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Guidance

Operating guide for additional inspections of non-association independent schools: for use from September 2026

Updated 12 June 2026

Applies to England

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 **For use on inspections from 7 September 2026.**

About this page

This guide sets out how lead inspectors ('you') and team inspectors should carry out pre-registration, material change, emergency and progress monitoring inspections of non-association independent schools. We refer to these types of inspections collectively as '[additional inspections](#)'.

This guide also applies when the Department for Education (DfE) commissions us to carry out an evaluation of an independent school's action plan, or an additional inspection of a school that is normally inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI).

When carrying out additional inspections, you will also need to refer to the [inspection information for non-association independent schools](#).

Inspectors should use the guidance in this document, along with their professional

curiosity and compassion, to gather evidence to reach fair and accurate judgements about whether schools meet the independent school standards. They should also draw on their experience and expertise.

Information for inspectors on how to carry out standard inspections is in our separate [operating guide for standard inspections of non-association independent schools](#), [education inspection framework](#), and [toolkit for non-association independent schools](#).

Conduct

You must act in line with our [code of conduct](#), and show professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect at all times. At the earliest opportunity, and as necessary throughout the inspection, remind both the provider and, where relevant, the inspection team of the importance of following the code of conduct.

Equality duties on education inspections

Both inspectors and providers have responsibilities under the [Equality Act 2010](#). Guidance on the equality duties for providers and inspectors is set out in our [Equality duties on education inspection](#) policy. This includes what to do if you witness or find evidence of behaviour by leaders and staff that does not comply with the act.

What to do before arriving on site – all types of additional inspections

Preparing for the inspection and carrying out off-site inspection activity

Preparation is a vital part of ensuring that the inspection is a positive experience.

Being focused and proportionate is key. You may wish to review some information briefly before your phone call with leaders to notify them of the inspection and return to this later to review the information in more detail.

Contact the lead social care regulatory inspector so you can plan the inspection together, if you are:

- inspecting a (proposed) [school that is also registered as a children's home, or has applied to Ofsted to register as a children's home](#) and the children's home provision is being inspected at the same time
- carrying out the same type of integrated inspection of a (proposed) [boarding or residential special school](#)
- carrying out a material change, emergency or progress monitoring inspection at the same time as a different type of additional inspection or [full inspection](#) of the school's boarding/residential provision

Review the following, recording relevant evaluative information.

Start by reviewing the DfE's inspection commissioning form (ICF) for the inspection. This will specify which of the [Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#) and associated requirements you need to check compliance against. The ICF may also specify a particular focus for the inspection.

The ICF also contains:

- for pre-registration inspections: the policies, curriculum documentation and other information that the proposed school has supplied to support its application to register
- for material change inspections: the information that the school has supplied to support its application to make a material change – check whether the information supplied by the school is in line with the DfE's guidance ([Independent schools: making a material change](#))
- for emergency inspections: complaints or other intelligence from the DfE, for example, that appears to raise a concern about safeguarding pupils or putting their safety at risk, or information that causes the DfE to suspect that the school may have ceased operating
- for progress monitoring inspections: where applicable, the version of the action plan approved by the DfE, and/or a copy of the statutory notice served to the school and any correspondence in relation to the action plan

Review the ICF for completeness. If you think it needs to be amended or added to, you should discuss this with the regional Senior His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), who can raise with the DfE.

Then review the documents supplied in the ICF and, where available, the (proposed) school's website. Start to gather evidence about whether the (proposed) school meets or is likely to meet any aspects of the independent school standards and associated requirements that you can start checking before arriving on site.

For pre-registration inspections, you must always review all the following points. For material change, emergency and progress monitoring inspections, what you review will depend on the focus of the inspection.

- Start by assessing the breadth and balance of the (proposed) school's curriculum, and whether it meets (or is likely to meet) the requirement in the independent school standards to promote preparation for, and an appreciation of, life in modern Britain.
- If the (proposed) school has a website, assess whether it contains the safeguarding policy.[\[footnote 1\]](#) If it does, assess whether that policy is suitable and meets statutory requirements.[\[footnote 2\]](#)
- Review information relating to the (proposed) school's duties under the [Equality Act 2010](#), including the accessibility plan (which is required by schedule 10 of the act).
- Review information about SEND provision.

Then for pre-registration inspections, do the following:

- Review the other policies in the proposed school's application and, where available, on the proposed school's website. Consider whether they are likely to meet relevant requirements of the independent school standards and associated requirements (such as in relation to part 6 of the standards, 'Provision of information').
- Review the report from any previous pre-registration inspections carried out at the proposed school.
- Check with the regional team whether a section 97 inspection of a [possible unregistered school](#) has taken place at the same address. If it has, ask the team to provide information about that inspection, including if any safeguarding concerns were raised.

For all types of additional inspection, you must also review:

- the school's previous standard inspection report and any subsequent additional inspection reports (including, where relevant, reports following inspections of boarding/residential and early years provision)
- information from any other associated providers, which may include registered early years provision or, if the (proposed) school is part of a group of independent schools, any relevant information from recent inspections of these schools – for example, any reported evidence about the suitability and capability of the proprietor
- the most recent Care Quality Commission inspection report, where the proposed school is co-located with a registered child and adolescent mental health service provider
- any other information publicly available or available from relevant stakeholders, such as local authorities and the police
- any [complaints that the DfE has asked us to consider about the \(proposed\) school](#) and/or any other complaints recorded on 'Find information about a provider'
- governance arrangements for the (proposed) school

Check the identity of the sole proprietor, all joint proprietors or all members of the proprietor body ('proprietor'). Check whether the proprietor's identity is consistently recorded in the (proposed) school's application to register and other available sources, for example the (proposed) school's website, if one exists. Record any discrepancies between the (proposed) school's information and other sources on your preparation evidence card and follow this up on inspection.

Review briefly the following publicly available information (and where relevant, record brief and evaluative points):

- the main findings from the relevant area special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) inspection, including (where relevant) arrangements for identifying, assessing and meeting the needs of young children with SEND
- the most recent inspection report on the relevant [local authority children's services](#)
- responses to Ofsted's [Parent View](#) survey, in particular where there have been any significant changes to the proportion of responses
- any further relevant information on the school's website
- the [register of licensed sponsors for student and child student visas](#)
- recent information reported in the press or online
- where the school is co-located with a registered child and adolescent mental

health service provider, the most recent Care Quality Commission report

- information published by local authorities, the DfE and the police

Other preparation before a material change, emergency or progress monitoring inspection

You must always review:

- the [school's previous standard inspection report or report card and any subsequent additional inspection reports](#) including, where relevant, the boarding and early years inspection reports – remember that if the school has ever changed its registered address to a different local authority area, the DfE will have given the school a new unique reference number, so you will need to review reports relating to the school's previous registration
- the school's case record^{[\[footnote 3\]](#)}
- information on our 'Find information about a provider' system
- responses to Ofsted's Parent View survey
- boarding pupils' and boarding staff's replies to [Ofsted's children's social care surveys](#)

Also consider any other information provided by the DfE, in particular:

- the school's census returns
- information on the school's registration status as recorded on the DfE's register, such as the number and age range of pupils that the school is registered to take, whether the school has a religious character or ethos, the name of the proprietor, whether the school is section 41 approved, and whether the school operates from any additional sites^{[\[footnote 4\]](#)}

You may also speak with the local authority designated officer if there are any wider concerns about how the school manages concerns or allegations made about staff or to obtain any information that may be relevant to the inspection. You may also speak with commissioners, for example local authorities that fund placements for pupils at the school.

