

Deferral policy for inspections of independent day, boarding and residential special schools

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This document sets out Ofsted's policy for determining that an inspection of an independent school should not go ahead on the planned dates. It applies to: inspections of schools' education provision; inspections of boarding or residential provision in schools; and integrated inspections of education and boarding or residential provision. It is also applicable to all types of inspection carried out to independent schools.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that decisions about the deferral, cancellation and rescheduling of inspections are taken consistently throughout the country. The policy does not apply to decisions to reschedule the start date of an inspection within five working days.

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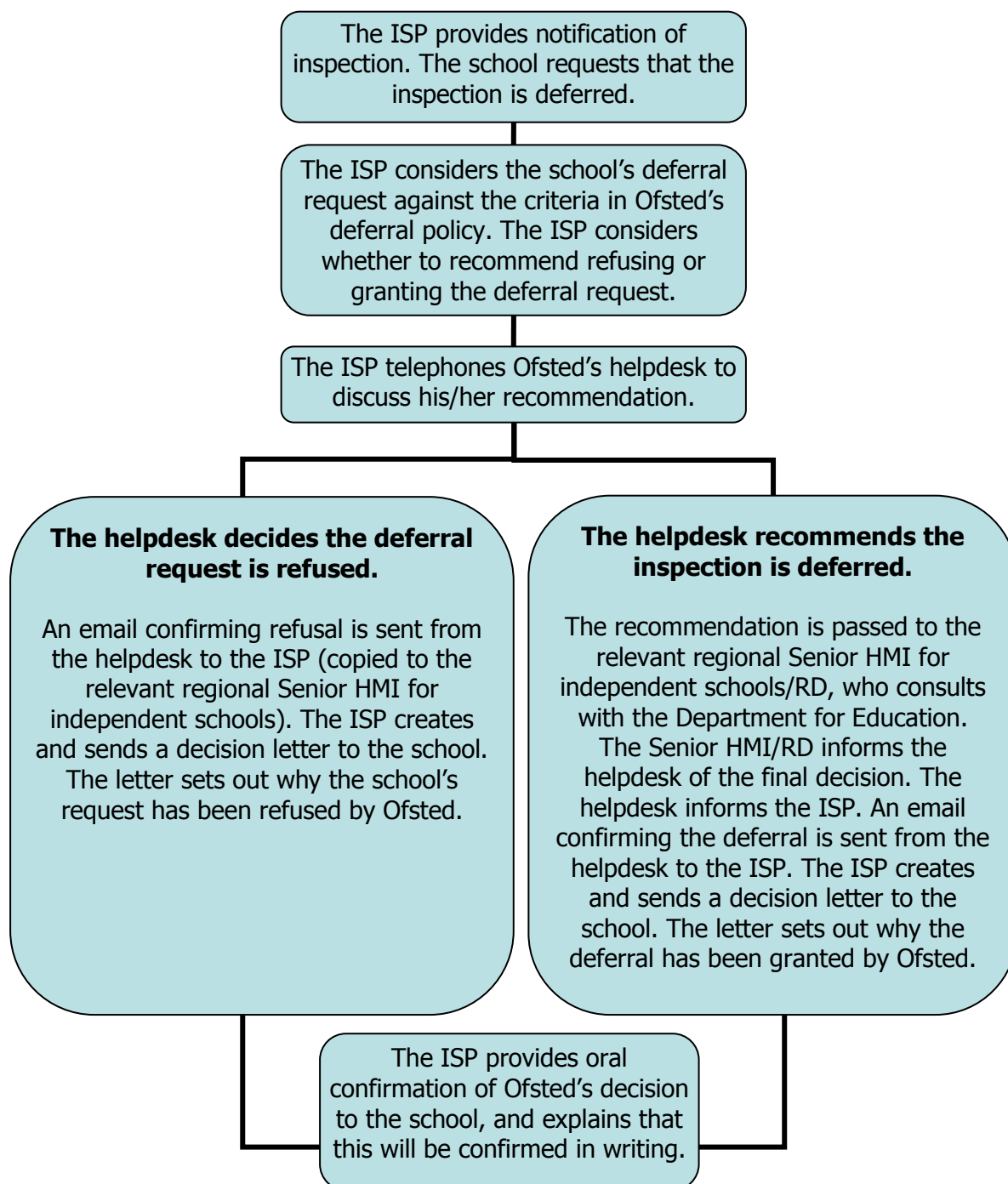
Deferral of independent school inspections

