

School inspections

A guide for parents¹

This document applies to all maintained schools including special schools and pupil referral units. It also covers academies, city technology colleges, city colleges for the technology of the arts and some non-maintained special schools in England.²

Age group: 0–19

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¹ 'Parents' refers to mothers, fathers and/or carers.

² Academies are state-funded independent schools. The same inspection schedule and associated guidance apply to academies as to other maintained schools. The family of academy schools includes: sponsor-led academies, schools that have converted to academy status under the Academies Act 2010, academy special schools, free schools, university technical colleges, and studio schools. 16-19 academies are inspected under arrangements for the inspection of further education colleges.

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Why does Ofsted inspect schools?

We inspect schools to provide information to parents, to promote improvement and to hold schools to account for the public money they receive. School inspections are required by law. We provide an independent assessment of the quality and standards of education in schools, and check whether pupils are achieving as much as they can.

When do inspections happen and how long do they last?

A school that was judged to be outstanding at its last inspection is exempt from routine inspection. We will not normally inspect 'exempt schools' unless we have a concern about their performance. Ofsted will also carry out an annual assessment of an exempt school's performance (from the third year after the school's last inspection) to determine whether an inspection might be necessary. Exempt schools continue to be inspected as part of Ofsted's programme of surveys of curriculum subjects and aspects of the curriculum. Exemption from inspection does not apply to maintained nursery schools, Special Schools or Pupil Referral Units.

A school judged to be 'good' is normally inspected within five school years from the end of the school year in which it was last inspected.

A school judged as 'requires improvement' will be subject to monitoring from inspectors to check its progress and is inspected within a period of two years. If at that inspection it is still judged as 'requires improvement', there will be further monitoring, and another inspection will take place within a further two years. If at this inspection it is still not 'good', it is highly likely that it will be judged 'inadequate' and deemed to require special measures.

Most schools receive notice of their inspection on the afternoon of the working day before the inspection begins. However, Ofsted can inspect any school without notice where this is judged to be appropriate. The inspection usually lasts for two days and the number of inspectors on the inspection team will vary according to the size and nature of the school.

Who inspects schools?

Her Majesty's Inspectors and additional inspectors carry out the inspections. All inspectors have been trained to, and assessed against, Ofsted's standards.

What happens during an inspection?

Inspectors look at the school's self-evaluation and analyse the pupils' progress and attainment. They talk to the headteacher, governors, staff, and pupils, and consider your views as a parent. They spend most of their time observing a wide range of lessons and looking at the quality of teaching in the school, and its impact on learning and progress. They also look at the behaviour and safety of pupils at the school, the promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; and how well the school is led and managed. Where applicable, inspectors will also look at the effectiveness of early years or sixth form provision in the school.

How can I make my views known?

If you are the registered parent of a child at the school, the school will send you a letter notifying you of the dates of the inspection. This letter provides you with details and options for providing your views. Our survey site, Parent View, is the main source of gathering parents' views about a school. Inspectors will use the views expressed on Parent View when inspecting your child's school.

Can I speak to the inspectors?

You may have the chance to speak to the inspectors during the inspection, for example at the start of the school day. The inspection administrators will be happy to pass on messages to the inspectors and may be able to arrange telephone conversations if you are unable to speak to them in person. Their contact details will be in the letter that tells you about the inspection. Please remember that inspectors cannot deal with complaints concerning individual pupils or settle disputes between you and the school.

What happens after the inspection?

We give schools an overall grade from 1 to 4:

- grade 1 (outstanding)
- grade 2 (good)
- grade 3 (requires improvement)
- grade 4 (inadequate).

The lead inspector reports her or his judgement to the headteacher and governors. The inspectors' findings are published in a report for the school, parents and the wider community. Inspection reports provide information about the effectiveness of the school's work and contain recommendations about what the school should do to improve further. The school must take all reasonable steps to make sure you receive a copy of the report. Reports are also published on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports.

What happens if Ofsted judges a school to be 'inadequate'?

If inspectors judge a school to be inadequate it will be placed in one of the following two categories.

Special measures

This means the school is failing to provide its pupils with an acceptable standard of education, and is not showing the capacity to make the improvements needed. Inspectors will visit the school regularly to check its progress, until it can be removed from the category. We will inspect it again after about two years.

Serious weaknesses

This means that one or more of the key areas of the school's performance require significant improvement, but the leaders and managers have demonstrated the capacity to improve. Inspectors will visit the school regularly to check its progress, until it can be removed from the category. It will be inspected again within 18 months of its last inspection.

Where can further details be found about school inspections?

The *Framework for school inspection*³ sets out the statutory basis for inspections. It summarises the main features of school inspections and describes how the general principles and processes of inspection are applied. The *School inspection handbook*⁴ sets out what inspectors must do and what schools can expect, and provides guidance for inspectors on making their judgements. Both documents are available on Ofsted's website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

What happens if I have concerns about the inspection?

Complaints are rare, but we treat them very seriously. You can find out more on our website at www.ofsted.gov.uk, or by calling our helpline on 0300 123 4666.

If you need any more information about our work, please visit our website or call our helpline.

What happens if I have concerns about my child's school?

If you are concerned about your child's school, you should start by talking directly to the teachers or headteacher or, if necessary, the governing body or the local authority. If you are not satisfied with the responses you receive Ofsted may be able to help.

You can find out more on our website or by calling our helpline.

Helpline: 0300 123 4666
www.ofsted.gov.uk

³ *Framework for school inspection* (120100), Ofsted 2014; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120100

⁴ *School inspection handbook* (120101), Ofsted 2014; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120101