Start to think about the potential inspection activities that are likely to be suitable and will give the opportunity to gather the relevant evidence. Refer to the additional guidance to gather evidence in the [operating guide for standard inspections](#) to inform your planning of inspection activities.

Notification

Constructive, professional dialogue

At the heart of our inspections is a professional dialogue between inspectors and leaders. This dialogue must follow our [code of conduct](#) and always be carried out with professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect.

The notification call should set the tone for the inspection. From the outset, you should build positive relationships and rapport with leaders. Consider the wellbeing of both staff and leaders throughout.

Progress monitoring and emergency inspections

We do not normally notify a school of our intention to carry out a progress monitoring or emergency inspection. In the exceptional circumstances when the DfE has agreed with the relevant Senior HMI that the school will receive a short period of notice, you should contact the school by telephone up to 30 minutes before you arrive at the school and follow the script.

Pre-registration and material change inspections

Timing of the call

On the [designated day for notification](#) contact the proposed school by telephone, usually after 9:30am.

Speaking with senior leaders

Ask to speak with the headteacher. If the headteacher is unavailable, ask to speak with the proprietor or the most senior member of school staff who is available.

Notifying leaders of the inspection

Follow the script to notify the (proposed) school of the inspection. This will ensure that the information is accurately recorded. (The [inspection information for non-association independent schools](#) sets out what a notification call will cover.)

Inform the (proposed) school that an inspection is taking place and explain the type and length of the inspection.

Confirm details of the inspection team and check whether there are any conflicts of interest or concerns. Note any conflicts or concerns and your response in the evidence base.

Scheduling the planning call

Agree with the headteacher, or the next most senior member of staff, the time for the second, longer call (the [planning call](#)) which will take place on your preparation

day. Explain that this is normally a video conference call, unless technology does not allow this. Agree with the headteacher the arrangements for this.

Explain what you are going to discuss on the call. Also explain that it will take place 2 working days after the notification call, that it may take up to 90 minutes, and why it needs to happen reasonably early on the preparation day (although after you have completed some [preparation](#)).

Emphasise to leaders that they can take breaks as needed.

Agree who should attend that call. Encourage the headteacher to have at least one other senior leader present to assist and support them in all calls.

Reasonable adjustments and adaptations

Ask whether anyone who will be joining the planning call requires any reasonable adjustments due to a disability and, if so, what arrangements are already in place.

Consider any requests, following the guidance in the [Responding to requests for reasonable adjustments and/or adaptations](#) section of the operating guide for standard inspections, and contact the duty desk. Advise the headteacher of your decision. If they have any questions or unresolved concerns following this discussion, refer them to the provider contact helpline.

Consider making other adaptations to the inspection process where those with other protected characteristics may otherwise be put at a disadvantage.

Confirming key school information

Ask leaders to confirm the relevant school information, as listed in the [inspection information for non-association independent schools](#).

Ask leaders to confirm the details of their application to register as an independent school/make a material change to their registration. Check that the details align with the information that DfE has given Ofsted in the ICF (which includes the proposed school's application to register as an independent school/make a material change). If any of the details differ from the information that DfE has given Ofsted, or if the (proposed) school wishes to make any changes to its application, tell leaders that they must inform the DfE immediately (so that the DfE can update the ICF for the inspection accordingly) and that this may affect whether the inspection goes ahead as planned.

Ask about the progress of any building works and whether there are any issues that might prevent you gaining access to the site. (Proposed schools should have already reported to the DfE any incomplete building works – or any other issues

which may prevent inspectors from gaining access to the site – before the notification call.)

Make clear that you expect the proprietor and the person(s) who is/will be responsible for the day-to-day operation of the (proposed) school to be present during the inspection.^{[\[footnote 5\]](#)} Explain that you need to interview them to judge their ability to promote and implement the relevant policies and procedures required by the independent school standards.

Advise leaders that they will receive formal notification of the inspection in a letter, which will be sent by an inspection support administrator as an email attachment. This will include a [list of documents](#) that the (proposed) school will need to provide at the start of the inspection. We will also provide information about the portal and how leaders can upload documents.

Complete and upload the notification form and inform the inspection support team that you have made the notification call.

Requests for deferral

If the (proposed) school asks for the inspection to be deferred, see [Deferring or pausing an additional inspection, or gathering additional evidence](#).

Planning call – pre-registration and material change inspections

Call the (proposed) school at the time agreed in the notification call. This is normally a video conference call, unless technology does not allow this. Ask the (proposed) school not to record this call or any further calls. In exceptional circumstances, you may permit the (proposed) school to record the call where this is required to respond to a request for reasonable adjustments. Similarly, tell school leaders that we do not normally record the call, unless we have agreed this beforehand with them. Let leaders know that they are welcome to take notes. Emphasise to leaders that they can take breaks when needed.

For pre-registration inspections, the aim of this call is to give the headteacher the

opportunity to explain what life in the proposed school is intended to be like and to provide further context about the application to register as an independent school.

Explain that the call will be in 3 parts:

- introduction and discussing practicalities
- understanding the (proposed) school's context and application to register/make a material change to its registration
- planning the timetable for the inspection

Part 1: introduction and discussing practicalities

Record the roles of all leaders who are on the call.

Remind leaders that:

- we have a [code of conduct](#) that sets out our expectations for leaders and staff at the proposed school
- these expectations include asking the proposed school to be open, transparent and honest with inspectors so that the inspection can be carried out with integrity

You should cover the following points.

Leaders' wellbeing

Check on the headteacher's and any other leaders' wellbeing.

Establish who is responsible for the headteacher's wellbeing on a day-to-day basis. Record how to contact them.

Make sure leaders are aware that support for their own, and their staff's, wellbeing is available through the charity [Education Support](#).

Reasonable adjustments and adaptations

Check that any reasonable adjustments agreed during the notification call have been put in place. Make sure you have considered any other requested adaptations appropriate to the inspection process where those with other protected characteristics may otherwise be put at a disadvantage.

Remind leaders that they can ask for any further reasonable adjustments or adaptations during the rest of the inspection process. See the [Responding to](#)

[requests for reasonable adjustments and/or adaptations](#) section of the operating guide for standard inspections for further information.

Record any requests and their outcome in the evidence base, along with any other adaptations that have been requested.

Ensuring that leaders have what they need

Establish whether leaders have the practical information they need, including the provider contact helpline number and instructions on how to upload documents to the portal.

Make sure that leaders understand the inspection process, and that you will be checking whether the proposed school is likely to meet the independent school standards and associated requirements if the DfE decides to register the provider. Let them know where they can access the operating guide and inspection information document.

Ask leaders if they have any issues or concerns that they would like to raise or if there is anything they want to clarify before the inspection. Explain that they will be able to raise any emerging matters during the inspection itself.

If any complaints have been made about the (proposed) school, explain that the inspection will focus on the wider issues raised by the complaints. Inspectors will not investigate individual complaints.

Establish whether you need your regional support team to book [an interpreter](#) to support some or all of the inspection or whether the (proposed) school will provide one.

