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Guidance

Inspection information for non-association independent schools: for use from September 2026

Updated 12 June 2026

Applies to England

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For use in inspections from 7 September 2026.

About this page

This page contains information about our inspections of non-association independent schools for a general audience.

It does not explain how inspectors carry out inspections, which is in our separate [operating guide for standard inspections of non-association independent school inspections](#) and [operating guide for additional inspections of non-association independent schools](#). The operating guides set out what inspectors do on inspection, who we engage with and how, and how we feed back to leaders and report our findings.

This page also does not contain the standards inspectors use to evaluate provision on a standard inspection. Those standards, with guidance on applying them across different provider types and phases, are in our [toolkit for independent schools](#). These documents should be read together.

Types of inspection

Standard inspections

Standard inspections are carried out at the direction of the Department for Education (DfE) under [section 109\(1\) and \(2\) of the Education and Skills Act 2008](#). For further information about how we conduct standard inspections, please see our [operating guide for standard inspections of non-association independent school inspections](#).

Additional inspections

We carry out additional inspections of independent schools, if the DfE commissions them. In additional inspections, inspectors check whether the school meets (or is likely to meet) the independent school standards. They do not consider the evaluation areas of the toolkit.

Pre-registration inspections

Pre-registration inspections are carried out under [section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008](#). Proprietors who want to open a new independent school must apply to the DfE for registration. The DfE's guidance on [independent school registration](#) explains the registration process and sets out the information that prospective schools need to provide with their application.^{[\[footnote 1\]](#)} When the DfE has checked that the application contains the required information, it commissions us to carry out a pre-registration inspection. The purpose is to check whether the school is likely to meet the [independent school standards](#), if the DfE decides to register it. The DfE must be satisfied that a proposed school is likely to meet the independent school standards if it is to be registered as an independent school.

A provider must register with the DfE as an independent school if it is providing full-

time education to 5 or more pupils of compulsory school age or to one pupil of compulsory school age who is looked after, has an education, health and care (EHC) plan, or has a statement of special educational needs. It is a [criminal offence](#) to [operate an independent school that is not registered with the DfE](#).

Material change inspections

Material change inspections are carried out under [section 162\(4\) of the Education Act 2002](#). Registered independent schools wishing to make certain 'material changes' to their registration must first [seek permission from the DfE](#). The DfE may then commission us to carry out an inspection, to consider whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change is implemented. Schools cannot implement material changes unless and until the Secretary of State gives approval for the change.

Material changes are:

- change of proprietor^{[\[footnote 2\]](#)}
- change of school premises^{[\[footnote 3\]](#)}
- change to the age range of pupils
- change to the maximum number of pupils
- if the school proposes to change from single sex to co-educational or vice versa, or change to admitting boys instead of girls, or girls instead of boys
- if the school intends to provide boarding accommodation or stop providing it
- if the school intends to admit pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or stop admitting them

If a school wishes to start admitting pupils under the age of 2, this is a material change, and also requires a separate registration of early years provision with Ofsted (see [Registering school-based childcare provision](#)).

See the [DfE's guidance for schools applying to make a material change](#) for further details, including the information that a school must submit to the DfE as part of a material change application.

Emergency inspections

Emergency inspections are carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education Act 2008. The DfE may commission us to carry out an emergency inspection of an independent school for any reason. Normally, this follows complaints or information the DfE has received about safeguarding and/or leadership. We report to the DfE on whether the school meets the relevant

independent school standards.

The DfE may also commission an emergency inspection when they think that a school may have ceased operating, or when a school informs us that it no longer wishes to operate as a school during the notification call for (or, for an inspection without notice, when we arrive to carry out) another type of inspection.

Progress monitoring inspections

The DfE may ask us to carry out a progress monitoring inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008 to check the progress an independent school has made to address weaknesses and to meet standards that it did not meet at its previous inspection. If the school has an action plan approved by the DfE, the inspection will be conducted against this plan.

For more information about how we conduct additional inspections, please see our [operating guide for additional inspections of non-association independent schools](#).

In any type of additional or standard inspection, the DfE may also ask us to check and report whether the school meets:

- the [statutory requirements of the early years foundation stage](#), if the school has or proposes to have early years provision for children aged 2 and above
- [paragraph 3 of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010](#), which requires that schools have an accessibility plan in place
- section 35 of the [Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006](#), under which schools have a duty to make a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) if a person in a regulated activity has been dismissed or removed due to safeguarding concerns, or would have been had they not resigned (see '[Keeping children safe in education](#)')
- the [national minimum standards for boarding](#) or [national minimum standards for residential special schools](#), where relevant

If a school is registered (or [seeking registration](#)) with Ofsted as a children's home, we may carry out an inspection of the school's education provision at the same time as an inspection of the children's home.

Inspections of boarding and residential special schools

We may carry out a [full inspection](#) of a boarding or residential special school's boarding/residential provision at the same time as an additional inspection of the school. The inspections may finish at different times to each other, and we will publish a separate report after each inspection.

If the DfE commissions us to carry out the same type of additional inspection of a boarding or residential special school's education provision and its boarding/residential provision, we will normally carry out an integrated inspection and publish one report or report card. For example, when the DfE receives an application to open a new boarding or residential special school, the DfE will commission us to carry out an integrated pre-registration inspection.

