



Department  
for Education

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By e-mail

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Dear Chief Inspector,

### **Standard Inspections of Independent Schools**

I am writing about the future inspection of non-association independent schools in England following the period of suspension of standard inspections due to the Covid- 19 pandemic. In relation to the frequency of standard inspections for independent schools in England, the approach below replaces the arrangements that were detailed in Peter Swift's letter of 21 July 2018.

In that 2018 letter, Peter Swift set out that ministers expected that HMCI (Ofsted) or SIS inspected independent schools would have at least one standard inspection in the period up to July 2021, and in the case of ISI inspected independent schools, at least one such inspection in the period up to Summer 2022. However, in March 2020, the standard inspection cycle in respect of all independent schools was suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Because of the suspension, we have agreed that the current cycle for Ofsted inspections of non-association independent schools will be extended until 31 December 2022.

Since the 2018 letter, SIS has ceased to be an independent inspectorate approved under section 106 of the Education and Skills Act 2008. I will confirm the standard inspection arrangements for ISI inspected schools to ISI separately.

## Standard inspections of non-association independent schools

HMCI (Ofsted) resumed standard inspections of some non-association independent schools in May 2021. Those inspections are being carried out as part of the current cycle. HMCI (Ofsted) expects to be able to commence a new cycle of regular standard inspections from 1 January 2023. The Department for Education will write to confirm arrangements for that new cycle closer to the time.

I write to confirm the following:

- I am content that HMCI (Ofsted) resumed standard inspections of non-association independent schools in the current cycle on 4 May 2021.

I note that, in the first part of the summer term 2021 those inspections focussed on schools where the Department for Education or Ofsted had concerns. From the second part of the summer term 2021 (after half term) HMCI (Ofsted) conducted routine standard inspections of schools that were due an inspection in the current cycle. It is our common intention that:

- a. A standard inspection of an independent school will consist of an inspection against all the independent school standards that apply to the school, and any applicable requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Furthermore, standard inspections by HMCI (Ofsted) should be carried out under Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework (EIF) and the Non-Association Schools Inspection Handbook.
- b. Any non-association independent school that was due to receive a standard inspection before 31 July 2021 will be inspected before the end of the current extended cycle i.e. before 31 December 2022.
- c. Where any non-association independent school is judged "inadequate" or "requires improvement" at a standard inspection on or after 4 May 2021 ("the first standard inspection") there will normally be a second standard inspection of that school within two academic years following the date of the first standard inspection. Such further standard inspections may be part of the current cycle or the next cycle.
- d. Where inspectors identify safeguarding concerns or serious non-compliance with any of the independent school standards or of the EYFS at an emergency inspection it may be appropriate for Ofsted to carry out a standard inspection of that school earlier than planned. Ofsted will inform the Department for Education where it considers

that that an earlier standard inspection of a school is appropriate within this current cycle.

- e. An additional inspection of a school may also be appropriate if a school was judged “inadequate” or “requires improvement” at a standard inspection earlier in the current cycle and shows that it is meeting all the requirements of the independent school standards and the EYFS (if applicable) at a subsequent non-standard inspection. Ofsted will inform the Department for Education where it considers that an additional standard inspection of a school is appropriate within this current cycle.

In order to give effect to the above, HMCI (Ofsted) and the Department intend to make all the necessary arrangements.

#### Welfare inspections of residential schools

I have noted and concur that the inspection cycle for welfare inspections of residential special schools should continue to be every year. The cycle for other Ofsted inspected boarding schools should continue to be every three years starting from 4 May 2021 for those judged (at their last welfare inspection) to be outstanding or good overall and every two years starting from 4 May 2021 for those judged (at their last welfare inspection) to be “requires improvement” or “inadequate” overall. Any boarding school (other than a residential special school) that has not received a welfare inspection prior to 4 May 2021 should be inspected within two years from that date.

#### Additional inspections

The Department will continue to commission HMCI (Ofsted) from time to time to carry out other inspections of independent schools including: material change, emergency, and progress monitoring inspections as well as standard inspections outside the current cycle. Pre-registration inspections will also continue to be carried out by HMCI (Ofsted) in relation to any applications to register an independent school.

Yours sincerely,



Sue Whitehouse  
Deputy Director  
Independent Education and School Safeguarding Division