For material change inspections, invite school leaders to let parents and carers know about the inspection but make it clear that we do not normally open the free text facility on Ofsted's Parent View or offer surveys for pupils or staff to complete for material change inspections.

If you and/or leaders consider there are exceptional circumstances that mean it would be helpful to open the staff and pupil surveys and the free text facility on Parent View for a material change inspection (for example if the school has applied to make significant changes to its capacity and the age ranges or special educational needs that it currently caters for) you should contact the duty desk for approval.

Part 2: understanding the (proposed) school's context and application to register/make a material change

It is crucial that, as part of the planning call, you develop an accurate understanding of what the (proposed) school intends to offer and whether it is likely to meet the needs of the pupils it plans to admit, so that you can determine whether it is likely to consistently meet the independent school standards and associated requirements.

Additional information about the (proposed) school

Use this part of the call to discuss:

- whether the proposed school has a religious ethos or character (see [The school has a religious ethos and/or is designated by order as having a religious character](#) for further steps to take)
- where applicable, any proposed nursery provision (see [Provision for 2- and 3-year-olds](#) in the inspection information for schools)
- where applicable, any proposed before- and/or after-school care or holiday clubs, particularly if these will cater for 2- to 8-year-olds (if the proposed school plans to offer before- and/or after-school care for its own pupils, you must consider that provision as part of the pre-registration inspection)
- whether the proposed school will be part of a group of independent schools, and if so, the different levels of responsibility and oversight within the group, to ensure that you can have the appropriate discussions with the right leaders
- the nature of any proposed SEND provision
- whether the proposed school will operate from more than one site, for example if it will offer early years or post-16 provision on separate premises – if so, you must establish the full address of each site, record it in the evidence base and report it to the relevant Senior HMI, who will decide whether the tariff for the inspection needs to change; you must also ask the proposed school to provide the addresses to the DfE, so that the DfE can record the information in the proposed school's record on [Get Information about Schools](#)
- the identity of the proprietor of the proposed school
- the governance arrangements for the proposed school

You may also want to follow up on any additional clarifications needed following your

pre-inspection preparation.

For material change inspections, also discuss:

- any changes to the school's context since the last inspection that leaders should share with you, including in relation to pupils' needs
- details of (and responses to) any recent tensions in, or pressures from, the community
- any changes to leadership arrangements since the last inspection
- any relevant safeguarding matters, as identified by leaders, including any safeguarding concerns, or allegations made about adults
- whether the school has any pupils who attend off-site alternative provision, either full time or part time, run either by the school or by a different organisation. If the school uses off-site alternative provision, ask for further details about this, including the:
 - number of pupils who attend
 - number of off-site alternative providers used currently
 - unique reference numbers and addresses of the alternative providers
 - names and addresses of the alternative providers (if there is no unique reference number (URN) for one or more alternative providers)
 - range of needs that these providers cater for
 - timetable for the pupils who attend

Part 3: planning the timetable for the inspection

The purpose of this part of the call is to shape the plan for the onsite inspection. Make sure leaders understand the plan and know what practical arrangements they need to make to support it.

Consider and plan with leaders what inspection activities you (and the team if there is one) need to carry out to gather the necessary evidence to check whether the proposed school is likely to meet all the independent school standards and related requirements. Remember that your arrival time should not be before 8am.

Organise a brief meeting to check on staff wellbeing at the start of the day and to review the proposed timetable and inspection activity arrangements.

Invite the headteacher and, if they are in post, other leaders to take part in joint visits to lessons (note that this applies to pre-registration inspections if the proposed school is already operating any kind of unregistered educational provision).

Make arrangements for:

- meetings with relevant staff, and anyone that the staff members wish to be present for those meetings
- a meeting with, as a minimum, the sole proprietor, all joint proprietors or the chair, and as many members of the proprietor body as are available
- meetings with those responsible for governance (as many as are available)
- meetings with anyone else you think would be relevant, such as any local authority representatives who intend to commission places at the school

Confirm if and when interpreters will be present during the inspection.

Establish how the proposed school will give the lead inspector access to its policy documents and records so that inspectors can check the proposed school's compliance with the independent school standards. We expect all documents to be provided in English.

Agree whether it may be pragmatic to do some elements of the inspection through video or telephone calls. This will usually only be to involve parents and those with leadership or governance responsibility who are unable to attend.

For material change inspections, in exceptional circumstances, allow for time to analyse the responses to Parent View and any staff or pupil surveys, where applicable.

Factor in time to reflect upon and record your evidence. Inform leaders that there will be reflection meetings and conversations with leaders and the inspection team during the inspection. Explain that these are an opportunity to review the evidence in relation to the independent school standards covered so far, and to agree adjustments to the planned inspection activities. The [operating guide for standard inspections](#) has further information about reflection meetings and who can attend them.

Make arrangements for the final feedback meeting at the end of the inspection (see the [inspection information document](#) for who may attend). Ask the (proposed) school to invite the appropriate people to the final feedback meeting.

You should leave the school by 5pm other than in exceptional circumstances – for

example if social care regulatory inspectors are inspecting boarding, residential or children's home provision at the same time. (Where any request to stay beyond 5pm is made either by leaders or the inspection team, discuss with leaders and record brief notes in the evidence base.)

When deciding which activities to carry out, remember that these are not standard inspections, so you need to consider how best to gather specific information about the independent school standards and associated requirements specified in the DfE's commission. Your planned inspection activities should be focused and purposeful. Refer to the [additional guidance for gathering evidence](#) in the operating guide for standard inspections to inform your planning.

Make sure that you share and explain the rationale for inspection activities, discussing any practical arrangements as required, and record this in your evidence base. The final decision on inspection activities rests with you as lead inspector. Be clear that you will ensure leaders have the opportunity to highlight the impact of their actions.

For pre-registration inspections, make clear that your judgements about whether the proposed school is likely to meet the independent school standards and associated requirements will be based solely on the evidence you have considered as part of your preparation and that you gather on site. Ofsted is not in a position to consider any further evidence after the on-site inspection has finished (and before the report is published).

Agree a time when you will be able to upload the timetable to the portal. End the call and upload the revised timetable to the portal by the agreed time.

After the call(s)

Use the electronic evidence-gathering preparation card to inform team inspectors (where relevant) of any pertinent information, including the planned activities, their responsibilities, and the outcome of any requested adaptations or reasonable adjustments. Where relevant, directly inform the lead social care regulatory inspector as well.

Refer any questions regarding suspected unregistered education provision to Ofsted's unregistered schools team. Take particular care when considering questions related to what constitutes full-time education. When the team suspects that provision is unregistered, it will determine whether further action needs to be

taken because there is reasonable cause to believe that the setting is operating as an unregistered school.

What to do on site during all types of additional inspection

On the day of the inspection, for pre-registration and material change inspections, arrive at the time arranged with leaders. This should not normally be before 8am. The inspection team should leave by 5pm other than in exceptional circumstances, for example if social care regulatory inspectors are inspecting boarding, residential or children's home provision at the same time that you are inspecting the (proposed) school provision.

For material change, progress monitoring and emergency inspections, in the rare event that you arrive at the school and it appears to no longer be operating, contact the duty desk who will consult with the DfE. See [Emergency inspections of schools that appear to have closed](#).