The DfE may also commission us to carry out one type of additional inspection of the school and a different type of additional inspection of the boarding/residential provision. We will publish a separate report after each inspection.

Types of schools we inspect

We inspect independent schools that are not members of associations. These are known as non-association independent schools.

Independent schools that are members of associations are normally inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). Occasionally, however, the DfE, which is the registration authority for all independent schools, may commission us to inspect an independent school that is normally inspected by the ISI. [\[footnote 4\]](#)

Non-association independent schools include:

- independent special schools [\[footnote 5\]](#)
- alternative providers that meet the definition of an independent school, and so are registered as one with the DfE [\[footnote 6\]](#)
- children's homes that provide education and meet the definition of an independent school, and so are registered as one with the DfE
- other independent schools, including schools with a faith-based ethos, performing arts schools, and Steiner schools

We identify a school by its unique reference number (URN), which is issued by the DfE.

A non-association independent school with its own URN will be inspected in its own right. If a school works in partnership with other schools but has its own URN, it will still be inspected as an individual school. This includes schools that have the same proprietor, are structured in groups or engage in other collaborative activities. Schools that work on different sites or that have different provisions but share a single URN will also be inspected as one body and will receive one [report card](#). We may try to coordinate the inspection of certain groups of schools, where this is possible.

When we inspect schools

Non-association independent schools are inspected approximately once every 3 years. [\[footnote 7\]](#) A 3-year cycle of standard inspections of these schools began in January 2026.

Once registered, new schools receive their first standard inspection in their first year of operation.

When a school transfers from being inspected by the ISI to being inspected by Ofsted, we will normally inspect it within 3 years of the ISI's most recent focused compliance and educational quality inspection.

The DfE may commission us to bring forward an inspection, in response to a complaint or allegation about the school. In these cases, the school may receive 2 standard inspections in one cycle. Unlike schools inspected under the education inspection framework (EIF), independent schools are not able to ask for an inspection outside the usual inspection cycle.

We carry out a standard inspection at any point from 5 school days after the first day that pupils attend in the autumn term. For example, if pupils return to school on a Tuesday, an inspection can take place as early as the following Tuesday, and we would notify the school on the Monday. Standard inspections do not normally last longer than 3 days.

Pre-registration inspections normally take place throughout the year (including outside term time). Material change and emergency inspections normally take place during term time but may happen outside term time at the DfE's request. Progress monitoring inspections normally take place during term time.

Pre-registration, material change, emergency and progress monitoring inspections

do not normally last longer than one day. However, they may last for 2 days if we deem it is appropriate. Integrated inspections of boarding and residential special schools may last for 2 days so that social care regulatory inspectors are able to inspect the boarding/residential provision during an evening.

Alternative provision registered as an independent school, or schools that offer alternative provision

Alternative providers that are registered as an independent school may differ from other independent schools as they often provide short-term interventions to help learners successfully re-engage into education. We still inspect these providers under the EIF, and they must meet all the independent school standards.

If an independent school offers alternative provision, the alternative provision is part of the school's registration with the DfE and will be considered as part of our inspection of the school.^{[\[footnote 8\]](#)} Any pupils that attend the alternative provision must be on the roll of the school, whether solely- or dual-registered.

Carrying out additional inspections as part of a standard inspection or 2 concurrent additional inspections

The DfE may commission us, via an inspection commissioning form, to carry out an additional inspection as part of a standard inspection. It may ask us to consider:

- a school's application to make a material change to its registration
- its progress in implementing its action plan (if approved by the DfE) and in meeting previously unmet independent school standards
- matters raised through a complaint or another issue about a school

We will normally consider the additional matters as part of the standard inspection and, typically, report on them in the report card.

The DfE may also commission us to carry out 2 types of additional inspections at the same time as each other. It may ask us to carry out:

- a material change or emergency inspection as part of a progress monitoring inspection
- a material change inspection as part of an emergency inspection

We will normally carry out a single combined inspection and report on both inspections in the inspection report or report card.

Inspection fees

Independent schools are charged a fee for standard, pre-registration and progress monitoring inspections. The fees are set out in the [Independent Educational Provision in England \(Inspection Fees and Savings Provisions\) Regulations 2019](#).

An inspection fee will be charged unless we grant a deferral in line with our [deferral policy](#) before the start of the on-site inspection.

For pre-registration inspections, if a proposed school withdraws its application at or following notification of the inspection, the fee may still be payable. The fee will be payable if the lead inspector has carried out off-site inspection activity as part of their inspection planning to assess whether the proposed school is likely to meet any aspects of the independent school standards.

If inspectors arrive and are unable to undertake or complete a pre-registration or progress monitoring inspection because they cannot access the site, for example because building works are incomplete, the inspection fee will still be payable if the lead inspector has carried out off-site inspection activity as part of their inspection planning to assess whether the school meets (or the proposed school is likely to meet) any aspects of the independent school standards.

If the DfE directs us to bring forward a standard inspection, and this means that the school is inspected twice within the cycle, the DfE will cover the cost of this extra inspection.