1. There are a limited number of circumstances in which a decision can be taken that an inspection should not go ahead on the planned dates. It applies to: inspections of schools' education provision; inspections of boarding or residential provision in schools; and integrated inspections of education and boarding or residential provision. It also applies to all types of inspection carried out to independent schools: pre-registration, material change, standard, emergency and progress monitoring.
2. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that decisions about the deferral, cancellation and rescheduling of inspections are taken consistently throughout the country. The policy does not apply to decisions to reschedule the start date of an inspection within five working days.
3. Ofsted's policy is that deferral or cancellation should only be granted in the following circumstances.
 - The headteacher, the proprietor or a member of the school's senior management team is subject to a current police investigation which would be compromised by an investigation of the school.
 - The school has experienced a recent major incident, such as a fatal accident to a pupil or member of staff.
 - The school is due to close and has informed the Registering Authority – the Department for Education (DfE) – of this in writing so that the Secretary of State considers that no useful purpose will be served in inspecting it. This should normally only apply when the date of closure is within six months of the inspection. On some occasions schools that are due to close may still be inspected.
 - HMCI agrees that the inspection is likely to cause significant disruption to the provision of education or distress to many pupils within the school.
 - Except in the case of pre-registration inspections, the school is closed to all pupils – for example, owing to a staff training day or adverse weather conditions – for at least half of the period for which the inspection has been scheduled.
 - Except in the case of pre-registration inspections, at least three quarters of the pupils will not be at school – for example, owing to a school trip or a religious festival – for at least half of the period for which the inspection has been scheduled.
 - The school has very recently converted to become an academy school – in such circumstances HMCI reserves the right to schedule the academy's first inspection at a later date.

- There are other exceptional circumstances which, in the judgement of the regional director, justify deferral or cancellation of the inspection. These will be considered on a case by case basis. The nature of such circumstances should be recorded fully.
 - In the case of illness or death of the headteacher or proprietor, professional judgement will be exercised by the regional director.
 - Also in the case of unavoidable absence of the headteacher and proprietor where this person is the only full-time teacher in the school, professional judgement will be exercised by the regional director.
4. Where the standard inspection of a school has been previously deferred on two consecutive occasions because there were no pupils on roll, the inspection will not be deferred for a third time. The purpose of the inspection will be to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards required for continued registration. Inspectors will still make qualitative judgements about the effectiveness of the school, and will comment on the extent to which it is ready to educate and safeguard pupils.
 5. Pre-registration inspections must not be deferred where the proposed school states that it is not ready for inspection. Incomplete building works is not a reasonable justification for deferring inspection. The DfE expects proposed new schools to be ready to undergo a pre-registration inspection, since the provision wishes to educate (and, for boarding/residential special schools, accommodate) pupils in the near future. The DfE informs proposed new schools that they should not apply to register if they will not be ready to operate by the proposed timescale. In cases where proposed new schools strongly resist a pre-registration inspection, the ISP must contact the relevant regional Senior HMI for independent schools, who will report the matter to the DfE.
 6. Where it transpires that a school is no longer operating, the ISP should contact the relevant regional senior HMI for independent schools, who will check whether the DfE requires an inspection to be carried out to ascertain whether or not the school is still operating. If the inspection will go ahead to check whether or not the school is still operating, the inspection event will need to be changed to an emergency inspection. This is in order that an advice note can be provided to the DfE after the inspection, as there will be no need to publish an inspection report.
 7. In the event of an application to defer a planned inspection on the grounds that the headteacher is out of school, other than in the exceptional circumstances cited above, Ofsted requires that the inspection proceed on the basis that the pupils at the school are still receiving education.
 8. Building work will not be a reason for deferral if pupils are in the school.
 9. Subject to the discretion of the regional director, the criteria for deferral and cancellation should also be applied to decisions to re-schedule an inspection.

Deferral process

10. The chart below is the process followed by Ofsted's inspection service providers (ISPs), who administer and conduct inspections on behalf of Ofsted.



If a school cannot be contacted by the inspection service provider

11. In exceptional circumstances, it may prove difficult for the inspection service provider to make contact with the school. If the inspection service provider has not managed to make contact by 2pm on the day before the inspection, they will contact Ofsted's helpdesk to discuss the situation. Normally, the helpdesk will advise that the inspection will continue and that the inspection service provider should continue to try and make contact with the school, while the lead inspector travels to the school. If there continues to be no answer, the inspection will be undertaken as an unannounced inspection.