In exceptional circumstances, if you arrive on site and are unable to undertake or complete the pre-registration inspection due to an inability to access the site, for example because of incomplete building works, contact the duty desk. For pre-registration and progress monitoring inspections, inform the proposed school that the inspection fee may still be payable, as set out in the [inspection fees](#) section of the inspection information document. In this situation, you will normally draft an inspection report/report card in line with this [operating guide](#), reporting on compliance with those independent school standards and associated requirements that you gained enough evidence to make judgements about [during your preparation](#).

If there are no pupils on roll, the inspection will still go ahead in line with this operating guide. For emergency and progress monitoring inspections, you will also need to follow the guidance in our [operating guide for standard inspections of non-association independent schools](#).

Progress monitoring and emergency inspections

On arrival at the school, ask to speak to the headteacher, proprietor, person(s) responsible for the day-to-day running of the school or, if necessary, the most senior member of staff available. Explain that you have arrived to carry out an emergency or progress monitoring inspection at the commission of the DfE.

- For emergency inspections, explain that you will inspect specified areas of the school's provision in order to report to the DfE whether the school meets the [Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#) and associated requirements (if relevant). If the inspection has been commissioned due to a complaint received by the DfE, be clear that we will not reveal the name of the complainant to the school.
- For progress monitoring inspections, explain that you will inspect specified areas of the school's provision in order to report to the DfE on whether the school now meets the [Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#) and associated requirements (where relevant). If applicable, say if you will be considering the school's progress in addressing any qualitative weaknesses identified at its previous inspection.

In the rare case that a school resists allowing you entry to carry out the inspection, remind them that you have a [power of entry to inspect as set out in the independent schools inspection information document](#). If the school still denies you entry, contact the duty desk who will seek advice from the policy and legal teams and may consult the DfE.

If the school asks for the inspection to be deferred, see the [Deferring or pausing an additional inspection, or gathering additional evidence](#) section.

Once you have gained entry to inspect the school, at a convenient point, contact the inspection support administrator to confirm that the inspection is underway and that they may send confirmation of the inspection to the school by email.

Starting the on-site inspection

Throughout the inspection, you (as the lead inspector) are responsible for assuring the quality of the evidence gathered, and ensuring the smooth running of the inspection with school leaders. Focus on building and managing relationships with leaders. Where there are team inspectors and/or (for integrated inspections only) social care regulatory inspectors, you are also responsible for managing the conduct of, and quality assuring the work of, the inspection team and having oversight of

leadership, governance and safeguarding.

At the start of the on-site inspection:

- check the wellbeing of the leaders and, where relevant, staff and, for pre-registration and material change inspections, find out whether any issues have arisen since the planning call
- introduce any team inspectors, social care regulatory inspectors and interpreters
- meet with the headteacher to confirm the inspection timetable and establish how you will be given access to any [additional policy documents and records](#), further to those submitted to the DfE in the (proposed) school's application
- check whether anyone involved in the inspection requires or has requested any reasonable adjustments because of a disability
- consider whether you need to make any adaptations to the inspection process where those with protected characteristics other than disability may otherwise be put at a disadvantage (refer to the [Responding to requests for reasonable adjustments and/or adaptations](#) section of the operating guide for standard inspections for further information)
- if there have been any requests for reasonable adjustments and/or adaptations, record them in the evidence base along with their outcome, and any other adaptations that have been requested

For progress monitoring and emergency inspections, also:

- reiterate the reason for the inspection and remind the school that all independent schools must comply consistently with the independent school standards for continued registration
- arrange meetings with those responsible for the governance of the school and with staff
- confirm whether any pupils at the school are educated at other sites, for example early years or post-16 provision that operates on separate premises; if so, you must establish the address of each of the premises, record it in the evidence base and report it to the duty desk, who will decide whether the tariff for the inspection needs to change
- confirm [which school documents you need access to](#), for example information about staff absence
- confirm [arrangements for providing feedback](#) at the end of the inspection
- ask the school to read our [code of conduct](#), which sets out expectations for

inspectors and leaders and staff at the school, and explain that if the headteacher has any concerns about inspectors not acting in accordance with the code of conduct, they should raise this with you as soon as possible, so that any issues can be resolved before the on-site inspection is completed

- make sure leaders are aware that support for their own, and their staff's, wellbeing is available through the charity [Education Support](#)

For pre-registration and material change inspections, follow the timetable and organisation for the day as discussed in the planning call.

For all types of additional inspection, if there is more than one inspector, hold a short team meeting to clarify inspection activities and individual roles and responsibilities.

Inspection activities

Inspection activities are focused on gathering evidence about whether the (proposed) school meets (for emergency and progress monitoring inspections) or is likely to meet (for pre-registration and material change inspections) the independent school standards and associated requirements specified in the DfE's commission for the inspection. Specifically, you will gather evidence as follows.

Pre-registration inspections

Gather evidence about whether the proposed school is likely to consistently meet all paragraphs of the independent school standards and associated requirements if the DfE decides to register it (even though it will not normally be possible for you to observe any teaching and learning or to judge the implementation of policies).

Keep in mind that the inspection is assessing the proposed school's readiness to open and the inspection is based entirely on the proposed provision.

Remember that if you gather any evidence that suggests that any paragraph of the independent school standards is unlikely to be met, the overall outcome for the inspection will be that the proposed school is unlikely to meet the independent school standards.

Also, if the proposed school has applied to admit a certain number of pupils but the facilities (for example the number of toilets) are only suitable for fewer pupils, the relevant independent school standards must be judged as being unlikely to be met.

You must only make judgements on exactly what the school has applied to cater for

in its application to the DfE. You must not agree to make any adjustments to the application during the inspection (for example a reduced number of pupils, or a reduced age range) so that a school is likely to meet the requirements of the independent school standards.

Alternative providers and other providers already operating

In pre-registration inspections of existing providers, including alternative provision, or children's homes that are already providing education, visit lessons to gather further evidence to inform judgements about whether the requirements of the independent school standards are likely to be met. Pay particular attention to the standard about teaching (paragraph 3), the requirement to effectively implement a policy that promotes good behaviour among pupils (paragraph 9(b)) and the standard about the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils (paragraph 5). Remember that you still need to make a judgement about whether the standards are likely to be met, as opposed to whether they are met, because the proposed school is not registered with the DfE.

Material change inspections

Gather evidence about whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards and associated requirements if the material change is implemented. Keep in mind that material change inspections assess existing, registered schools that normally have a proven ability to meet the independent school standards.

In reaching judgements about whether relevant requirements are likely to be met, consider carefully all the implications of the material change. For example, if the school has applied to accept younger pupils, consider whether:

- the accommodation, furniture and playground space are suitable
- the curriculum has been properly planned and is supported by adequate teaching resources, including the proposal to recruit teachers with expertise in teaching the proposed age range

Record in the evidence base the full address (including the postcode) of any new premises.

Remember that if you judge any of the independent school standards that are relevant to the material change are unlikely to be met, the overall outcome for the inspection will be that the school is unlikely to meet the independent school standards.

You must only make judgements on exactly what the school has applied to cater for

in its application to the DfE. You must not agree to make any adjustments to the application during the inspection (for example a reduced number of pupils, or a reduced age range) so that a school meets the requirements of the independent school standards.