The inspection team

Inspections of non-association independent schools are carried out by:

- His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), who we employ directly
- social care regulatory inspectors, who we employ directly
- Ofsted Inspectors (OI), who are contracted to work for us part-time; they are serving or non-serving practitioners in a school, or former HMI

The size of the inspection team varies according to the number of pupils on roll and the type of school.

A lead inspector oversees the inspection. They are responsible for leading the inspection, making the notification and planning calls to the school, and writing the inspection report or [report card](#). Team inspectors support the lead inspector. They may be present for 1 or 2 days or for the whole inspection. Social care regulatory inspectors inspect the boarding/residential provision in boarding/residential special schools, and children's homes provision.

Sometimes new inspectors, members of our non-inspection staff or other professionals may be present on site to observe an inspection. An HMI or senior HMI may also visit a school, or monitor the inspection remotely, to make sure the inspection meets our quality assurance and consistency standards. We will notify the headteacher during the notification call if there will be additional people with the inspection team.

There is no requirement to deploy inspectors of a particular faith to inspect a school of that faith. It would be unusual for a team inspecting a faith school to consist entirely of inspectors of that faith.

Conduct

Throughout the inspection, we expect school leaders, staff and inspectors to act in line with our [code of conduct](#) and to show professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect at all times.

Approach to groups of schools on inspection

We recognise that schools forming part of a group are a single entity and that it is not easy to separate decisions made by individual schools from those made by the proprietor of the group. We also recognise that the proprietor retains overall legal responsibility for all matters in the group, even where these are delegated. Through conversations with the proprietor, we will identify the correct leaders that we need to meet during the course of inspecting an individual school.

Provision for 2- and 3-year-olds

Schools that take 2- and 3-year-olds as part of their early years provision may not need to register that provision with us (see [Registering school-based childcare provision](#)). In these schools, we inspect the provision for 2- and 3-year-olds. The lead inspector makes sure that the grading of early years provision (and judgements on compliance with the relevant independent school standards) includes an evaluation of the provision for 2- and 3-year-olds. Inspectors will also record whether any children receive additional funding.

We consider any care that a school provides for children in the early years age range, before and/or after the school day or during the school holidays, as part of the evaluation of its early years provision.

Information about the inspection process

Standard inspections: overall inspection focus

Our renewed inspections reflect a significant shift in inspection culture. There is a stronger emphasis on leadership as a driver of sustained improvement and on inclusion. These emphases are reflected both in the themes guiding our evidence-gathering and in the standards within the toolkit.

Inspections are grounded in respectful professional dialogue, focused on impact and designed to support self-improvement and inclusive practice. They are structured but also flexible, adapting to context, responding to evidence and concentrating on what matters most for pupils. Learning walks are important and

allow leaders to share their context as they are showing inspectors around.

Inspectors work with schools to build an accurate view of their quality. This includes knowing and understanding how well pupils:

- achieve – academically and personally
- belong – feel that they belong to, and are valued as part of, the school community, so that they attend, behave and contribute positively to what the school offers
- thrive – benefit from the right systems, processes and levels of oversight, so that they are kept safe and are able to flourish, whatever their background or individual needs

Inspectors will consider what leaders are aiming to achieve, how well they are doing it and how they know it is working. Their starting point is the ‘expected’ standard in each of the evaluation areas in the toolkit. These considerations underpin inspection planning, shape evidence-gathering and guide our evaluation from preparation through to final reporting.

The foundations of our renewed inspections are:

- children and pupils first – high expectations with a focus on outcomes and experiences
- the care and wellbeing of those we inspect – through collaborative working with schools and building positive relationships with leaders and staff
- a provider’s unique context – evidence is evaluated in the light of each setting’s strengths, challenges and priorities for improvement, and how well it identifies and meets the needs of significant groups of pupils
- lens of the toolkit – the toolkit sets out the grading standards, supporting shared professional dialogue
- quality and impact – evidence-based decisions focus on the quality and the impact of leaders’ choices and actions on pupils, reflected in the grading standards

Throughout the inspection, we give particular attention to the experiences and outcomes of disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND, pupils known (or previously known) to children’s social care and those who face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. These groups remain central to planning, inspection activity and

evaluation. Inspectors will engage with the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) or equivalent and any teacher who is responsible for looked-after children. Inspectors will also consider engaging with other relevant leaders who have an inclusion role supporting these children, as appropriate.

What happens when a school is notified of an inspection

For standard inspections, the lead inspector usually contacts the school by telephone at around 12 noon on a Monday. Following a bank holiday, or in the first week after the Christmas or Easter holidays, the lead inspector may contact the school on a Tuesday. This is because some time is needed after a longer holiday period to settle pupils back into school. The day of notification varies for pre-registration and material change inspections. We normally notify a proposed school between 2 and 5 calendar days before a pre-registration inspection is due to start, and we normally notify a school of a material change inspection 2 calendar days before.

If inspectors are carrying out a standard inspection without notice, for example at the DfE's request, the lead inspector will not normally telephone the school before they arrive. We will consider inspection without notice when there are serious concerns about one or more of the following:

- the breadth and balance of the curriculum
- rapidly declining standards
- safeguarding, including a decline in standards of pupils' behaviour and in the staff's ability to maintain discipline
- standards of leadership or governance

We carry out all progress monitoring and emergency inspections without notice (although the DfE will have informed schools that have failed to meet the independent school standards that they are likely to receive one or more progress monitoring inspections). If it is a previously deferred inspection, the lead inspector may notify the school on any day of the working week.

