

Ofsted inspection

A guide for governing boards in schools and trusts

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Introduction

Ofsted inspection provides independent, external evaluation and identifies what needs to improve in order for provision to be good or better.

This guide has been developed to help governing boards:

- know what to expect from an Ofsted inspection
- understand what inspectors look at and some of the evidence they consult
- take steps following inspection to support school improvement

This guide also explains some of the changes made to Ofsted inspection from September 2024 as part of plans for reform following the [Big Listen consultation](#).

Demonstrating effective governance to Ofsted

Governance is inspected under leadership and management. The Ofsted inspection handbook states that this area of judgement is about:

“... how leaders, managers and those responsible for governance ensure that the education that the school provides has a positive impact on all its pupils.”

NGA’s [Navigating Ofsted inspection tool](#) provides examples of how governing boards demonstrate effective governance through the course of routine board business.

1. Types of inspections

One or two inspectors (depending on school size) visit the school to conduct an inspection.

Graded inspections

- Formerly known as Section 5 inspections
- Normally last two days
- Result in grades (outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate) in four key judgement areas, however single headline grades are no longer given

Ungraded inspections

- Formerly known as Section 8 inspections
- One to two days (depending on school size)
- Focus on determining whether the school has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection
- Inspectors may consider any of the areas set out in the key judgement areas but will not carry out deep dives
- May be deemed a graded inspection if there are serious concerns about the quality of education, behaviour, potential gaming (including off-rolling) or safeguarding

Urgent inspections

- Formerly known as a ‘no formal designation’ inspection
- Carried out at any time where there are serious concerns (e.g. about safeguarding or leadership)
- These concerns might be raised internally through Ofsted’s risk assessment process, or externally through a complaint or other information received
- Urgent inspections focus on the issues raised that caused the school to be inspected. Findings will be based on the areas of focus – inspectors will not make key or provision judgements

Monitoring inspections

- Focused on where the school needs to improve in order to come out of its category of concern or no longer meet [Ofsted’s monitoring threshold](#)
- For schools in a category of concern such as special measures or serious weakness or those graded as requires improvement or inadequate for at least one key or provision judgement in their most recent graded inspection

Inspection timings

Schools inspected this academic year will no longer be able to use an overall effectiveness grade to work out when their next inspection will be. Ofsted will set out the next inspection dates for these schools in September 2025 – they should not expect to receive an ungraded or graded inspection before then.

Ofsted has provided an indication of inspection timing for schools last inspected before this academic year – see paragraph 42 of the [school inspection handbook](#).

Headline grades

Ofsted will no longer provide single headline grades for inspections taking place from September 2024.

However, this is not a retrospective change and as such, headline grades for schools inspected previously remain.

Summary evaluations of MATs

Inspections are carried out on an individual school basis. However, in some cases, Ofsted carries out summary evaluations of multi academy trusts (MATs) with the cooperation and consent of the MAT being reviewed.

Summary evaluations look at the extent to which the trust is delivering a high quality education and improving pupils' outcomes. Inspectors meet the leaders of the MAT to discuss:

- the findings of individual academy inspections (that precede the summary evaluation)
- the overall educational quality across the MAT

Inspectors also meet trustees and visit academies to hear from academy leaders and staff.

[See our guidance on summary evaluations](#) to find out more.

2. Before an inspection

Ofsted phone the headteacher to give notice of an inspection. As part of a new pilot approach, this phone call will take place on a Monday with inspection to start on Tuesday (although schools may be notified of an urgent, monitoring or deferred inspection on any day). The phone call will be after 9.30am and may come on a Tuesday in a bank holiday week.

The governing board will be informed by the governance professional, headteacher, or other member of staff that an inspection is taking place.

Following notification of an inspection, the lead inspector will arrange a preparatory discussion(s) with the headteacher. The headteacher is encouraged to have at least **one other senior leader present** during these conversations to assist and support them. The preparatory discussion(s) will cover the following two elements:

- a planning conversation that focuses on practical and logistical arrangements, including a discussion about the headteacher's wellbeing and appropriate support if required
- a longer, educationally focused conversation about progress since the school's last inspection

Before they arrive, inspectors will also research the school and review relevant data and information.

