

# Pre-registration and material change inspections of independent schools

A leaflet for registered and proposed new independent schools

---

This leaflet is for registered and proposed new independent schools. It sets out what Ofsted inspectors will look at during pre-registration and material change inspections.

## Introduction

### Pre-registration inspections

The Department for Education (DfE) is the registration authority for independent schools and maintains a register of them. Proprietors wishing to open a new independent school, or to register an eligible existing provider as an independent school, must apply to the DfE for registration.

When the DfE has checked that the provider's application to register as an independent school contains the required information, it will commission Ofsted to carry out a pre-registration inspection of the provider. The purpose of this inspection is for Ofsted to report to the DfE whether the provider is likely to meet the [independent school standards](#) ('the standards') [if the DfE decides to register it](#). The DfE must be satisfied that a proposed school is likely to meet the standards if it is to be [registered as an independent school](#).

All registered independent schools must meet all the independent school standards, which are set out in the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Independent boarding and residential special schools must also meet the national minimum standards for [boarding schools](#) or [residential special schools](#).

Ofsted will also report to the DfE on whether the school is likely to meet the national minimum standards in pre-registration inspections of proposed boarding or residential special schools.

### Material change inspections

Registered independent schools wishing to make one of the following changes to their registration [must seek permission to do so from the DfE](#). These are known as material changes:

- change of proprietor
- change of school premises
- change to the age range of pupils
- change to the maximum number of pupils
- if the school proposes to admit boys instead of girls or girls instead of boys or become co-educational
- if the school intends to provide boarding accommodation, or cease to provide it
- if the school intends to admit pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, or cease to admit them.

The DfE may commission Ofsted to carry out an inspection to consider the implications of the material change. Inspectors will report to the DfE on whether the

school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change is implemented.

Schools cannot implement the proposed change until the DfE grants permission.

## Meeting the inspectors

The proprietor(s) and/or person(s) who are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the school should ensure that you are available to meet with the inspectors during the inspection.

If inspectors are unable to meet with you, they may not be able to gather sufficient evidence in order to judge whether the school is likely to meet paragraph 34(1) of the independent school standards, which concerns the quality of leadership and management.

Staff (including leaders at all levels) may always be accompanied by another appropriate person when speaking to inspectors. However, it is important that staff are able to express their views freely to inspectors.

## Conduct during Ofsted inspections

[Ofsted's code of conduct](#) outlines our expectations for the conduct of our inspectors and our expectations of providers during inspection. At the start of the inspection (usually during the preparatory conversation) the lead inspector will explain these expectations and will ask schools to read the code.

Inspectors will uphold the highest professional standards in their work. They will treat everyone they meet during inspections fairly and with the respect and sensitivity they deserve. Inspectors will work constructively with leaders and staff, demonstrating professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect at all times.

## Information to share with inspectors

Schools are not expected to prepare anything extra for inspectors, but the lead inspector will request that the school provides certain information as early as possible.

If any of this information is available before the inspection, you can upload it onto the inspection portal. We provide instructions for using the portal in the notification of inspection letter.

## For pre-registration inspections

You should ensure that you can demonstrate that the proposed school is likely to meet the independent school standards and that you have the following necessary information ready for the inspection:

- the policies and information that are required by [the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#)
- the single central record for the school<sup>1</sup>
- schemes of work for the subjects that the proposed school intends to teach
- a copy of the proposed school's timetable
- a complete staff list giving qualifications, experience and, for part-time staff, hours worked per week, if staff have been appointed
- a plan of the proposed school, including residential accommodation for pupils, if applicable
- maps and other practical information
- access to Wi-Fi, if it exists, so that inspectors can connect to the internet.

In pre-registration inspections of any existing providers, including alternative provision or children's homes that are already providing education, inspectors will also expect to see:

- strategic documents about the school, including:
  - anything that sets out school improvement planning or the longer-term vision for the school, such as the school's strategy
  - a summary of any school self-evaluation or equivalent
  - any reports from any external evaluation of the school
  - documented evidence of the work of the proprietor and/or those responsible for governance and their priorities
  - minutes of governors' meetings and other relevant strategic documentation about governance that the school may have
- records and data about behaviour and attendance, including:
  - up-to-date attendance analysis for all groups of pupils
  - records and analysis of pupils taken off roll
  - records and analysis of exclusions and suspensions, incidents of poor behaviour and any use of internal isolation
  - records and analysis of bullying, discriminatory and prejudiced behaviour, either directly or indirectly, including racist, sexist, disability and homophobic/biphobic/transphobic bullying, use of derogatory language and racist incidents
  - records and analysis of sexual harassment and/or sexual violence

---

<sup>1</sup> Ofsted uses the term 'single central record' to refer to the register described in paragraph 21(1) of the independent school standards, which is also known as the 'single central register'.