Emergency inspections

In emergency inspections, gather evidence about whether the school meets the independent school standards and associated requirements that are relevant to the issues that triggered the inspection being commissioned. Although the purpose of the inspection is not to resolve or investigate the specific issue or [complaint](#) that triggered the commissioning of the inspection, use the wider issues raised by the trigger for the inspection as lines of enquiry.

When the underlying reasons for the emergency inspection relate to safeguarding matters, you must not investigate the actual case. Consider whether the school's policies and processes and their implementation are appropriate to meet the independent school standards and associated requirements.

If you and/or leaders consider there are exceptional circumstances that mean it would be helpful to open the staff and pupil surveys and the free text facility on Parent View, contact the duty desk for approval.

Remember that if you judge any of the independent school standards that are relevant to the wider issues raised by the trigger for the inspection as being unmet, the overall outcome for the inspection will be that the school does not meet all the independent school standards that were checked during the inspection.

Progress monitoring inspections

If the DfE required the school to prepare – and has approved/approved with modifications – an [action plan](#), DfE will have supplied this to you in the inspection commissioning form. In this case, you must check how effectively the school is implementing all the proposed actions and whether they are being implemented within the timescale set out in the action plan.

If the DfE has rejected the school's action plan, ask the school to provide a revised version of the plan, if one exists. Take the revised plan into account when judging the school's progress in meeting unmet requirements.

Note that the school may have updated their original action plan even if it has not been rejected by the DfE. You must take account of any updated plans when judging the school's progress in meeting unmet requirements.

Gather evidence about whether the school now meets the independent school

standards and, where relevant, associated requirements that were judged to be unmet at the previous inspection. Check the school's progress in addressing any qualitative issues identified at the previous inspection, ensuring you follow up all matters identified in the inspection report/report card.

If you and/or leaders consider there are exceptional circumstances that mean it would be helpful to open the staff and pupil surveys and the free text facility on Parent View, contact the duty desk for approval.

Remember that if you judge that any of the previously unmet independent school standards remain unmet (or if the school has new failures to comply with other independent school standards), the overall outcome for the inspection will be that the school does not meet all the independent school standards that were checked during the inspection.

All types of additional inspections

In checking whether the (proposed) school meets/is likely to meet the independent school standards, refer to the DfE's non-statutory guidance [Independent school standards guidance](#), and [Registration of independent schools: guidance for proprietors](#) and the resources these documents refer to.

When [boarding, residential](#) or [children's home](#) provision is being inspected at the same time as your inspection, work with the lead social care regulatory inspector as appropriate.

You must inspect against any particular focus specified in the DfE's ICF and include the following activities.

- [Meet with the proprietor](#) and the person(s) who will be responsible for the day-to-day operation of the (proposed) school to gather evidence to help assess whether the (proposed) school is likely to meet paragraph 34(1) of the independent school standards, which concerns the quality of leadership and management.
- Follow up any discrepancies about the proprietor's identity that arose during inspection planning or in the notification or planning calls.
- Meet with the headteacher, [staff already in post](#) and those responsible for governance.
- Look at the premises, including any proposed or existing off-site provision.
- Evaluate the policies and other information that the (proposed) school provides to you on site and in its application to the DfE.
- Where pupils are present, including at alternative provision or in children's homes

that are already providing education, [talk to them](#).

- Seek opportunities whenever possible to test emerging findings and corroborate conclusions.

Safeguarding

You must evaluate the (proposed) school's safeguarding arrangements and report whether it is likely to meet the requirements in the independent school standards about:

- its safeguarding policy (in paragraphs 7 to 7(b) and 32(1)(c))
- the suitability of staff and supply staff (in part 4) [\[footnote 6\]](#)

You do not normally need to check whether the school meets the standard about recruitment checks on the proprietor in paragraphs 20(3) to 20(5)(c)(ii), as the DfE usually carries out these checks. You will only need to check them in the rare case that the DfE has commissioned Ofsted to do so, or if you find on inspection that the school has changed the proprietor without seeking the DfE's permission.

If the provider is operating, you must [talk to pupils](#) as part of judging how effectively the proposed school is implementing its safeguarding policy (paragraph 7 of the standards) and meeting the requirement to actively promote the wellbeing of pupils (paragraph 34(1)(c), which is part of the standard about the quality of leadership and management.

If you cannot corroborate the evidence gathered about the effectiveness of the (proposed) school's arrangements to safeguard pupils because you are prevented from talking to pupils during the inspection, then you will normally judge the relevant independent school standards as unmet/unlikely to be met.

In inspections of providers that are already operating, determine – and record in the compliance record – whether:

- there have been any safeguarding incidents or allegations since the last inspection
- the proposed school has taken appropriate action to safeguard the children affected and/or deal with allegations

If adults live on the premises, consider the (proposed) school's risk assessment. Ask the (proposed) school to demonstrate they have fully assessed any potential risks to children, and check that their risk assessment includes:

- a safeguarding check of residents

- access between the residential accommodation and the rest of the premises
- which other individuals (such as family members and visitors) can access the residential accommodation

You must also check the (proposed) school's compliance with [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 the DfE guidance [Keeping children safe in education](#)).

If safeguarding needs minor improvements

During the inspection, you may identify minor improvements that the (proposed) school needs to make to its safeguarding practices, such as correcting small administrative errors in paperwork or updating policies. If leaders can make these minor improvements easily before the end of the on-site inspection, give them every chance to do so by discussing this constructively with them.

Sometimes, leaders cannot finish making the required minor improvements before the end of the on-site inspection. When this is the case, you can still complete the inspection and judge paragraph 7 of the independent school standards as likely to be met if they have taken the necessary steps to resolve the issues – for example where training has been booked but will not take place for a number of weeks.

In these cases, the minor improvements should be such that, if they were not made straight away, leaving them undone would not have an immediate and/or significant impact on pupils' safety.

Early years provision

When early years provision for children aged 2 and upwards is (proposed as) part of the school registration, consider whether it meets/is likely to meet the requirements of the [early years foundation stage](#). The independent school standards cover all of the prospective pupils in the (proposed) school from the age of 2 upwards, so your judgement on whether the (proposed) school meets/is likely to meet the standards must take into account the whole-school provision. For example, when reaching a judgement about whether the (proposed) school is likely to meet the standards relating to the quality of the curriculum, resources, premises and accommodation, you must take into account their suitability for children aged 2 to 5.

If the provider proposes to offer early years provision at a separate premises, record the full address in the evidence base and inform the relevant regional Senior HMI.

Provision for students aged 19 and over

Some (proposed) schools may intend to admit students aged 19 and over. In these cases, you must only inspect and take account of provision for these students if the (proposed) provision is a course of secondary education that students would begin before the age of 18.

Whether or not this is the case, you must always take account of any provision for students aged 19 and over when considering whether the (proposed) school meets/is likely to meet the safeguarding requirements of the independent school standards, because any such students will essentially be adults who are studying alongside any children admitted to the proposed school. Always mention this in the inspection report/report card.

Proposed special schools

When gathering evidence about whether a (proposed) special school meets/is likely to meet the independent school standards, in particular the requirements in part 1 concerning the quality of education, you must consider whether the (proposed) provision meets/is likely to meet the needs of pupils with all the types of special educational needs that the provider proposes to cater for.

