

Standard inspections of non-association independent schools

This leaflet outlines what Ofsted will look at during a standard inspection of a non-association independent school.

Introduction

Ofsted's [education inspection framework](#) came into effect in September 2019.

Under the framework, inspectors carry out standard inspections of non-association independent schools ('schools') under section 109(1) and (2) of the [Education and Skills Act 2008](#). They will report on the extent to which schools meet the requirements of [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

They also make the following judgements:

- overall effectiveness
- the quality of education
- behaviour and attitudes
- personal development
- leadership and management.

If the school offers early years provision and sixth-form provision, inspectors also make judgements on these areas.

We inspect schools on a three-year cycle. However, schools that are judged as requires improvement or inadequate normally have a standard inspection within two years of the previous standard inspection.

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 they 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 meets 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 conversations) 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. This will include:

- a copy of the school timetable(s), where relevant
- details of any relevant staff absence
- any requests not to visit any specific lesson or lessons (for example, if a teacher is subject to capability procedures).

We will also send the school a letter setting out that the following information must be made available to inspectors at the formal start of 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 and/or sexual violence

- records and analysis of any restrictive physical intervention
- operational documents, 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 should not be visited for any reason

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.

If any of the 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.

Inspectors will use a range of technology to gather evidence electronically, including mobile devices, tablets and laptops. They may also ask to take photographic evidence, for example of pupils' work and displays. Inspectors will not take photographs of pupils.

Judging the quality of education in schools with a specialist curriculum

Ofsted recognises that some schools offer a specialist curriculum, for example in the performing arts, or a faith-based specialist curriculum. This may be separate or in addition to any provision made for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Alongside any specialist education provided, paragraph 2(2)(a) of the independent school standards requires that pupils study a broad, rich curriculum. Schools should provide inspectors with evidence of how they meet this requirement. The non-specialist curriculum will normally be inspectors' primary source of evidence when reaching a judgement under the quality of education judgement area. If a school chooses to deliver a substantial amount of its curriculum through the specialist curriculum, or if there is insufficient evidence from the non-specialist curriculum that the quality of education criteria are met, inspectors will consider evidence from the specialist curriculum in arriving at their judgement.

Inspecting boarding and residential special schools

When a boarding or residential special school's standard inspection is due in the same financial year as the full inspection of its boarding or residential provision, we will normally carry out an aligned inspection.

Aligned inspections are carried out by two separate inspection teams (education and social care). They result in two sets of graded judgements and 2 separate published reports. We will also publish on [our reports website](#) a summary letter using extracts from both reports.

We make the judgements for boarding or residential provision in accordance with the guidance and grade descriptors in the [social care common inspection framework \(SCCIF\): boarding schools and residential special schools](#). We carry out the inspection of the education provision under the [education inspection framework](#).

Inspecting schools that are registered as children's homes

The inspection of education in a school that is also registered as a children's home may take place as a stand-alone inspection of the education provision or at the same time as the full inspection of the children's home. When possible, we will attempt to carry out both inspections at the same time so that inspectors may work together and share evidence.

Seeking the views of parents, staff and pupils

Parents¹ can give their views about their child's education and boarding/residential provision on [Ofsted Parent View](#), which they can access at any time. This includes at the point of inspection, when we will provide them with a link to the Ofsted Parent View website.

Staff and pupils will be encouraged to complete a voluntary online survey, available at the point of inspection.

Boarders will be asked every year to comment on their boarding/residential provision through an online point-in-time survey.

Staff working in the boarding/residential provision of boarding or residential special schools will be asked to comment on the boarding provision through an annual online point-in-time survey.

More information about school inspections

Standard inspections do not normally last longer than 3 days. Inspectors will spend most of their time observing lessons and gathering evidence to inform their judgements. Inspectors will talk to a range of pupils and staff 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 Department for Education (the registration authority for independent schools). Leaders, responsible

¹ In this leaflet, 'parents' refers to parents and/or carers.

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 [non-association independent school inspection handbook](#) explains how we carry out inspections and the judgements that inspectors make. It contains the grade descriptors used by inspectors when making their judgements. The [handbook for additional inspections of independent schools](#) explains how we carry out a range of other types of inspections of independent schools, when the Department for Education commissions us to.

The [education inspection framework](#), together with the [regulations](#), sets out the statutory basis for independent school inspections.

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 [non-association independent school inspection handbook](#) sets out the arrangements for the inspection report.

Your views on the inspection

Following your 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 to 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.

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, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at 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
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2024