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Guidance

Summary of changes

Updated 12 June 2026

Applies to England

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This document sets out changes we have made to inspection guidance to reflect our inspection practice.

September 2026

Non-association independent schools inspection toolkit

In this update, we have made the following changes to the independent school's toolkit:

- inclusion of new independent school standards (paragraphs 16A(1) to 16A(6) and 32A to 32A(3)) under 'gathering evidence about attendance and behaviour.' This relates to ensuring that restrictive interventions, including incidents of use of force and incidents of seclusion, are recorded and reported
- clarification as to leaders' and governors' responsibility to have an effective, whole school approach to safeguarding
- clarification as to children with personal education plans
- reference to virtual school head teachers removed
- additional wording on specialist curriculums, in particular secular curriculum
- clarification that evidence will be gathered in relation to independent school standards 3(a) and 3(g) when evaluating Achievement.
- additional wording to provide clarity on low attendance
- clarification that all children must be consistently very well prepared for the next stage of learning
- additional wording on identifying pupils who are at risk of harm to take account of the new edition of Keeping children safe in Education (KCSIE), introduced September 2026
- evidence gathering prompts related to statutory guidance for safe sleeping arrangements and children's food preparation and provision
- achievement expected standard grading standards
- leaders' engagement with pupils and families in the inclusion expected standard
- inclusion bases and curriculum adaptation
- pupils' progress across the curriculum
- pupils with an education, health and care plan having support to attend and behave

Operating guide for standard inspections of non-association independent schools

In this update, we have made the following changes to the independent schools operating guide:

- clarification on case sampling
- clarification on virtual school heads
- clarification on when a school changes registered address to a different authority
- clarification that if the Department for Education (DfE) commission Ofsted to bring forward a school's standard inspection, this will be as a result of a complaint received by DfE
- additional wording to prompt inspectors to also ask any inspection team members if they require reasonable adjustments and adaptations
- additional wording on inspector conduct to highlight the responsibility of the inspector and provider to align duties with the Equality Act 2010 with a link to additional guidance
- clarification on planning the timetable
- clarification about who inspectors must consider speaking to about inclusion on inspection
- clarification on the process of recruitment checks for proprietors
- clarification on meetings with the designated safeguarding lead, special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and other relevant leaders who have an inclusion role, throughout the inspection
- additional wording to reflect any fire safety concerns as part of evaluating safeguarding
- additional wording to direct inspectors to review a school's risk assessment where adults live on the premises and a school's compliance with section 35 of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act
- amended wording relating to the manner in which complaints are handled
- additional wording to remind those attending the final feedback meeting that information should not be shared publicly shared or formally shared with parents.
- additional wording to set out Ofsted's definition of 'off-rolling' and what inspectors should do if off rolling is found or suspected
- additional wording to include those responsible for governance when suspending an inspection
- link to additional guidance to support evidence gathering added to assist with structure for day 1
- clarification on learning walks
- additional wording to reflect that some schools are exempt from the learning and

development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and this must be taken into account when selecting pupils to read

- additional wording for specialist curriculums
- additional wording added to include compliance records for carrying out an additional inspection as part of a standard inspection
- additional wording to provide clarity on the independent school standards and evaluation areas
- additional wording to set out specific circumstances where equalities must be considered on inspection
- additional wording on Parent View and online surveys
- clarification on the focus of learning walks, how leaders can be involved in joint activities and what activities inspectors must undertake to evaluate reading as part of a learning walk

Inspection information for non-association independent schools

In this update, we have made the following changes to the Inspection information page:

- clarification on how inspectors will engage with relevant leaders for inclusion
- clarification of timings of what happens when a school is notified of an inspection following bank holidays, Christmas holidays and Easter holidays
- clarification that we normally notify a proposed school of a pre-registration inspection between 2 and 5 days prior
- clarification that the DfE will only commission Ofsted to bring forward a school's standard inspection on a case-by-case basis and in response to complaints received by the DfE
- additional wording to reflect who inspectors will engage with on inspection about the experiences and outcomes of disadvantaged pupils, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), pupils known (or previously known) to children's social care and those who face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing
- additional wording to reflect that inspectors will also want to know about any

bullying, harassment, or directly or indirectly discriminatory or prejudiced behaviour based on region or belief

- additional wording to reflect how the lead inspector will organise meetings throughout the inspection

Operating guide for additional inspections of non-association independent schools

In this update, we have made the following changes to the independent schools operating guide for additional inspections:

- additional wording on inspector conduct to highlight the responsibility of the inspector and provider to align duties with the Equality Act 2010 with a link to additional guidance
- wording removed suggesting we do not use online surveys for parents, staff or pupils

January 2026

Inspection information for non-association independent schools

Updated following the withdrawal of the handbook for additional inspections of independent schools. Information that was in the handbook is now in this document. The update includes new sections on:

- aligned inspections of boarding and residential special schools
- evaluation of school action plans (including when reports are issued)
- concerns or complaints about a school
- how and when inspection reports are published

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