

Inspecting Your School



**Office for Standards
in Education**

This guidance provides an overview of current inspection practice and highlights changes to the framework for school inspections from September 2003.

Purpose of this guidance

This guidance is intended primarily for headteachers, although the information it contains is likely to be of interest to a wider audience, including teachers and governors. The main aim is to provide a step-by-step guide to the inspection process (pages 2–4). The main changes from the previous inspection framework are highlighted separately (page 5). Publications, sources of information about inspections and helpline numbers are also listed (page 6). The guidance relates to inspections carried out under the September 2003 framework; it does not look forward to possible changes in inspection arrangements arising from the consultation in 2004.

Selection of schools

The rationale for deciding when schools are to be inspected, normally at least once in a six-year cycle, remains broadly the same as in the previous framework. The frequency of inspection will be determined by the effectiveness of the school for its pupils. Less effective schools will be inspected more frequently than effective schools. The size, age-range and characteristics of an individual school will determine the number of days allocated to its inspection.

Inspection requirements

In outline, the law requires inspectors to report on:

- the educational standards achieved in the school
- the quality of education provided by the school
- the quality of leadership and management, including whether financial resources made available to the school are managed efficiently
- the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school.

Inspectors use the inspection framework, *Inspecting schools*, as the basis for their work. The framework has been constructed to meet Ofsted's inspection principles to ensure that:

- the findings are valid, reliable and consistent
- inspection findings contribute to improvement
- the process of inspection promotes inclusion
- the inspection is carried out openly with those being inspected.

The inspection framework has common elements that apply to all inspections. In addition, inspections are tailored to reflect the particular characteristics of each individual school. Registered inspectors must ensure that the inspection report accurately reflects the effectiveness of the school, any special features and its context and status.

Notifying schools that an inspection is due

Ofsted's Contract Management Division informs schools by letter about their forthcoming inspection, giving between six and ten school weeks' notice. Shortly after notification, the inspection provider which has been awarded the contract for the inspection will contact the headteacher to agree the inspection date.

Your questions answered

When will the school hear from the inspection provider?

The provider responsible for conducting the inspection must not contact the school for six days following the school's receipt of notification. However, you may contact the provider at any time after notification to determine dates for the inspection and to ascertain the name of the registered inspector (also referred to as the lead inspector).

What do I need to do when I first hear about our inspection?

As well as letting your staff, governors and parents know, the most important thing is to complete and return Form S1. You will need to complete and submit Form S1 using the Internet **within seven days** of receiving notification that your school is being inspected. Ofsted requires Form S1 to be returned within this time so that we can determine:

- the number of days allocated for the inspection
- whether any additional features need to be included in the inspection.

What other forms need to be completed before the inspection?

You will need to complete and submit Forms S2, S3 and S4 **within two weeks** of notification. These are also completed online using the Internet. With Form S4, you may find it helpful to use word processing software to write the text entries and copy them into the website form.

How will inspection forms be made available to the school?

You can download the following forms through the Ofsted website (details on page 6):

- Forms S1, S2, S3, S4 (with some entries already completed)
- questionnaire for parents, including the translations into different languages
- questionnaire for pupils in the primary, secondary and post-16 age groups
- the *Pre-inspection Commentary* and the *Inspectors' Record/Record of Corporate Judgements*
- the evidence form used in lesson observations.

What happens if the school's Internet link is not working?

You may ask Ofsted for blank versions of the form, fill them in by hand and return them by post. In this case, your inspection provider will submit the forms electronically on your behalf. Online completion is far more efficient, however, as your data entries are checked for accuracy as you submit them.

How can we ensure that the required information is readily available?

Many schools currently hold, and update, information on Forms S1–S4 to minimise the amount of preparation necessary for an inspection. As before, Forms S1 and S2 provide basic information about the school, Form S3 provides information about the school's statutory arrangements and policies, and Form S4 is the school's evaluation of its own performance. Increasingly, schools find great benefit in carrying out their own self-evaluation using Form S4, regardless of whether an inspection is imminent. When completing Form S4, try to be concise and include references to where evidence can be found, not the evidence itself.

