

School inspections

A guide for parents and carers

Why does Ofsted inspect schools?

We inspect schools to provide information to parents and carers, 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?

We inspect schools judged to be satisfactory at least once every three years. Schools judged to be good are inspected once at any time within a five-year period. Most schools receive one to two days' notice of their inspection. The inspection usually lasts for two days.

Schools that were judged to be outstanding at their last inspection are '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.

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 or carer. They observe a wide range of lessons and look 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.

How can I make my views known?

If you are the registered parent or carer of a child at the school, the school will send you a letter with a questionnaire from us. You can tell us your views by filling in the questionnaire and returning it to the inspection team at the school. Inspectors will use your views to help them reach their judgements. The questionnaire is confidential, but if a response raises issues about a child's safety inspectors may pass on the information.

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 (satisfactory)
- 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. The report includes a letter to the pupils, telling them what the inspectors thought about the school and what they can do to improve it. 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.

Notice to improve

This means either:

- the school is failing to provide its pupils with an acceptable standard of education but it does have the capacity to improve; or
- it is not failing, but is performing significantly less well than we reasonably expect.

If we give a notice to improve, the school will receive a monitoring visit by an inspector and it will be inspected again after about a year.

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 4234.

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.

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.¹

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Helpline: 0300 123 4234
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Published: April 2012
Reference no. 090181
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¹ 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, 16-19 academies and studio schools.