- records and analysis of any restrictive physical intervention
- operational documents, including:
  - the school timetable, current staff list (indicating [early career teachers](#)) and times for the school day, including planned interruptions to normal school routines during the inspection and notifications where teachers should not be visited for any reason
  - details of any relevant staff absence
  - requests to not visit any specific lesson or lessons (for example, if a teacher is subject to capability procedures)
- safeguarding information, including:
  - a list of referrals made to the designated safeguarding lead in the school and those that were subsequently referred to the local authority, along with brief details of the resolution (a very short summary of how the school dealt with the matter and assurance that pupils have received the appropriate help)
  - any referrals made to the local authority designated officer regarding staff or other adults
  - a list of all pupils who have open cases with children’s services or social care and all pupils who have a multi-agency plan (this is to ensure that the school knows who these pupils are, and is able to meet requirements). Inspectors may select a sample of children to make sure the school is meeting the requirements in [Keeping children safe in education: statutory guidance for schools and colleges](#).

Schools and inspectors must make sure that all actions are compliant with legal requirements on information-handling.

## For material change inspections

You should ensure that you can demonstrate that the school is likely to meet the independent school standards that relate to the material change that you have applied to make. You should make sure that you have the necessary information ready for the inspection:

- the policies and other documents required by [the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#)
- schemes of work for the subjects that the school teaches
- strategic documents about the school, including:
  - anything that sets out school improvement planning or the longer-term vision for the school, such as the school’s strategy
  - a summary of any school self-evaluation or equivalent
  - any reports from any external evaluation of the school

- documented evidence of the work of the proprietor and/or those responsible for governance and their priorities
- minutes of governors’ meetings and other relevant strategic documentation about governance that the school may have
- records and data about behaviour and attendance, including:
  - up-to-date attendance analysis for all groups of pupils
  - records and analysis of pupils taken off roll
  - records and analysis of exclusions and suspensions, incidents of poor behaviour and any use of internal isolation
  - records and analysis of bullying, discriminatory and prejudiced behaviour, either directly or indirectly, including racist, sexist, disability and homophobic/biphobic/transphobic bullying, use of derogatory language and racist incidents
  - records and analysis of sexual harassment or sexual violence
  - records and analysis of any restrictive physical intervention
- operational information, including:
  - access to Wi-Fi, if it exists, so that inspectors can connect to the internet
  - maps and other practical information
  - the school timetable, current staff list (indicating [early career teachers](#)) and times for the school day, including planned interruptions to normal school routines during the inspection and notifications where teachers cannot be observed for any reason
  - details of any relevant staff absence.

## Safeguarding information

On arrival at the school, inspectors must have secure access to safeguarding information, including:

- the single central record for the school
- a list of referrals made to the designated safeguarding lead in the school and those that were subsequently referred to the local authority, along with brief details of the resolution (a very short summary of how the school dealt with the matter and assurance that pupils have received the appropriate help)
- any referrals made to the local authority designated officer regarding staff or other adults
- a list of all pupils who have open cases with children’s services or social care and all pupils who have a multi-agency plan (this is to ensure that the school knows who these pupils are, and is able to meet requirements).

Inspectors may select a sample of children to make sure the school is meeting the requirements in [Keeping children safe in education: statutory guidance for schools and colleges](#).

Schools and inspectors must make sure that all actions are compliant with legal requirements on information-handling.

## More information about school inspections

Pre-registration and material change inspections do not normally last longer than 1 day. During the inspections, inspectors will talk to a range of staff and, where the provider is already operating, pupils about important aspects of the school's work.

Prior to the on-site inspection, inspectors will provide an opportunity for leaders to share with inspectors any requests for adaptations to the inspection process due to a protected characteristic, or any reasonable adjustments due to a disability.

Staff (including leaders at all levels) may always be accompanied by another appropriate person when speaking to inspectors. However, it is important that staff are able to express their views freely to inspectors. Inspectors should take careful account of the well-being of leaders and staff and adjust their approach or activity, as appropriate, as they go about their inspection work in the best interests of pupils. If inspectors see or suspect that a staff member (including all leaders and the headteacher) is upset or distressed at any point during the inspection, inspectors should respond sensitively. Where appropriate, inspectors will consider suitable adjustments to enable the staff member to continue. Where there are serious concerns, inspectors will contact the duty desk, and will normally inform those responsible for the person's well-being.

There may be exceptional occasions when a pause to inspection needs to be considered. We will consider these on a case-by-case basis according to our published guidance on [pausing school inspections](#) and inform the DfE. Leaders, responsible bodies and others can contact a senior leader in Ofsted directly if they have issues they do not feel they can raise directly with the lead inspector.

Inspectors will make their final judgements when they have collected and considered all the evidence.

The [handbook for additional inspections of independent schools](#) explains how we carry out pre-registration and material change inspections and a range of other types of inspection of independent schools that the DfE may commission Ofsted to carry out. The [non-association independent school inspection handbook](#) explains how we carry out routine 'standard' inspections of independent schools.

## Gathering personal information on inspection

Inspectors will gather any personal information necessary to assist them in inspecting a school. [Our privacy policy](#) sets out what personal information we collect,

what we do with it, how long we keep it and individuals' rights under data protection legislation.

## After the inspection

The [handbook for additional inspections](#) sets out the arrangements for the inspection report.

## Online inspection survey

Following a material change inspection, we will invite you to complete an online inspection survey. The survey asks for your views on the inspection process, including the impact that the inspection is likely to have in bringing about improvement. We value all survey responses. We use the outcomes to help keep us informed about the quality and impact of inspections, and help guide us in reviewing and improving the inspection process.

## Contact us

You can:

- write to us at Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD
- call our helpline on 0300 123 1231
- [contact us online](#).



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted).

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2024