

School inspections

A guide for parents

This document applies to all maintained schools, including special schools and pupil referral units. It also covers academies, city technology colleges, city colleges for the technology of the arts and some non-maintained special schools in England.

Age group: 0–19

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Why does Ofsted inspect schools?

We inspect schools to provide information to parents, to promote improvement and to hold schools to account for the public money they receive. School inspections are required by law. We provide an independent assessment of the quality and standards of education in schools, and check whether pupils are achieving as much as they can.

Who inspects schools?

Her Majesty's Inspectors and Ofsted Inspectors (who in most cases are serving school leaders who inspect for Ofsted for an agreed number of days each year) carry out the inspections. All inspectors have been trained to, and assessed against, Ofsted's standards.

When do inspections happen and how long do they last?

A school that was judged to be outstanding at its last inspection is exempt from routine inspection. We will not normally inspect exempt schools unless we have a concern about their performance. Ofsted will also carry out an annual assessment of an exempt school's performance (from the third year after the school's last inspection) to determine whether an inspection might be necessary. Exempt schools continue to be inspected as part of Ofsted's programme of surveys of curriculum subjects and aspects of the curriculum. Exemption from inspection does not apply to maintained nursery schools, special schools or pupil referral units.

A school judged to be good at its last inspection normally receives a short inspection (see section on 'short inspections' below).

A school judged as requires improvement at its last inspection is a school that is not yet good but overall provides an acceptable standard of education. The school is inspected again within a period of 30 months. Where a school has been judged as requires improvement at two successive inspections, it will be subject to monitoring from inspectors to check its progress and is inspected again within a period of 30 months.

A standard inspection usually lasts two days and the number of inspectors on the inspection team will vary according to the size and nature of the school.

What judgements do inspectors make?

Inspectors will make graded judgements on the following areas using the four-point scale:

- Effectiveness of leadership and management
- Quality of teaching, learning and assessment
- Personal development, behaviour and welfare

as having serious weaknesses or requiring special measures within 30 months of its last standard two-day inspection.

Short inspections

A school judged to be good at its last inspection normally receives a one-day short inspection approximately every four years.² However, some good schools will automatically receive a full two-day inspection if our risk assessment process indicates that the quality of provision in the school may have deteriorated significantly.

The purpose of a short inspection is to determine whether the school continues to provide a good or better standard of education and whether safeguarding is effective.

If there is sufficient evidence of strong practice and improved performance of a good school, and it is reasonable to believe that the school may be judged outstanding if it received a full two-day inspection, the school will receive a report, in the form of a letter, setting out its strengths and areas of marked improvement and informing the school that its next inspection will be a full two-day inspection, to take place within one to two years.

Similarly, if inspectors are not satisfied that the school would receive its current grade if a full two-day inspection were carried out, the school will receive a report, in the form of a letter, setting out areas for improvement. The letter will make clear that the school's next inspection will be a full two-day inspection, which will take place within two years.

Schools should inform parents of pupils at the school that the report of the short inspection has been published.

How much notice do you give to a school before you inspect?

Most schools receive notice of their inspection on the afternoon of the working day before the inspection begins. However, Ofsted can inspect any school without notice where this is judged to be appropriate.

What happens during an inspection?

Inspectors look at the school's self-evaluation and analyse the pupils' progress and attainment. They talk to the headteacher, governors, staff, and pupils, and consider your views as a parent. They spend most of their time observing a wide range of lessons and looking at the quality of teaching in the school, and its impact on

² This also applies to a maintained nursery school, special school or pupil referral unit judged to be good or outstanding.

The 'School inspection handbook'⁴ and 'School inspection handbook – section 8'⁵ set out the statutory basis for inspections, what schools can expect at inspections and provide guidance for inspectors on making their judgements.

What happens if I have concerns about the inspection?

Complaints are rare, but we treat them very seriously. You can find out more on our website at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about/complaints-procedure, or by calling our helpline on 0300 123 4666.

If you need any more information about our work, please visit our website or call our helpline.

What happens if I have concerns about my child's school?

If you are concerned about your child's school, you should start by talking directly to the teachers or headteacher or, if necessary, the governing body or the local authority. If you are not satisfied with the responses you receive Ofsted may be able to help.

You can find out more on our website or by calling our helpline.

Helpline: 0300 123 4666

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

Privacy notice

During the inspection of your child's school, the inspectors will collect information about children at the school by looking at school records, reviewing responses to the pupil survey and observing the everyday life of the school. No names will be recorded, but some of the information may make it possible to identify a particular child. Ofsted uses this information to prepare its report and for the purposes set out in its privacy policy. Ofsted will not publish any information that identifies a child in the report.

More information is available in Ofsted's privacy policy:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-privacy-notice/schools-ofsted-privacy-notice#parent-school.

The contact details for Ofsted's Data Protection Officer are as follows.

⁴ 'School inspection handbook', Ofsted, January 2018; www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-from-september-2015.

⁵ 'School inspection handbook – section 8', Ofsted, January 2018; www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-short-monitoring-and-unannounced-behaviour-school-inspections.

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