What other information is needed?

Ofsted is committed to reducing as far as possible the demands on schools before an inspection. The lead inspector will be able to obtain your school's PANDA report and previous inspection report from the Internet. All of the other information required by the lead inspector before the pre-inspection visit is contained in Forms S1–S4. You will need to ensure, however, that the lead inspector has time to read and assimilate the information they contain before the visit and it is important that you adhere to the submission deadlines for Forms S1–S4.

What happens at the pre-inspection visit?

The lead inspector, possibly accompanied by another inspector, will visit the school for the equivalent of at least a full day. The visit may be split and take place on more than one day. This is an important stage in the inspection process as it provides evidence from the school which helps the lead inspector to formulate the hypotheses to be tested during the inspection. During the visit(s), you should expect to discuss the school's performance data and the contents of Form S4 with the inspector(s) as well as making arrangements for the inspection week itself. Inspectors will also wish to speak with staff and governors about the inspection. The lead inspector then compiles the pre-inspection commentary.

Must we hold a meeting for parents?

Yes. The law requires the governing body to arrange a meeting between the lead inspector and parents before the inspection. The date of the meeting is for the school to agree with the lead inspector.

Do we have to issue the parents' and pupils' questionnaires before the inspection?

Your governing body is responsible for deciding whether or not to use the Ofsted questionnaire to survey parents' views. We recommend this and nearly all schools use it, finding it a valuable source of information for the inspection team and the school. The lead inspector will analyse the questionnaires before the inspection. You will also need to decide whether your existing ways of gaining pupils' views of the school provide the inspection team with up-to-date information. If not, you may wish to survey pupils' views using a version of Ofsted's questionnaire for pupils.

May we produce our own questionnaire for parents?

Schools may seek the views of parents on any topic at any time and the results of any school-based surveys may be shared with the inspectors. However, we hope that all parents will be given the opportunity to complete the Ofsted questionnaire for parents before the inspection.

May we produce our own questionnaire for pupils?

We hope that schools will regularly seek out the views of pupils and take any necessary action as a result. The questionnaires for pupils on Ofsted's website are suggestions only and can be modified by a school to suit its context and the age of its pupils.

What documents must we provide?

Before or at the time of the initial visit, as agreed with the lead inspector, you need to provide **one** copy of:

- your school's development, improvement or management plan
- the current prospectus or brochure
- the most recent LEA monitoring report on the school's progress against its targets
- staff timetables
- a plan of the school.

Do we have to provide copies for all the inspection team?

No. You should never be asked to provide multiple copies of documents for the team.

What documents must I ask my staff to prepare before the inspection?

You should not need to ask staff to prepare any documents or other material especially for the inspection and inspectors should not need to take school policy documents or subject schemes of work away from the school. Existing school and subject documentation should be made available during the inspection so that inspectors can refer to it when needed.

What will the lead inspector provide before the inspection?

Before the inspection, the lead inspector must provide you with the names of team inspectors, up-to-date curricula vitae and inspectors' particular responsibilities during the inspection. The lead inspector must also provide you with a copy of the pre-inspection commentary. There should be sufficient time for you and the governors to make a written response to the pre-inspection commentary if you so wish.

How might the inspection feel different this time round?

Inspections will be tailored more closely to the circumstances of individual schools. You will wish to ensure the lead inspector has a clear picture of the school's context. You will also have an opportunity to contribute to the shape of the inspection during pre-inspection discussions with the lead inspector. Lesson observations and discussions with teachers, governors and support staff will focus mainly on the issues pertinent to your school. Some areas will receive more attention than others, therefore, and some staff may be observed more often than others. Inspectors will take more account of the school's self-evaluation and will respond flexibly to changing circumstances as the inspection progresses.

How can the inspection avoid only looking at the school's weaknesses?

The inspection team should seek out and celebrate areas of strength as well as diagnosing the school's weaknesses and identifying the most important areas for development. You should discuss the inspection focus during the pre-inspection visit and, where you feel the school has areas of strength, indicate where the evidence can be found.

Is it necessary for all teachers to be familiar with the *Handbook* for inspection?