Children's homes applying to register as an independent school

Children's homes frequently accept children with a range of educational needs at short notice. If you are carrying out an additional inspection of educational provision offered by a children's home, you must consider whether the educational provision is capable of providing effectively for a variety of needs. Consider whether there is a prompt and effective system for assessing a pupil's educational attainment and needs and putting in place an individual programme of support, so that disruption to the young person's education can be minimised and their individual needs are likely to be met.

Considering complaints about the (proposed) school

If the DfE has asked you to [consider a complaint](#) as part of the inspection, you must check whether the school meets those independent school standards that are relevant to the wider issues raised by the complaint.

Reflection meetings and conversations

Meet with leaders (and, when deployed/appropriate, team inspectors and social care regulatory inspectors) throughout the inspection to reflect on the emerging evidence. You should:

- check on the wellbeing of leaders and staff, and allow leaders to raise any issues or concerns or to seek clarification, including about the conduct of the inspection

or of individual inspectors

- evaluate the emerging evidence about whether requirements of the independent school standards are likely to be met
- give leaders an opportunity to suggest further evidence, and help you to identify further areas to explore
- identify the most appropriate inspection activities to gather any further evidence you require

If the evidence suggests that the safeguarding requirements of the independent school standards may be judged as unlikely to be met and/or there are serious weaknesses in the proposed school's arrangements to consistently meet the independent school standards, alert the school leaders and call the national duty desk. During this call, you must talk through the evidence and discuss what you used in reaching the emerging findings. Where there are urgent concerns, for example if children may be at risk of harm, complete an [early notification form](#).

Checking independent school standards beyond the scope of the DfE's commission

If you identify matters of concern beyond the scope of the DfE's commission, you should normally inspect and report about whether the (proposed) school meets/is likely to meet the requirements of the independent school standards relevant to the concerns.

If you consider that there are too many matters to follow up in the time available for the inspection, contact the national duty desk, who will consult the DfE regarding increasing the resource allocated to the inspection.

Other matters

Refer to the [Other matters](#) section in the operating guide for standard inspections for information on:

- responding to requests for reasonable adjustments and/or adaptations
- if the (proposed) school has concerns/complaints
- if you need to consider pausing the inspection
- if you identify evidence or allegations of abuse on inspection
- if the (proposed) school uses artificial intelligence

- if the (proposed) school uses external support

Recording evidence

You must [record evidence as outlined in the operating guide for standard inspections](#).

Final feedback meeting

Record the main points for feedback to the (proposed) school in the evidence base during the inspection.

Your feedback must be clear, respectful and grounded in the evidence gathered. It must cover all the points that will appear in the inspection report. [If the inspection was integrated](#), you must feed back to the (proposed) school with the lead social care inspector.

Thank everyone for their contributions, engagement and involvement in the inspection. Explain clearly to all attendees that attendance at the final feedback meeting is voluntary and any attendee may leave at any time.

Then, for pre-registration inspections, explain:

- the independent school standards and associated requirements (including the national minimum standards in the case of integrated inspections of boarding and residential special schools) that the proposed school is likely to meet, and those that are unlikely to be met if the DfE decides to register it
- the rationale and evidence to support the judgement that any independent school standards or associated requirements are unlikely to be met, so that the proposed school is clear about its priorities for improvement (Ofsted does not give advice about how to meet the standards)
- that Ofsted is not in a position to consider any further evidence after the on-site inspection has finished (and before the report is published) in relation to any independent school standards and associated requirements that you have judged that the proposed school is unlikely to meet

- that the DfE, which is the registration authority for independent schools, will decide whether the proposed school will be registered based on the outcome of the inspection and any other evidence it has about the proposed school's likely compliance with the independent school standards^{[\[footnote 7\]](#)}
- that Ofsted does not make a recommendation to the DfE as to whether or not a proposed school should be registered
- if the proposed school is unlikely to meet all the independent school standards for all of the age range (and/or the full capacity of pupils) that it has applied to cater for, but it is likely to meet all the standards for a reduced part of that age range (and/or number of pupils on roll), explain the reasons why, being clear that the overall outcome of the inspection will be that the independent school standards are unlikely to be met; emphasise that you will also set this out in the inspection report, that you are not in a position to make recommendations about what the proposed school should be registered to cater for, and that it is the DfE that will decide whether to register the school and what the school will be registered to cater for
- if the provider has applied to the DfE to register as an independent school and applied to Ofsted to open a children's home, make clear that, irrespective of whether Ofsted has judged that the school provision is likely to meet the independent school standards, the DfE will not be in a position to decide whether to register it until Ofsted has decided that the children's home provision can be registered with Ofsted
- that where the proposed school appears to be operating without registration:
 - you will report this to the DfE
 - Ofsted may decide to inspect the proposed school under section 97 of the Education and Skills Act 2008
 - under section 96 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 it is a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment to conduct an unregistered educational institution in England

For material change inspections, explain:

- about the independent school standards and associated requirements (including the national minimum standards in the case of integrated inspections of boarding and residential special schools) that the school is likely to meet, and those that are unlikely to be met if the DfE decides to approve the school's application to make a material change
- about the evidence to support the judgement that any independent school standards or associated requirements are unlikely to be met, so that the school is

clear about its priorities for improvement (Ofsted does not give advice about how to meet the independent school standards)

- that Ofsted does not recommend to the DfE whether or not a proposed material change should be approved
- that schools cannot implement material changes until the Secretary of State gives approval for the change
- that, if the material changes have already been implemented by the school, this will be reported to the DfE
- that if the school has already implemented the change, and the inspector has judged that the relevant standards are not met, the DfE will decide any subsequent action to take in respect of any unmet standards
- that the DfE will decide any action to take in respect of any [independent school standards that are not met](#), which may include commissioning us to carry out a progress monitoring inspection

For emergency inspections, explain:

- about the independent school standards and associated requirements (including the national minimum standards in the case of integrated inspections of boarding and residential special schools) that have been checked on the inspection, which the school meets or does not meet
- about the evidence to support the judgement that any independent school standards or associated requirements are not met, so that the school is clear about its priorities for improvement (Ofsted does not give advice about how to meet the independent school standards)
- that the DfE will decide any action to take in respect of any [independent school standards that are not met](#), which may include commissioning us to carry out a progress monitoring inspection

For progress monitoring inspections, explain:

- which of the independent school standards and associated requirements (including the national minimum standards on integrated inspections of boarding and residential special schools) that were judged to be unmet at the previous inspection are now met, and those that remain unmet (if applicable)
- about any other independent school standards or associated requirements that are unmet, if the inspector identified and inspected additional matters of concern during the course of the inspection (see [Checking independent school standards beyond the scope of the DfE's commission](#))

- the evidence to support the judgement that any independent school standards or associated requirements are not met, so that the school is clear about its priorities for improvement (Ofsted does not give advice about how to meet the independent school standards)
- about the progress made in addressing any qualitative matters identified at the previous standard inspection (if applicable)
- that the DfE, which is the registration authority for independent schools, will decide any action to take in respect of any standards or associated requirements that are not met

Then, for all types of additional inspection, explain:

- that any of these judgements about compliance with the independent school standards may change as a result of quality assurance and consistency checking procedures or moderation
- that leaders should share the inspection findings with the proprietor and those responsible for governance, and whoever else 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
- that the draft inspection report/report card they receive must not be published; they must wait for the copy of the final inspection report/report card
- that we will always share the final inspection report/report card with the DfE, and may share the draft report/report card following our quality assurance process
- that the headteacher or proprietor should, ideally, complete the post-inspection survey
- that the (proposed) school has an opportunity to [raise any issues or concerns](#) or to seek clarification about the inspection, and can also contact us after the end of the inspection, if necessary
- that leaders can make a formal complaint and that information on how to do this is available in our [complaints procedure](#)

Reflect the (proposed) school's context and frame your feedback through professional dialogue. Make sure that the meeting is practical and constructive by managing the number of attendees and the conduct of everyone who attends.

