

# Inspecting maintained schools and academies: a leaflet for maintained schools and academies

---

This guidance outlines what Ofsted will look at during an inspection of a maintained school or academy.

**Published:** October 2024

---



Corporate member of  
Plain English Campaign  
Committed to clearer communication

**361**

## Introduction

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

Under the framework, inspectors carry out graded inspections of schools under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. They make the following judgements about schools:

- 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.

Until September 2024, graded inspections of schools included an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the above key judgements and any provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website.

From September 2024, graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. Schools inspected from then will not have the same way of working out when to expect their next inspection as other schools. We will set out the expected dates for when we will next inspect these schools from September 2025. They should not expect to receive an ungraded or graded inspection before then. Some could receive an urgent or monitoring inspection, which can be deemed a graded inspection.

If we judged a school to be good or outstanding for overall effectiveness before September 2024, we will normally return to the school once every four years to confirm whether the school has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection. We call this an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Act. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection but if we find evidence that the school's work has improved significantly, or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, we will make the next inspection a graded inspection.

If we judged a school requires improvement or inadequate (either because it had serious weaknesses or required special measures) for overall effectiveness at its last inspection before September 2024, we will normally carry out a graded inspection within two-and-a-half years. We may monitor the school before that inspection.

## Conduct during Ofsted inspections

Ofsted's [code of conduct](#) sets out our expectations about the conduct of our inspectors and our expectation of schools 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 ask the school to provide certain information as early as possible. This will include:

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

We will request that the following information is available at the start of the inspection:

- 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 or the trust's strategy
  - for maintained schools, minutes of governors' meetings and other relevant strategic documentation about governance that the school may have
  - for academies, minutes of board of trustees' meetings and other relevant strategic documentation about the trust that the school may have
- a summary of any school self-evaluation or equivalent
- any reports from any external evaluation of the school
- records and information 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](#), mentors and induction tutors) and times for the school day, including any

planned interruptions to normal school routines during the inspection and whether any 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 any 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 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 ensure that all actions are compliant with legal requirements on information-handling.

If any of this information is available before the inspection begins, 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 request to take photographic evidence, for example of pupils' work and displays. Inspectors will not take photographs of pupils.

## Inspecting boarding and residential special schools

When a boarding or residential special school's graded 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. However, we are not planning to carry out any aligned inspections in the 2024/25 academic year, except in exceptional circumstances. We expect to resume aligned inspections from September 2025.

Aligned inspections are carried out by two separate inspection teams (education and social care). They result in two sets of graded judgements and two 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**

A graded inspection of the 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**

Parents will give their views about their child's school 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.

## **More information about school inspections**

Inspections will normally last two full 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.

Before the on-site inspection, inspectors will give leaders an opportunity to tell them about any requests for adaptations to the inspection because of a protected characteristic, or reasonable adjustments because of 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 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 we need to consider pausing an inspection. We will consider these on a case-by-case basis according to our guidance on [pausing school inspections](#).

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

The [school inspection handbook](#) explains how we carry out inspections and the judgements that inspectors make under graded inspections. It contains the grade descriptors that inspectors use when making their judgements. The handbook also explains how we carry out ungraded inspections and urgent inspections under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

The [school monitoring handbook](#) explains how we carry out monitoring inspections of schools that meet our monitoring threshold at their most recent graded inspection.

The [education inspection framework](#) sets out the statutory basis for schools inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended).

## **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.

## **Your views on the inspection**

Following your inspection, we will invite you to complete an online inspection survey. The online 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**

Address: Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

Helpline: 0300 123 1231

Online form: [contact Ofsted](#).



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