Parents and carers also receive a letter about the inspection and ways to provide their views. Schools are expected to encourage parents to complete the [Ofsted Parent View questionnaire](#) by including a link to it on their website.

Deferring an inspection

Schools can request the deferral of a planned inspection during the initial notification or as early as possible before the inspection begins (usually before 16:30 on the day of notification). More information about the circumstances where Ofsted could potentially grant a deferral can be found in NGA's [guidance on deferring and pausing Ofsted inspection](#).

3. How schools are inspected

The [education inspection framework](#) sets out how Ofsted inspects schools and is accompanied by a [school inspection handbook](#).

Ofsted judgements

For inspections this academic year, **schools will no longer receive a single headline grade**. However, inspectors will continue to evaluate schools against the following four key judgements, providing a grade (outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate) for each.

Quality of education

Inspectors evaluate the extent to which the [school's curriculum](#) sets out the knowledge and skills that pupils will gain at each stage (the 'intent'), the way that the curriculum is taught and assessed in order to support pupils to build their knowledge and to apply that knowledge as skills (the 'implementation'), and the outcomes that pupils achieve as a result (the 'impact').

Inspectors recognise that curriculum development is an ongoing process; leaders are expected to understand current curriculum practice and to have identified clear next steps. Inspectors look at the inspection data summary report (IDSR), which includes attainment and progress data.

Personal development

This judgement focuses on developing healthy, responsible, respectful and active citizens who can play their part and become actively involved in public life as adults.

Inspectors evaluate the extent to which the school's curriculum extends beyond the academic and provides for broader development.

Behaviour and attitudes

Inspectors consider how leaders and staff create a safe, calm, orderly and positive environment and the impact this has on the [behaviour](#) and attitudes of pupils and their attainment.

[Attendance](#) also forms part of how Ofsted evaluates behaviour and attitudes. Where attendance is not consistently at or above what could reasonably be expected, inspectors will expect it to be a high priority for leaders and for it to be improving.

Inspectors recognise the pandemic's impact on schools – they will consider and discuss attendance patterns and the steps taken to ensure the best possible rates of attendance.

Leadership and management

Inspectors consider how leaders, managers and those responsible for governance ensure that the education that the school provides has a positive impact on all its pupils.

This includes looking at areas such as [stakeholder engagement](#), [staff CPD](#) arrangements and whether leaders and those responsible for governance understand their respective roles and perform these in a way that enhances the effectiveness of the school.

Safeguarding

Inspectors make a judgement under **leadership and management** about whether the arrangements for [safeguarding](#) pupils are effective, gathering evidence from a range of sources.

Grace period for resolving safeguarding issues: ‘suspend and return’

From September 2024, Ofsted is piloting a new approach. If there are safeguarding concerns but the school would be judged good or outstanding in all other areas, inspectors can withhold judgement and return in 3 months to complete the inspection. This will only be the case if inspectors feel leaders are capable of resolving the issues in that time period.

In such cases, Ofsted will send a letter to schools to share with parents about the safeguarding issues identified.

Deep dives (graded inspections)

During graded inspections, inspectors conduct ‘deep dives’ into three to six subject areas (depending on school phase and size) to evaluate how education flows from intention to impact within a school. This entails:

- discussions with senior leaders, curriculum leaders, teachers and pupils
- scrutiny of pupils’ work
- visits to a sample of lessons (carried out alongside a school leader)

Areas of focus for ungraded inspections

In ungraded inspections, inspectors will pay particular attention to the quality of education and to safeguarding, also focusing on a number of areas within the inspection framework, including:

- **Attendance** – whether the school is doing all it reasonably can to achieve the highest possible attendance.
- **Behaviour** – whether the school sets high expectations for pupils’ behaviour and conduct and applies this fairly and consistently.
- **Workload** – the extent to which leaders engage with staff and are aware of pressures on them.
- **Gaming and off-rolling** – ensuring that schools are not enrolling or removing pupils for the sole interest of the school instead of the pupil(s).
- **Pupils’ wider development** – the extent to which the curriculum enhances spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The inspection focus will take into account areas that the inspector wants to look at and areas that are particularly important to the school – for example, something the school has been working on, or something related to its particular context. At least two of the areas of focus will relate to the quality of education, however, inspectors will not conduct subject deep dives during ungraded inspections, instead they will look at a group of subjects, not just one.