What to do after the inspection

After the end of the inspection, write the inspection report or report card, following our internal writing guidance.

Following a pre-registration or material change inspection, write an inspection report.

Following a progress monitoring or emergency inspection, update the school's report card where one exists, and if not (because the school has not received a standard inspection since January 2026) write an inspection report.

For integrated additional inspections of boarding and residential special schools, incorporate the social care regulatory inspectors' findings on the boarding/residential provision, including the school's compliance with the national minimum standards.

Do not make any recommendations in the report/report card about what action the (proposed) school needs to take in order to meet any unmet independent school standards or associated requirements.

In pre-registration inspection reports, do not make any recommendations about whether the proposed school should be registered or what it should be registered to cater for.

In material change inspection reports, do not make any recommendations about whether the DfE should approve the material change that the school has applied to make or what the school should be registered to cater for.

You may reflect in the inspection report/report card if an emergency inspection was commissioned as a result of a complaint, but you must not refer to the substance of the complaint in case this identifies the complainant and/or any individuals in the school.

Complete the compliance record. If there are concerns about the school, complete an [early notification form](#).

The text in the report or report card must:

- reflect the evidence gathered
- be consistent with the compliance record and verbal feedback given to the school at the end of the inspection
- clearly provide evidence of compliance and (in particular) non-compliance with the independent school standards throughout, so that it supports the DfE in taking any regulatory or enforcement action

If the DfE has specifically commissioned us to consider a complaint as part of the inspection, confirm to the DfE that you have done so in the compliance record. Use the compliance record to confidentially share details relating to the complaint with the DfE.

If the (proposed) school submits comments after reviewing the inspection report or report card, you are responsible, as the lead inspector, for reviewing and responding to the comments and making any necessary amendments to the inspection report or report card and compliance record.

Reporting concerns to the DfE: completing the early notification form

If, during any inspection covered by this guidance, you identify that:

- safeguarding requirements are not met
- there are serious weaknesses in the school's arrangements to consistently meet the independent school standards, which may have a serious impact on pupils' welfare, health and safety, or academic or personal development
- on a pre-registration inspection, the proposed school appears to be operating any kind of unregistered educational provision, whether or not the provision appears to meet the definition of an independent school and whether or not you have judged that the proposed school is likely to meet the independent school standards
- on a material change, emergency or progress monitoring inspection, the school is operating beyond its registration agreement, which constitutes a [material change to its registration](#)

you must contact the duty desk. After the on-site inspection, you must complete an [early notification form](#). All early notification forms are sent to the DfE. Early notification forms for pre-registration inspections are also sent to Ofsted's unregistered schools team.

Where there are urgent concerns, for example if children may be at risk of harm, you must send the early notification form to the DfE during the on-site inspection.

If you have any concerns about the suitability of the proprietor or any other member of staff who is employed in a management capacity, report these to the DfE (as the appropriate authority) in the compliance record. This information is particularly

relevant when it may have a bearing on a person's suitability to participate in managing an independent school. This includes cases where the person's conduct undermines British values or children's safety, or where you conclude that the person's conduct is so inappropriate that it may make them unsuitable to take part in managing an independent school.

Quality assurance and consistency checking

You are responsible for the quality of your own work and that of your team, where applicable. You must ensure that the inspection is carried out in accordance with the [code of conduct](#).

As the lead inspector, you are responsible for giving team inspectors timely feedback about the quality of their work and their conduct.

When DfE commissions a follow-up desk-based exercise after the inspection

Occasionally, after we have published a report of an additional inspection, the DfE may commission Ofsted for subsequent advice about the (proposed) school, rather than commissioning another on-site inspection.

This only happens when the (proposed) school has been judged to meet (or to be likely to meet) almost all of the relevant requirements of the independent school standards in an additional inspection, but has failed to meet a small number of requirements due to omissions in, or the quality of, a small number of documents or policies.

Normally you, as the lead inspector of the recently completed additional inspection, will carry this out as a desk-based exercise, rather than an on-site inspection.

Review the content and quality of the revised documents and check whether they meet the requirements of the relevant independent school standards and associated requirements. Refer to the DfE's non-statutory guidance, [Independent school](#)

[standards guidance](#) and [Registration of independent schools: guidance for proprietors](#), and the resources to which these documents refer.

Report your advice to the DfE, by email, about whether the revised documents now mean that the relevant requirements are likely to be met by the (proposed) school.

[\[footnote 8\]](#) There is no inspection report for desk-based exercises.

Carrying out 2 concurrent additional inspections

If you are carrying out 2 types of additional inspections concurrently, follow the guidance in the relevant sections of this operating guide. You should usually report to the DfE in one report card and compliance record.

Carrying out an additional inspection as part of a standard inspection

If you are carrying out a material change, progress monitoring or emergency inspection as part of a standard inspection, follow the guidance in the relevant section of this operating guide.

You should usually report these additional matters to the DfE in the standard inspection's report card and compliance record. However, in exceptional circumstances the DfE may ask, in their inspection commissioning form, for a report card and compliance record on the standard inspection and a separate report and compliance record on the progress monitoring inspection.

Concurrent inspections of schools with the same proprietor

Please follow the guidance in our [operating guide for standard inspections of non-association independent schools](#).

Additional inspections at the same time as social care inspections of boarding and residential special schools

If you are carrying out an additional inspection of a boarding or residential special school at the same time that a social care inspector carries out the same type of additional inspection of the school's boarding/residential provision, the inspection will be integrated. Notify the school of the inspection and take the overall lead of both inspection teams. You are responsible for drafting the compliance record and report or report card in line with this operating guide, incorporating the findings from both inspections.

If you are carrying out an additional inspection of a boarding or residential special school at the same time that a social care inspector carries out a different type of additional inspection or a [full inspection](#) of the school's boarding/residential provision, report your findings in line with this operating guide. The lead social care inspector will report their inspection findings in a separate report.

In all cases, you must work closely with the lead social care regulatory inspector to plan the inspection activities. You may meet with key staff together, such as the designated safeguarding lead(s), the proprietor and those responsible for governance. You must discuss your findings throughout the inspections and share inspection evidence where appropriate. This includes assessing pupils' attendance, and considering the strengths of the links between the day school and the boarding or residential provision, and whether concerns are raised with inspectors about the children's welfare during inspection.

Inspections of schools that are registered as children's homes

If you are inspecting education at the same time as the full inspection of the children's home, follow the guidance in our [operating guide for standard inspections of non-association independent schools](#).

Emergency and progress monitoring inspections of schools with no pupils on roll

If you are carrying out an emergency- or progress monitoring inspection of a school with no pupils on roll, follow the guidance in our [operating guide for standard inspections of non-association independent schools](#).