Once schools have been notified of an inspection, they will receive a letter by email to confirm the conversation between the lead inspector and school leaders. This will set out the information that will need to be available at the start of the inspection (see

the [Documents that schools must provide](#) section). For standard inspections, this will include links to the pupil and staff questionnaires.

For standard inspections, we also provide a letter for schools to use to tell all parents or carers (who we will refer to as ‘parents’ throughout, for ease of reading) of registered pupils about the inspection and explain the ways parents can give their views. We also ask schools to notify other relevant bodies of the inspection, including those providing alternative provision.

Inspectors will let the school know that we expect to meet the proprietor and the person(s) responsible for its day-to-day operation. If these people are not present during the inspection, inspectors may not be able to gather sufficient evidence to judge whether the school complies with paragraph 34(1) of the independent school standards, which concerns the quality of leadership and management, or to determine whether leadership and governance reach the expected standard.

Which leaders can attend the notification and planning calls

During the notification call, the lead inspector and the school agree who will attend the planning call.

We encourage headteachers to have at least one other senior leader with them to assist and support them in all calls, including the remainder of the notification call, if they wish. Typically, this would be someone who usually deputises for them. If the school is part of a group led by one proprietor, it may be a member of the group’s staff – someone who can understand and discuss the educational content of the calls. This may be [the nominee](#), where applicable.

Inspectors will ask the school not to record these calls or any further calls.

Information the lead inspector may ask for during the notification call

We ask the school to confirm:

- contact information including the:

- headteacher's full name and title
- headteacher's direct email address and phone number
- general school email and phone number
- school's postal address
- details regarding oversight and governance, such as:
 - the name and email address of the proprietor or the chair of the proprietor body
 - whether the school is part of a group of independent schools
 - the names and email addresses of any other relevant contacts (such as the chair of the governing body)
- information including:
 - the number of pupils on roll, their sex and the age range
 - the number of pupils in the post-16 provision, and their sex
 - whether the school is linked to a children's home and, if so, whether the school manages it
 - the addresses of any boarding or residential provision, and the number of boarding or residential pupils on roll
 - the annual school fee or fees for pupils
- whether there is any provision for pupils with SEND
- whether any pupils attend off-site alternative provision
- whether any children on roll have a place that has been commissioned by a local authority
- whether the school operates on more than one site, for example whether separate premises are used for early years or post-16 provision
- for standard inspections, what early career framework the school uses for early career teachers, if any
- any reason why the inspection should not take place
- any reason or issues that might prevent the inspector/s having access to the site
- the start and end dates for the next school holiday
- any other dates when the school will be closed within the next 2 months, for example for a religious festival
- whether the school is closing within 6 months

- details (not personal information) of anyone living on the school premises
- for standard inspections, details of the nominee (where applicable)
- whether the school is experiencing, or has recently experienced, any tensions in, or pressures from, their community

Although most of the information is publicly available, it is still important that it is confirmed as part of the inspection.

The lead inspector also asks the school whether anyone who will be joining the planning call requires any reasonable adjustments due to a disability. They may also consider making other adaptations to the inspection process where those with other protected characteristics may be put at a disadvantage.

The lead inspector may ask for the following information during the follow-up discussion in the planning call:

- if there are pupils with SEND:
 - information about the number of pupils, their needs, the type(s) of language and/or communication systems used (for example British Sign Language)
 - the staffing support they receive
- if there are any pupils in off-site alternative provision:
 - information about the name, address, registration status and URN (if registered) of the alternative provision
 - the number of pupils that attend and for what reason
 - their start dates
 - and the hours they attend
- information about the number of pupils on a part-time timetable, being flexi-schooled or being educated remotely
- information about any nursery provision, before- and/or after-school care or holiday clubs led and managed directly by the school, including:
 - whether this provision takes children aged 2 to 8
 - whether any pupils from the school attend this provision

Documents that schools must provide

For pre-registration and standard inspections, schools must make the following information available to inspectors by the start of the inspection:[\[footnote 9\]](#)

- policies and other documents required by the independent school standards
- schemes of work for the subjects taught/that a proposed school intends to teach
- strategic documents, including:
 - anything that sets out school improvement priorities or the longer-term vision, such as the school strategy
 - a summary of any school self-evaluation or equivalent
 - reports from any external evaluation of the school
 - documented evidence of the work of the proprietor and/or those responsible for governance and their priorities
 - minutes from recent meetings of the proprietor body, where relevant, and the governing body, and other relevant strategic documentation about governance that the school may have
- records, analysis and information about behaviour and attendance, including:
 - an up-to-date analysis of the attendance of all groups of pupils
 - any pupils taken off roll, including the reasons why (see [Ofsted's definition of off-rolling](#))
 - suspensions and permanent exclusions, incidents of poor behaviour and any use of internal isolation
 - information about the school's use of alternative provision
 - information about any pupils directed off-site and/or pupils on managed moves
 - any bullying, harassment, or directly or indirectly discriminatory or prejudiced behaviour, including language that is racist, sexist, based on religion or belief, ableist, homophobic, biphobic or transphobic, or derogatory
 - any sexual harassment and/or sexual violence
 - any restrictive physical intervention
 - inclusion information for case sampling, including: a list of disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, those known (or previously known) to children's social care and those who face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing
- operational documents, including:
 - Wi-Fi details, if the school has it, so that inspectors can connect to the internet
 - map of the school buildings (including boarding/residential provision if