Gathering evidence

Inspectors gather evidence from a range of sources, including:

- national performance data – exploring trends and areas for improvement
- Parent View responses – looking for themes such as bullying, behaviour or homework
- the school website – checking statutory information and how the school engages with stakeholders
- previous inspection information – looking to see that necessary action has been taken
- exclusion records, behaviour records and attendance analysis
- documented evidence on the work and priorities of those responsible for governance

Some evidence will be looked at before the inspector visits the school. Your governance professional is responsible for ensuring that governance documentation is filed correctly and readily accessible for inspectors.

Inspectors will not ask for or use internal data as evidence; however, they will be interested in the conclusions drawn and actions taken from internal assessment information.

To support their evidence collection, inspectors will also:

- observe pupils outside of lessons (such as at break times)
- meet with the governing board (see section 4)
- meet with leaders to discuss the school’s self-evaluation and other aspects of management

Schools raising concerns during inspection

Any concerns about an inspection, including about inspectors’ conduct or any potential or perceived conflicts of interest, should be raised at the earliest opportunity with the lead inspector. Concerns can be raised at any point during inspection (including meetings between inspectors and leaders, the final feedback meeting, and on the next working day after the inspection ends).

At the start of the inspection school leaders are given the telephone number of a senior leader at Ofsted to contact if needed.

Inspectors now have the power to pause an inspection if it is clear that it is adversely affecting the wellbeing of senior leaders. Chairs should be prepared to request a pause if they have serious concerns about the wellbeing of school leaders during the inspection.

See NGA’s [guidance on deferring and pausing Ofsted inspection](#) for more information.

4. Meeting with inspectors

Regular dialogue between school leaders and inspectors will be maintained throughout the inspection. The lead inspector will agree to a process for keeping relevant staff informed but, as a minimum, check-ins with the headteacher and/or any other previously agreed school leader(s) will take place at the start, middle and end of each day.

Inspectors meet with members of the governing board for around 30 minutes. As many governors/trustees as possible should attend the meeting (school staff will not be present).

The meeting is intended to help inspectors establish whether the board understands its role and carries it out effectively. The discussion should focus on the board's core strategic functions and avoid operational areas such as the detail of what pupils are taught and how they are taught. Board members should point out if the discussion has moved into operational areas.

Where the school is part of a MAT

- Inspectors recognise that multiple trust leaders may have delegated responsibility of the inspected school, especially in large trusts, and will not limit attendance to meetings or in inspection activities. As a minimum, they will want to meet with the CEO who may invite other senior trust leaders to support conversations.
- The trust's [scheme of delegation](#) should be provided to inspectors at the earliest opportunity so that they are clear about lines of accountability.
- Inspectors will speak to the chair of the trust board (or their delegate) and as many other trustees as possible.
- The academy committee (local governing body) may also be invited to the meeting, depending on their delegated responsibilities (as set out in the scheme of delegation).

Examples of questions inspectors may ask

1. What is the governing board's vision for the school?
2. What is the strategy for achieving the vision – who determines this?
3. What are the school's development priorities?
4. How does the board ensure that progress is made on these priorities?
5. How do you hold your headteacher to account?
6. How do you know safeguarding is robust? What staff and governing board training takes place?
7. What sources of information do you use to find out the views of parents, staff and pupils?
8. How is pupil premium funding being used and what impact is it having?
9. How do you ensure that pupils gain the essential knowledge needed to be educated citizens?
10. How do you [monitor attendance and absence](#) rates?