Emergency inspections of schools that appear to have closed

On rare occasions, it may transpire during the notification call for any type of inspection (or for unannounced inspections, when you arrive at the school to carry out any type of inspection) that a school appears to have closed, or that it is no longer operating as a school. [\[footnote 9\]](#) You must always contact the duty desk, who will consult the DfE.

If you have not already arrived at the school to start the inspection, the DfE may contact the school to clarify whether the school intends to continue operating, so that the DfE can decide what action needs to be taken, for example to de-register the school.

Whether or not you have arrived at the school, the DfE may commission Ofsted to carry out an emergency inspection to check compliance with the independent school standards. The DfE's commission may include taking copies of the admission and attendance registers. Your right of entry to inspect in such cases is set out in the [independent school inspection information guide](#).

If the DfE commissions you to carry out an emergency inspection, carry out your planning and on-site activities in line with the guidance on emergency inspections in this operating guide.

If you find that the school is still operating, write the inspection report/report card in line with the guidance in the [What to do after the inspection](#) section.

When the outcome of the inspection is that the school appears to have closed –

including if we have not been able to gain entry to inspect the school – you must still draft a short factual inspection report/report card in order to report to the DfE on the school's compliance with the independent school standards and associated requirements that you were able to gain sufficient evidence to make judgements about, for example during your [preparation](#). Record the overall outcome for the inspection as 'The school appears to have closed'. The report/report card will be [quality assured](#) and [published](#) in the usual way.^{[\[footnote 10\]](#)}

Deferring or pausing an additional inspection, or gathering additional evidence

Familiarise yourself with our guide on [deferring, pausing and gathering additional evidence](#).

If you receive a request to defer an additional inspection, you must contact the regional duty desk.

Checking for complaints about schools

When preparing for an inspection, review and consider any complaints that the DfE has asked us to consider about the school and any other complaints recorded on 'Find information about a provider'. Record the themes raised and, in the light of all other available information, decide how to adapt your planned inspection activities to gather objective evidence on those themes.

Do not:

- investigate or follow up the specific circumstances of a complaint received before and/or during the inspection or come to any conclusions about the complaint itself
- use complaints, or information about complaints, as evidence to support grading, or reach any grades based on complaints; however, you may take account of wider issues and information raised by complaints when planning inspection activities, and you can use the evidence that you find through those activities to support your decision-making about grades

Working with interpreters on inspection

Please follow the guidance on working with interpreters in our [operating guide for standard inspections of non-association independent schools](#).

Evaluations of school action plans

Carrying out the evaluation

If a boarding/residential special school's action plan covers failures relating to the boarding/residential provision, the social care regulatory inspector will evaluate those aspects of the plan first, in line with this guidance.^[footnote 11] You (the lead education inspector) will then evaluate the educational aspects of the plan and take the social care regulatory inspector's evaluation into account when reaching an overall outcome.^[footnote 12]

You (education and social care regulatory inspectors) must take account of any particular requirements specified in the DfE's ICF for the evaluation. The ICF will contain a copy of the school's action plan and any supporting evidence that the school has supplied to the DfE to demonstrate that it has implemented actions, for example revised policies required by the independent school standards.

Evaluate the action plan by assessing the following:

- completeness:
 - whether the plan includes every standard and requirement that was judged to be unmet at the previous inspection, with clear reference to the substance of the specific paragraphs of the independent school standards, national minimum standards and any associated requirements that were judged to be unmet
 - whether the plan includes actions for meeting every unmet standard and requirement, and how the school will address the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection – that is, the evidence from the inspection which caused the inspector to judge that each standard or requirement is not being met

- whether each action has a date it will be completed by
- whether each action has measurable criteria for judging whether it succeeds in meeting the unmet standard or requirement
- quality:
 - the specificity of each action – how clearly defined each action is
 - how robust each action is
 - the applicability of each action: how each proposed action will address the evidence from the previous inspection which caused the inspector to judge that the standard or requirement is not met; and whether the action is likely to bring about sufficient improvement to enable the school to meet the unmet standard or requirement
 - the practicality of achieving each action by the dates shown – whether the timescale is realistic
 - the relevance and adequacy of the success criteria for each action, and whether the criteria are measurable
 - the quality of the evidence recorded, or provided, for any action that the plan states that the school has already completed

Taking all of this into account, evaluate whether each action that the school proposes to take is likely to mean that the school will meet the unmet standards and/or requirements when the actions have been implemented.

You will then form an overall outcome to advise the DfE whether the proposed action plan is acceptable, acceptable with modifications, or not acceptable.

When carrying out the evaluation, refer to the DfE's guidance documents:

- [Independent school action plans](#)
- [Registration of independent schools: guidance for proprietors](#) and the resources to which this document refers
- [Independent school standards guidance](#)

Carry out the evaluation directly in the independent school evaluation of action plan report template. The text of the report should explain the judgements and reflect the evidence. There is no compliance record for evaluations of action plans, and you should not normally use other methods of recording evidence in the course of an evaluation.

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1. In all commissions for material change, emergency and progress monitoring inspections, the DfE will commission Ofsted to check that the requirement of paragraph 32(1)(c) in part 6 of the independent school standards is met. Paragraph 32(1)(c) forms part of the standard in paragraph 32(1). It requires the proprietor to ensure that a safeguarding policy is 'published on the school's internet website or, where no such website exists, [is] provided to parents on request'. All commissioned inspections should include a check of the school's safeguarding policy and its implementation. [↩](#)
2. In all commissions for material change inspections, the DfE will commission Ofsted to check the suitability of the school's safeguarding policy and its implementation. This is an element of the standard in paragraph 7 of part 3 of the independent school standards. It is also an element of standard 11 of the national minimum standards for boarding and residential special schools. [↩](#)
3. Case records are uploaded to the pre-inspection documents for inspectors to use during preparation. [↩](#)
4. A registered independent school can be approved by the Secretary of State under section 41(1) of the Children and Families Act 2014 to enable the school 'to be the subject of request for it to be named in an EHC [education, health and care] plan'. [↩](#)
5. The 'proprietor' is the person as named on the registration form and accepted by the DfE as being the proprietor or the identified chair of the proprietor/proprietorial body. [↩](#)

6. In all commissions for material change, emergency and progress monitoring inspections, the DfE asks Ofsted to check the school's safeguarding policy and its implementation (part 3, paragraphs 7, 7(a) and 7(b)) and to check that the safeguarding policy is published on the school's website or otherwise made available (part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c)). Checking the school's safeguarding policy and its implementation includes checking that the relevant requirements in part 4 are met if a school has appointed any new staff since the previous inspection. ↩
7. See [section 99\(2b\) of the Education and Skills Act 2008](#). ↩
8. The advice is provided under [section 118\(2\) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006](#) and [section 99\(2\) of the Education and Skills Act 2008](#). ↩
9. Note that this section is not applicable to inspections of closed schools that have already been removed from the DfE's register of schools, [Get Information about Schools](#). If we suspect that a previously registered school is operating, it will be inspected under section 97 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, as set out in the [unregistered school inspection handbook](#). ↩
10. When the overall outcome reported is 'The school appears to have closed', the DfE, as registration authority for independent schools, will normally remove the school from its register of schools, and decide on any further action to take. ↩
11. Normally the social care regulatory inspector will be the lead social care regulatory inspector from the previous inspection. ↩
12. Normally the lead education inspector will be the lead inspector from the previous inspection. ↩

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