Many schools find the *Handbook* to be a very valuable resource. The current edition has additional features that should be helpful to teachers. For example, grade descriptions are now provided for all key judgements, including those for teaching and learning, and cover all of the seven grades. They are much more sharply defined than under previous frameworks. These are not additional criteria, but they do help inspectors and teachers to decide which grade fits best when reaching a judgement.

Will inspectors still need to analyse pupils' work during the inspection?

Inspectors will need to undertake a detailed analysis of pupils' work. The lead inspector will discuss with you the mechanics and procedures for this in advance of the inspection. Inspectors will look at work being undertaken by pupils during the inspection and may also wish to look at teachers' planning and assessments of pupils' achievements. Inspectors will give some pupils the opportunity to explain how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

Do teachers need to be familiar with the new forms for gathering evidence?

Although it is not necessary, teachers may wish to be aware of the changes that have been made to evidence forms. Inspectors make judgements in lessons on teaching, learning, standards and achievement. Where it is available, information is also recorded on: attitudes, values and personal qualities; the curriculum; care, support and guidance; partnerships; leadership; and inclusion.

Will inspectors now be looking more closely at pupils' achievements?

This will continue to be a primary focus for inspectors. Ofsted has developed additional guidance to support inspectors' understanding of the key concepts of: achievement; standards; teaching; and learning. This guidance has been published in *Update 42*, which is available on the Ofsted website.

What else are inspectors likely to focus on during lesson observations?

In carrying out their work, inspectors are encouraged to evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' learning; to assess the connection between the school's provision and pupils' achievements; and to establish links between cause and effect.

How can I best help the inspection run smoothly for my staff?

The best inspections are those where there is a high level of professional dialogue between the inspectors and the staff, where information and feedback are provided freely. Staff, pupils and inspectors should be courteous, and inspectors must uphold the Code of Conduct.

What feedback is likely to be received during the inspection?

Teachers will be offered oral feedback on each lesson that is observed. This will take place at a mutually agreed time and will indicate clearly the quality of teaching seen and identify key strengths and any areas for improvement. The extent of feedback for curriculum leaders or heads of department will depend on the amount of evidence available for particular subjects. Headteachers will receive feedback from the lead inspector about the emerging findings of the inspection, at least daily.

What will happen after the inspection?

Oral feedback will be offered to senior managers and, separately, to the governing body. This will usually take place within two weeks of the end of the inspection. You should not expect to see a copy of the draft report at this stage, but you will be encouraged to discuss the findings.

Will we get a chance to see the draft report before it is published?

Shortly before publication, you will have five working days to consider the final draft of the inspection report, in ready-for-publication form, so that you can comment on its factual accuracy. This opportunity does not replace professional discussion and clarification about inspection judgements, however. This is best done earlier at the oral feedback sessions.

What will the final report be like?

You will receive a full report, together with a summary report for all parents. Each section of the full report will start with a clear overall evaluation followed by particular strengths and weaknesses. These will be explained in a commentary. If inspectors identify examples of outstanding practice, these will be highlighted in the full report. The summary report for parents will provide a brief overview of inspection findings and highlight the most important improvements needed. A copy of the summary must be sent to parents within ten working days of its receipt by the school.

Are governors required to produce an action plan?

The requirement to produce an action plan within 40 working days of receiving the report remains. Once the governors have agreed the action plan, it must be sent out to parents within five working days.