applicable) and other practical information

- the school timetable
- the current staff list (indicating early career teachers, mentors and induction tutors)
- details of any staff absence
- times for the school day, including any planned interruptions to normal school routines during the inspection, and whether any lesson(s) or teacher(s) should not be visited for any reason (for example, if a teacher is subject to capability procedures)
- safeguarding information (with secure access), including:
 - the single central record^{[\[footnote 10\]](#)}
 - a list of any referrals made to the designated safeguarding lead in the school and any that were subsequently referred to the local authority, with brief details of the resolution (a very short summary of how the school dealt with the matter and assurance that pupils have received the appropriate help)
 - any referrals made to the local authority designated officer regarding staff or other adults
 - a list of all pupils who have open cases with children's services or social care and all pupils who have a multi-agency plan (to ensure the school knows who these pupils are, and can meet requirements); inspectors may speak with some of these pupils as part of their inspection activity to make sure the school is doing what is required by the [Keeping children safe in education](#) guidance

We expect all policies, schemes of work and plans, and all other documents required by the independent school standards, to be written in English.

Schools and inspectors must make sure that they comply with legal requirements on data protection and information-sharing.

If any of this information is available before the inspection begins, schools can upload it onto the inspection portal. We provide instructions for using the portal in the inspection notification letter that we send to the school.

We do not want schools to do any additional work or to ask pupils to do work specifically for the inspection. We also do not want inspections to create unnecessary workload for teachers. Importantly, schools do not need to provide:

- any information beyond what we ask for

- information in any specific format (as long as it is easily accessible for inspectors)
- written evidence of oral feedback to pupils
- predictions of attainment and progress scores
- performance and pupil-tracking information

For material change, emergency and progress monitoring inspections, the lead inspector will confirm which information they require for the inspection.

Standard inspections: role of the nominee

Schools are invited to nominate a senior member of staff to support planning, communication and engagement throughout the inspection. Their involvement helps the inspection to run smoothly.

In particular, the role of the nominee is to:

- attend the planning call alongside the leader
- where delegated by the appropriate authority, inform relevant stakeholders about the inspection
- make sure that children, pupils, parents and staff are informed about how they can give their views through the online questionnaires
- brief staff about inspection arrangements
- provide information for the lead inspector to support inspection planning
- provide insight into the school's context
- liaise with the lead inspector and make sure that documents and other information are available, and that staff can attend meetings
- attend regularly planned meetings with inspectors to review evidence and discuss emerging findings and grades
- act as the link between the lead inspector and school leader if the school wants to raise any issues and concerns or to clarify anything about the inspection
- keep other leaders up to date on the progress of the inspection
- join the lead inspector for inspection activities, where appropriate
- suggest to the inspection team where additional evidence could usefully be gathered

- coordinate feedback arrangements, in particular at the end of the inspection

Standard inspections: further information about the nominee

It is not compulsory to have a nominee. Schools will not be at any disadvantage if they do not nominate someone.

The nominee should have thorough knowledge of how the school operates on a day-to-day basis.

The headteacher/leader may take on this role if they wish to and feel able to. A member of staff who is an OI can be a nominee.

Training for nominees is available but not compulsory.

The nominee will not have access to confidential inspection notes, safeguarding complaints, or any whistle-blowing information.

Nominees will not be present during confidential discussions with learners, staff or parents, or where their presence could limit open dialogue.

Requesting a deferral or to pause an inspection

If the school needs to ask for a deferral, it should do so as soon as possible after it is notified of the inspection, or, in unannounced inspections, after the inspector's arrival. The decision whether to grant a referral will be made in accordance with our [deferral policy](#).

If the leader of the school thinks an inspection should stop once it has started, we will consider the request under our [pausing policy](#).

Next steps following our inspection

findings

At the end of the inspection, inspectors provide feedback to the school, including their final evaluation of its compliance with the independent school standards, its strengths and priorities for improvement.

Meetings

To ensure that all meetings are practical and constructive, the lead inspector will manage the number of attendees and the conduct of all attending.

Inspectors will ask leaders to confirm who will attend the end-of-day reflection and grading meetings and will set out the expectations for these. Inspectors will explain that it is flexible who attends, as long as schools agree with them who is attending before the meeting takes place.

Who can attend the final feedback meeting

Those who may attend the inspectors' final feedback meeting include:

- the headteacher
- the proprietor or, where there is a proprietor body, as many members as are available
- the clerk to the proprietor body, or their delegate, who may attend to take notes (if necessary, there can be more than one note-taker)
- other senior leaders, as agreed by the lead inspector and headteacher
- any appropriate person the headteacher or proprietor wants to be present to assist and support them
- if the school has a governing body, the chair, and as many representatives as are available from the governing body
- the clerk to the governing body, or their delegate, who may attend to take notes (if necessary, there can be more than one note-taker)

The lead inspector seeks to ensure that the meeting is practical and constructive by managing the number of attendees and the conduct of all attending. They will make sure that leaders know that their input in this meeting is valued.