5. Inspection feedback, report and outcomes

The feedback meeting

At the end of the inspection, the lead inspector will hold a feedback meeting in which the main findings are explained. Members of staff aside from the headteacher/CEO and those invited to support them will not usually be present. Other individuals who may attend include:

- governors/trustees
- a representative from the local authority
- a representative from a Diocese or sponsor
- where relevant, social care regulatory inspectors and education inspectors, who will provide feedback to education and residential staff

We recommend that as many members of the governing board as possible attend the feedback meeting to hear the grades awarded and judgements reached. This will help board members understand the work required to address any areas for improvement.

We also recommend that the governance professional attend to take a written note of the meeting. This may be shared confidentially with all those responsible for the governance of the school, regardless of whether they were able to attend the meeting or not.

School leaders **can share the inspection outcome and findings** with whomever they deem appropriate, including individuals not involved in the school, as long as the information isn't made public or shared with parents/carers.

Inspection report

The inspection report explains the judgements made. It is intended for parents and stakeholders and provides a snapshot of what it is like to be a pupil at the school.

Soon after the inspection, a confidential draft report is sent to school leaders and the governing board for comment. This is an opportunity to challenge any factual inaccuracies or to highlight where it is felt that the report does not represent the findings discussed at the feedback meeting.

The school is told of any subsequent amendments and the report is published on Ofsted's website within 30 working days. Schools receive an electronic version of the final report in advance of publication which should be uploaded to the school's website.

Schools in MATs should check that the report lists the trust board as the accountable body, with the chair of the trust board named.

Requires improvement judgements

Where one or more of a school's key judgements is graded as 'requires improvement', but is not placed in a formal category of concern, it may be subject to [monitoring by Ofsted](#).

Schools in a category of concern

Schools that have any key judgement deemed as inadequate and/or have safeguarding judged as ineffective will be placed in a formal category of concern (either labelled as special measures* or as having serious weakness). In such cases, the government will continue to intervene, including potentially issuing an academy order, or, in the case of an academy, initiating a rebroker, meaning that the academy will transfer to a different trust. Schools causing concern will also be monitored in line with the policies set out in Ofsted's monitoring handbook.

* Maintained schools and PRUs placed in special measures are not normally permitted to appoint Early Career Teachers (ECTs). Academies are not subject to this regulation, but Ofsted may strongly advise that an academy should avoid appointing ECTs.

Consecutive requires improvement judgements

In the past, the government has intervened where a school receives two or more consecutive judgements of 'requires improvement' under the '2RI' policy, including by issuing an academy order. Whilst Ofsted will continue to identify the most serious cases of concern, the [government has explained](#) their intention to change this policy and instead "put in place support for these schools from a high performing school, helping to drive up standards quickly".

Ungraded inspection outcomes

There are four possible outcomes for an ungraded school inspection which will determine when the school's next graded inspection takes place.

- Outcome 1: The school has maintained previous standards. Either no key judgement would be lower if graded, or some may be lower but still good.
- Outcome 2: The school's work has improved significantly since the last inspection, meaning at least one key judgement would be higher in a graded inspection, with none lower and all potentially outstanding.
- Outcome 3: Some aspects of the school's work have weakened, meaning at least one key judgement would be lower in a graded inspection, now requiring improvement or deemed inadequate.
- Outcome 4: The school may be inadequate in one or more key areas, raising serious concerns about education quality, behaviour, or safeguarding. In this case, the ungraded inspection will typically **convert to a graded inspection** within 48 hours.

Read paragraph 206 onwards of the [school inspection handbook](#) for more information.

Post-inspection board discussions

Governing boards and leaders should make time to discuss the inspection process and reflect on findings from the feedback meeting. The board should then ensure that:

- plans are put in place to address any identified areas for improvement
- the board's strategy takes into account Ofsted's findings and plans for improvement
- school staff (and the executive leader in particular) continue to receive the professional and personal development they need
- they discuss the impact of inspection and its findings on [staff wellbeing](#), workload and recruitment

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