The main changes to inspections since the previous inspection framework

- More account is taken of the school's self-evaluation through Form S4.
- The pre-inspection visit will have a greater focus on the interpretation of the school's performance data, including information from the LEA, where it is available.
- The lead inspector will shape the inspection to reflect the main features of the school and strengths and weaknesses in its performance.
- More emphasis is placed on celebrating what the school does particularly well and on diagnosing what most needs to be done to bring about improvement.
- Inspectors will place much more emphasis on how well pupils achieve in relation to their capabilities. This will usually involve inspectors in more discussion with pupils to see whether they are doing as well as they could. Inspectors will focus particularly on how well different groups of pupils achieve.
- The inspection team will respond flexibly to new evidence as the inspection unfolds and make use of inspection trails to track specific initiatives, issues or the progress of particular groups of pupils.
- The inspection framework makes much clearer distinctions between leadership at all levels, management at all levels and governance, where judgements are more clearly linked to the statutory responsibilities of the governing body and the way it supports and challenges the school.
- Inclusion is more clearly signalled as a central feature of a school's effectiveness. The inspection team will focus on all aspects of inclusion, but especially race equality, special educational needs, and equality of opportunity for all groups in the school, taking particular account of their achievements.
- More consideration is given to pupils' views of the school, as well as those expressed by parents. If schools do not already have in place their own ways of gaining pupils' views, they can seek pupils' views before the inspection by using the questionnaires on Ofsted's website. The questionnaires may be modified to suit the school and the pupils, and the outcomes provided for the inspection team.
- Lay inspectors are expected to play a greater role in representing a view of the school from the standpoint of a customer. This means standing back and looking at the school from a lay perspective, asking '*What is it like to be a pupil in this school?*' and '*What is it like to be a parent of a pupil at this school?*'
- Reports are shorter. In most circumstances, the summary for parents is just two pages, and the full report is also considerably shorter.
- Inspection reports will highlight examples of outstanding practice, some of which will be included on Ofsted's website.
- There is only one type of inspection, and the distinction between short and full inspections no longer exists.
- Not all subjects will be inspected in detail, particularly in primary and special schools, and other subjects will only be sampled. Consequently, not all teachers may be observed teaching.

Further information

Publications

Inspecting Schools (2003, ref HMI 1525), the framework used for inspecting schools, has been sent to all schools. If you have not received it or you need an additional copy, it can be obtained free of charge from Ofsted's website www.ofsted.gov.uk or through the Ofsted Publications Centre (contact details below).

Three *Handbooks* provide guidance to inspectors and are also useful for school self-evaluation. They are: *The Handbook for inspecting nursery and primary schools* (2003, ref HMI 1359), the *Handbook for inspecting secondary schools* (2003, ref HMI 1360) and the *Handbook for inspecting special schools and pupil referral units* (2003, ref HMI 1361). Each is priced at £16 and is available to order through the Ofsted Publications Centre (contact details below) or through bookshops.

Inspecting subjects 3–11, *Inspecting subjects 11–16* and *Inspecting subjects post-16* are three sets of booklets giving inspectors guidance on inspecting a range of individual subjects. The booklets have been sent to all schools in the relevant phase and can be obtained free of charge from Ofsted's website www.ofsted.gov.uk or through the Ofsted Publications Centre (contact details below).

Contacting the Ofsted Publications Centre: tel: 07002 637833, fax: 07002 693274, email for free publications: freepublications@ofsted.gov.uk.

Information about school inspections

Ofsted's website, www.ofsted.gov.uk, contains a large amount of information about school inspections. Through the website, you can find:

- which schools are being, or are about to be, inspected
- the last inspection report for every school
- the inspection framework and the *Handbooks*
- all the forms used by schools in preparing for an inspection (Forms S1–S4)
- questionnaires to obtain parents' and pupils' views of their school
- translations of the parents' questionnaires into 23 languages
- the forms inspectors use during an inspection
- a survey form, available for completion once your report has been published, to find out how staff and governors felt about your inspection
- further information about Ofsted and details of all Ofsted publications.

Inspectors receive additional guidance regularly through *Update*, which is available only on Ofsted's website. Anyone can view or download copies and you can subscribe to a service to alert you to the publication of a new edition. You can sign up for these email alerts through the home page of Ofsted's website www.ofsted.gov.uk. The current and previous editions of *Update* can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspectors.

Helplines

If you need help at any stage of your inspection, the following helplines are available during normal office hours:

- setting up the inspection, including Form S1 020 7421 6660 or 020 7421 6584
- interpretation of Forms S1–S4 020 7421 6643
- technical support with website Forms S1–S4 0845 120 9786
- queries about PANDA reports 020 7421 6840 or 020 7421 6633
- inspection helpline, for any other support 020 7421 6662 or 020 7421 6680