The lead inspector will support school leaders' understanding of the final feedback by making sure that the inspection team has connected the evidence gathered and reflected on it proportionately.

Attendance at the meeting is voluntary. The [operating guide for non-association independent school inspections](#) and the [operating guide for additional inspections of non-association independent schools](#) gives further information about what the lead inspector will discuss during the feedback meeting.

Gathering additional evidence

In some circumstances, we may carry out a further visit to the school to gather additional evidence. Please see our [gathering additional evidence protocol](#) for further information.

Schools with unmet independent school standards

If a school has failed to meet any of the independent school standards, we report this to the DfE.

The DfE is then likely to:

- ask the school to produce an action plan
- ask us to [evaluate that action plan](#)
- ask us to carry out an inspection to monitor the school's progress in implementing the action plan

The DfE can close a school if it does not improve.

For more information, see the DfE's [Regulatory and enforcement action policy statement](#).

Following a pre-registration inspection, if there are significant or numerous omissions in a proposed school's documents, the DfE may commission another on-site pre-registration inspection, or reject the proposed school's application to register.

Evaluations of school action plans

If a school has been judged on any type of inspection to not meet the independent school standards (and, where relevant, associated requirements), the DfE will normally write to the proprietor to tell them that they are required to produce an action plan that sets out the action they intend to take to rectify the failures.

The DfE's letter or statutory notice to the school will list each of the unmet requirements (based on the previous inspection report or report card) that the proprietor must address in the school's action plan. The DfE provides schools with [guidance and a suggested template for producing action plans](#).

The DfE may commission Ofsted to evaluate a school's action plan to inform its decision on next steps. The purpose of the evaluation is for Ofsted to advise the DfE whether the plan is acceptable or whether it requires improvement.

Potential misconceptions about inspection

Toolkit

We do not expect leaders to produce written evidence to support each standard in each evaluation area of the toolkit.

The toolkit focuses on the quality and impact of leaders' choices and decisions on pupils, rather than compliance alone. It is used to guide conversations, reflect on evidence, and make sure grades reflect the evidence gathered. It supports a shared understanding and discussion of the strengths of the school's work, its context, and areas for further exploration.

We do not expect schools to have completed any formal self-evaluation using the toolkit. Leaders will not be at a disadvantage if they do not have a written self-evaluation. In the planning call, we will ask leaders about their perceived strengths and areas for development, using the toolkit as a common focal point. This is to help inspectors plan what inspection activities need to be carried out to gather the necessary evidence to:

- celebrate what leaders have identified as strengths
- validate the priorities leaders have identified for improvement, and whether they have an effective plan to bring about the desired impact
- highlight where there is more to do to ensure that all pupils achieve, belong and thrive

Curriculum

The DfE is responsible for setting the rules about what must be in a curriculum. We do not have additional or separate rules.

We recognise that some schools offer a specialist curriculum, for example in the performing arts, or a faith-based specialist curriculum. We evaluate schools that take radically different approaches to the curriculum fairly.

Inspectors evaluate a school's curriculum favourably if they have built or adopted a curriculum with appropriate coverage, content, structure and sequencing, and implemented it effectively. They consider the extent to which the curriculum reflects the breadth and ambition of the national curriculum, and how inclusive the curriculum, culture and practices are. This is the case whether the school has devised its own curriculum or uses, for example, commercial or local schemes. It is up to leaders to determine the school's practices and to justify these on their own merits.

Planning, teaching and assessment

We do not prefer any particular method of planning (including lesson or curriculum planning), teaching or assessment. We do not expect a specific format for curriculum planning.

We do not require schools to show us individual lesson plans or previous lesson

plans.

We do not grade individual teachers or lessons.

We do not evaluate individual workbooks or expect workbooks to be compiled solely to provide evidence for inspection.

We do not use work scrutiny to evaluate teachers' marking.

We do not specify the frequency, type or volume of marking and feedback.

We do not require schools to make sure that work in pupils' books or folders is of a specific quantity or done at a particular frequency.

We do not require leaders to carry out a specified amount of lesson observation.

Safeguarding

Our safeguarding expectations are those that the DfE has set out in [Keeping children safe in education](#) and [Working together to safeguard children](#).

We do not expect or require the school to apply retrospectively for DBS checks and other pre-employment checks for staff who were appointed before DBS requirements were introduced, and who have been employed continuously since then.

Evidence/recordings

We do not require photographic evidence of pupils' work (although inspectors may take photographs of their work – they will take all reasonable steps to anonymise these).

We do not require schools to share recordings of live lessons that are delivered remotely, unless they are normally stored for future use by staff or pupils.

We do not expect schools to prepare a presentation or any additional documents about their school or context for inspection. Inspectors prioritise gathering first-hand evidence during the inspection.

Artificial intelligence

A school's use of artificial intelligence (AI) is not an explicit part of our inspection and regulation frameworks.

