

# Inspecting non-association independent schools

A guide for parents

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This applies to all non-association schools in England.

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## Introduction

All independent schools must be registered by the Department for Education (DfE), and they must meet the requirements of [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#) in order to remain registered.

Ofsted inspects about half of all independent schools in England, which we refer to as 'non-association' independent schools. The rest of the schools belong to independent school associations and are inspected by the [Independent Schools Inspectorate](#), which has been [approved by the DfE](#).

## Why does Ofsted inspect schools?

We inspect independent schools at the request of the DfE. We inspect schools to provide information to parents and to promote improvement. 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.

**Standard inspections** are carried out in line with Ofsted's [education inspection framework](#), which came into effect in September 2019.

Under the framework, inspectors will report on the extent to which schools meet the [independent school standards](#). They will also make the following judgements:

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

If applicable, inspectors will also make a graded judgement on the effectiveness of the early years or sixth-form provision in the school.

The DfE also commissions Ofsted to inspect independent schools for several other reasons.

- In **pre-registration inspections**, inspectors report whether a proposed new school is likely to meet the standards when it opens, if the DfE decides to register it.
- Registered schools must apply to the DfE to make certain changes to their registration. The DfE may commission us to carry out a **material change inspection**, to report whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change is implemented.
- If the DfE has concerns about a registered school, it may commission us to carry out an **emergency inspection**. We will report whether the school

complies with the standards that relate to the concerns that the DfE has about the school.

- If a school was judged to not meet all of the standards at its previous inspection, the DfE may commission us to carry out a **progress monitoring inspection**. Often, the DfE will require the school to prepare an action plan to set out how it will meet the failings identified at the previous inspection. The purpose of the progress monitoring inspection is to check the school's progress against its action plan, and whether the school now meets the previously un-met standards. Inspectors will also report on the school's progress made in addressing the qualitative issues identified at the last inspection.

## Who inspects schools?

His Majesty's Inspectors and Ofsted Inspectors (who in most cases are serving school leaders who inspect for Ofsted for an agreed number of days each year) carry out the inspections. All inspectors have been trained to, and assessed against, Ofsted's standards and all are familiar with the independent school standards.

## When do standard inspections happen and how long do they last?

A new three-year cycle of standard inspections began in September 2018. Schools that are judged as requires improvement or inadequate will normally have a standard inspection within two years of the previous standard inspection.

A standard inspection does not normally last longer than three days.

## How much notice do you give to a school before a standard inspection?

Most schools receive notice of their inspection around lunchtime on the school day before the inspection begins.

## What happens during a standard inspection?

Inspectors 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 education in the school and the impact of the curriculum. Inspectors give specific attention to the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills in lessons.

They also look at the personal development, behaviour, attitudes and welfare of pupils at the school, the promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and how well the school is led and managed.

For information about the inspection of boarding or residential provision in schools, see the [social care common inspection framework \(SCCIF\): boarding schools and residential special schools](#).

## **Inspection and the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic**

Our approach to inspection will take into account the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption it has caused to schools. Inspectors will discuss the impact of the pandemic with the school, including how the school leaders responded to the situation, and will take that into account in their assessment of the school.

The three-year standard inspection cycle running September 2018 to July 2021 was suspended in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To account for this suspension, the inspection cycle will now be extended by four terms until 31 December 2022. Independent schools that have not yet received a standard inspection in the current cycle will be inspected by that date.

## **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, [Ofsted Parent View](#), is the main source we use to gather parents' views about a school. Inspectors will use the views expressed on [Ofsted 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 or end 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. Note that inspectors cannot deal with complaints concerning individual pupils or settle disputes between you and the school.

## **What happens after the inspection?**

In standard inspections, 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 their judgements to the headteacher and proprietor. 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. Reports are published on our [reports website](#).

The independent school standards require the school to ensure that a copy of the inspection report is provided to the parents of each registered pupil at the school. The standards also require the school to ensure that a copy of the report is published and maintained on the school's internet website.

## **What happens if Ofsted judges a school to be failing?**

If inspectors judge that a school is not meeting the independent school standards and is inadequate, the DfE will normally ask the school to submit an action plan for improvement.

The DfE commissions Ofsted to carry out a progress monitoring inspection to report on the progress the school is making with its action plan. Schools that are judged to not meet the standards and graded as 'requires improvement' are sometimes required to submit an action plan to the DfE. Schools judged as requires improvement following a standard inspection may receive a progress monitoring inspection before their next standard inspection.

All progress monitoring inspection reports are published on our [reports website](#) and, like standard inspection reports, schools are required to provide a copy to parents and publish it on their own website.

## **Where to find further details about school inspections**

The [education inspection framework](#) sets out the principles that apply to inspection and the main judgements that inspectors make when carrying out inspections.

The [non-association independent school inspection handbook](#) sets out the statutory basis for inspections, what schools can expect at inspections and provides guidance for inspectors on making their judgements.

## **What happens if I have concerns about the inspection?**

Complaints are rare, but we treat them very seriously. You can find out more by reading our [complaints procedure](#) or by calling our helpline on 0300 123 4666.

If you need any more information about our work, 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, headteacher or proprietor. If you are not satisfied with the responses

you receive, then you should raise issues of concern with the DfE, which registers all independent schools. The DfE may then ask Ofsted to carry out an inspection.

Inspectors cannot investigate individual concerns.

Independent and Boarding Team  
Department for Education  
Bishopsgate House  
Feethams  
Darlington  
DL1 5QED

Email: [registration.enquiries@education.gov.uk](mailto:registration.enquiries@education.gov.uk)

## **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.



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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)  
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