There is no expectation that a school will use AI in a certain way or will use it at all.

Inspectors do not directly evaluate the use of AI or any AI tool. Our focus is, instead, on the quality of decision-making about AI.

What we mean by off-rolling

Off-rolling is where leaders take any of the following decisions and do so in the interests of the school rather than of the pupil(s) in question:

- removing a pupil from the school roll without a formal, permanent exclusion that is carried out in line with the published behaviour policy and contractual arrangements with parents
- preventing a pupil on the school roll from attending school normally without a suspension imposed in line with the published behaviour policy and contractual arrangements with parents, for example by sending them home or placing them on a part-time timetable without parental consent
- placing pressure on a parent to remove their child from the school roll
- placing pressure on a post-16 student not to continue with their course of study
- not allowing a pupil to attend school normally in breach of the published behaviour policy and the contractual arrangements with parents

If a school removes a pupil from the roll in line with the school's behaviour policy and the contractual arrangements with parents, this is not considered to be off-rolling.

Concerns or complaints about a school

The DfE is responsible for investigating complaints about independent schools.

Ofsted does not investigate these complaints, but the DfE may commission Ofsted to carry out an emergency inspection or bring forward the school's next standard inspection (or their first standard inspection following registration) as a result of a complaint. The DfE may also ask Ofsted to consider a complaint at the time of a school's next scheduled inspection. Complaints may also form part of the information that inspectors review when they plan for any type of inspection.

If the DfE has asked us to consider a complaint as part of the inspection, inspectors will normally check whether the school meets the independent school standards (and associated requirements, where applicable) that are relevant to the wider issues raised by the complaint.

Concerns or complaints about an inspection

We take any concerns seriously. Leaders are free to raise concerns, and doing so does not negatively affect inspection findings or how we grade a school.

If a school has any concerns during an inspection, including about inspectors' conduct or any potential or perceived conflicts of interest, they should raise these with the lead inspector at the earliest opportunity, to try to resolve issues before the on-site inspection activity is completed.

If leaders cannot resolve their concerns with the lead inspector during the inspection, they can contact a senior Ofsted leader using the number provided as part of the notification process.

If it is not possible to resolve concerns through either of these routes, the school or responsible body should follow the steps set out in our [complaints process](#).

We respond to any complaints before we finalise and send the inspection report card to the school. If the school has highlighted some minor points about clarity or factual accuracy in the draft report card, it will not normally be able to submit a formal complaint or challenge about these once the report card has been finalised.

When and how inspection reports and

report cards are published

Following a standard inspection, we publish a report card. If a school has already received a standard inspection and therefore has a report card, we will publish the findings from a progress monitoring or emergency inspection (including emergency inspections of schools that appear to have closed) in the report card. If not, we will publish an inspection report following a progress monitoring or emergency inspection (including emergency inspections of schools that appear to have closed). We always publish inspection reports following pre-registration and material change inspections.

We send reports and report cards to the school after moderation, quality assurance and consistency checking. In most circumstances, this will be within 18 working days of the end of the inspection.

Schools have 5 working days to comment on the draft report or report card. A school can highlight minor points relating to clarity and/or factual accuracy. If a school submits only minor points of clarity or factual accuracy, we consider these and respond to them when we share the final report or report card. This is normally within 30 working days of the end of the inspection. We may also send the draft report or report card to the DfE. This takes place only after moderation, quality assurance and consistency checking.

A school can also [submit a complaint](#) seeking a review of the inspection process, including grades, or raising concerns about inspectors' conduct.

Leaders should share the inspection findings with the proprietor, others responsible for oversight of the school and with whoever they consider appropriate, which may include colleagues, family members, and/or their wider support group; however, the information should not be made public or shared with parents until the school receives the final report or report card.

We do not normally issue draft or final reports or report cards to schools or publish final reports or report cards on our website during school holidays.

Once a school receives its final report or report card, it must make sure the parents of each registered pupil at the school receive a copy within 5 working days. This requirement is set out in paragraph 32(1)(d) of the schedule to the [Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#). A school may wish to meet the requirement by sharing it digitally through emails to parents and/or by putting a link to it on the school's website. It may also consider whether it needs to provide hard copies for some parents.

We normally publish the final report or report card on our [reports website](#) 5 working days after sending it to the school.

Reports following evaluations of school action plans

We normally send the report following an evaluation of a school's action plan to the DfE within 4 weeks from the date that we received the commission to carry out the evaluation. We do not publish the report, but the DfE may, at its discretion, send the report to the school.

Based on the advice in our report, and any other relevant evidence, the DfE may approve, approve with modifications or reject a [statutory action plan](#).

In the case of a non-statutory plan, the DfE may:

- accept it and put the school back into the normal inspection cycle
- accept it and request a progress monitoring inspection
- reject it and serve a statutory notice requiring a revised action plan
- reject it and request a further non-statutory action plan

How to provide feedback about the inspection

We invite all schools to take part in a voluntary post-inspection survey. We send a link to the survey with the final copy of the report card. This is to help us improve our inspection work.

Inspectors' right of entry to inspect the school

Inspectors have right of entry for the purpose of inspecting a school. For pre-registration inspections, carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act

2008, and emergency and progress monitoring inspections, carried out under section 109(1) and (2), these rights are as follows:

- Under section 110(1) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, inspectors have ‘(a) a right of entry to the premises of the institution for the purposes of the inspection, and (b) a right to inspect and take copies of any records kept by the institution and any other documents containing information relating to the institution that are required for the purposes of the inspection’.
- Under section 110(5), ‘It is an offence intentionally to obstruct a person in the exercise of the person’s functions in relation to the inspection’.

Inspectors have powers of entry and a right to carry out material change inspections, as set out in section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

Independent schools are legally required to give us access to information required for inspection.

Paragraph 32(1)(g) of the independent school standards requires the proprietor to ensure that ‘any information reasonably requested in connection with an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act which is required for the purposes of the inspection is provided to the body conducting the inspection and that body is given access to the school’s admission and attendance registers’.

The [Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2006](#), require independent schools to keep admission and attendance registers and make them available to inspectors during any type of inspection.

The [National Care Standards Commission \(Inspection of Schools and Colleges\) Regulations 2002](#) set out Ofsted’s general powers to inspect boarding or residential provision in schools and colleges under the Children Act 1989. This document covers inspectors’ right of entry to boarding/residential provision in schools, and the inspection of premises, records and children.

How we handle evidence and personal information

Our [privacy policy](#) sets out what personal information we collect in order to inspect a school, what we do with it, how long we keep it for and individuals’ rights under data protection legislation.

Inspectors record their notes using our systems. They may see information that contains personal information about staff and young people, such as registers and lesson plans. They may take notes from, or copies of, this type of supporting information before returning it to an appropriate staff member at the end of the inspection. They may take photographs of pupils' work. Any notes, copies or photographs will be stored securely. Inspectors do not retain any inspection notes or supporting information personally. Information gathered electronically, including on laptops, mobile phones and tablets, is transferred securely in line with our security policies.

Inspectors are instructed to use digital methods for recording notes wherever possible. Where handwritten notes are unavoidable due to practical constraints, inspectors are required to transcribe relevant information into the secure system as soon as possible. Once transcribed, all handwritten notes must be securely disposed of in accordance with our retention policy.

Use of Ofsted logos

Schools that we judged to be outstanding or good for overall effectiveness before November 2025 can continue to use the specific Ofsted outstanding or good logos until their next full inspection. Once they receive their next full inspection, they must remove those logos, as they relate only to an overall effectiveness judgement, which they will not get as this is no longer part of our grading. For more information, see [our logo terms of use](#).

Research activities on inspection

We may [carry out research](#), based on national priorities, during our inspections. This has no impact on the inspection.

We may use the evidence that inspectors gather during inspections to inform other work, such as national reporting. No personal data obtained as part of the inspection evidence will be used to inform other work.

We may also invite schools to take part in research visits (separate from inspections) at other times.

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1. Part 2 of the schedule to the [Education \(Independent Educational Provision in England\) \(Provision of Information\) Regulations 2010](#) and [section 98 of the Education and Skills Act 2008](#) require prospective schools to provide certain information with their application. ↩
 2. A change of proprietor is a material change, including any changes to a proprietor body. However, the DfE will not normally commission Ofsted to carry out a material change inspection when a school applies to make a change of proprietor. A change of chair of an existing proprietor body is not a material change, although the school must still inform the DfE. Ofsted normally checks proprietor details during any type of inspection. ↩
 3. The DfE does not routinely ask Ofsted to carry out a material change inspection when a school opens a new building on its premises. ↩
 4. See the [Memorandum of understanding: independent schools](#). ↩
 5. Independent schools that are organised to cater specifically for pupils with SEND are normally registered with the DfE as an 'independent special school'; however, there is no legal definition of this term. Under [section 41 of the Children and Families Act 2014](#), the DfE can approve independent schools that are organised to cater specifically for pupils with SEND for the purpose of enabling the school '[to be the subject of a request for it to be named in an EHC plan](#)'. If an approved independent special school is named in an EHC plan, the local authority must comply with the request to place the pupil at the school, and the school must

admit the pupil. If a school is not approved under section 41, and is named in an EHC plan, there is no duty for the local authority to place the pupil in the school. ↵

6. If the DfE decides to register an alternative provider, the provider will be registered as an independent school and will be inspected against the independent school standards. The DfE does not maintain a separate register of alternative providers. ↵
7. The timing of the school's next inspection is calculated from the date that the final report card from the previous standard inspection was sent to the DfE (see the section [Information about the inspection process](#)). ↵
8. The only exception is where alternative provision that is a separate legal entity is situated on the site of a registered independent school. ↵
9. Paragraph 32(1)(g) of the independent school standards requires proprietors to give any information that is reasonably requested in connection with an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, and is required for the purposes of the inspection, to the body conducting the inspection. It also requires the proprietor to give that body access to the school's admission and attendance register. ↵
10. We use the term 'single central record' to refer to the register described in paragraph 21(1) of the independent school standards, which is also known as the 'single central register'. ↵

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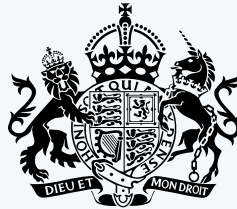
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