

Ofsted inspection

A guide for governing boards in schools and trusts

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NGA Ofsted research

NGA's June 2022 [research report](#) highlights where Ofsted inspection practice has changed or improved following our 2020 report which identified key issues and areas to address.



National Governance Association

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and clerks of state schools in England.

We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school and trust governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and governance professionals at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

Introduction

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. Ofsted's role is to make sure that organisations providing education, training and care services in England do so to a high standard. Ofsted fulfil this role in schools by carrying out inspections.

Inspection provides independent, external evaluation and identifies what needs to improve in order for provision to be good or better. It is based on gathering a range of evidence that is evaluated against the education inspection framework and takes full account of policies and relevant legislation in areas such as safeguarding, equality and diversity.

This guide has been developed to help governing boards:

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

1. Types of inspection

Graded inspections (formerly known as Section 5 inspections) normally last two days. These inspections result in a judgement on the overall effectiveness of provision at the school, graded on the following scale:

1. Outstanding
2. Good
3. Requires improvement
4. Inadequate

Ungraded inspections (formerly known as Section 8 inspections) do not result in individual graded judgements but focus on determining whether the school remains the same grade as at the previous graded inspection. An ungraded inspection may be deemed a graded inspection if the school's overall effectiveness or safeguarding provisions have declined.

A [summary table](#) outlining the different types of inspection is available.

1.1 Frequency of inspections

Judgement at last inspection	Frequency of subsequent inspection
Good or outstanding*	Ungraded inspection around every four years
Requires improvement	Graded inspection within approximately six terms
Inadequate	Dependent upon whether the school leadership (including the governing board) have demonstrated the capacity to bring about improvement – see section 4.3

*Following a change in regulations, schools judged outstanding are no longer exempt from routine inspection. In these cases:

- Schools last inspected before September 2015 will receive a graded inspection by 2025.
- Schools last inspected after September 2015 will receive an ungraded inspection by 2025.

Ofsted carry out urgent inspections (previously known as a no formal designation inspection) at any time where there are serious concerns (about safeguarding or leadership, for example).

1.2 Summary evaluations of MATs

Graded and ungraded inspections are carried out on an individual school basis. However, in some cases, Ofsted carry 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.

During a summary evaluation, inspectors meet the leaders of the MAT, discuss the findings of individual academy inspections (that precede the summary evaluation) and overall educational quality across the MAT. Inspectors also meet trustees and visit individual academies to capture the views of academy leaders and staff.

2. Before an inspection

Ofsted will usually telephone the headteacher to give notice of an inspection the day before an inspection starts. This will be communicated to the whole governing board by the governance professional (clerk to the board), headteacher, or other member of staff.

Parents and carers of pupils will also receive a letter about the inspection and options for providing their views.

The lead inspector and the headteacher will discuss arrangements for the visit. Inspectors use this conversation to understand the school's context, the progress made since the last inspection and to agree [deep dive areas](#). Before they arrive, inspectors will also research the school and [review relevant data and information](#).

2.1 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”.

By keeping the strategy document, school improvement plan and relevant policies under review, boards are well placed to talk to inspectors about:

- their strengths and areas for development
- the progress being made towards strategic priorities
- areas where expected progress is not being made
- the plans in place to address this

The areas above incorporate the school's quality of education, how its resources are managed and the culture of safeguarding.

The following table outlines leadership and management areas that Ofsted focus on and shows how these relate to the work of the governing board. Use the links to NGA resources provided to find further information and access best practice guidance.

Area of focus	Evidence to support effective governance Boards can demonstrate effective governance by evidencing that they:
Governing board self-review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ have an effective induction programme in place to help new board members understand their role ■ engage in regular internal and external self-review to improve skills, knowledge and the quality and impact of governance ■ undertake a skills audit (at least annually) to identify the skills, knowledge and experience of board members and address any gaps through development and targeted recruitment
Vision and strategy Refer to NGA's guide to Being Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ work collaboratively with school leaders and stakeholders to develop a clear and ambitious vision ■ have created a strategy document setting out how the vision will be achieved ■ are clear on what pupils should leave the school knowing and having done ■ receive sufficient data to monitor the outcomes detailed in the strategy
Quality of education Refer to NGA's curriculum guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ monitor the impact of what pupils are taught (reviewing assessment and destination data to support with this) ■ monitor the impact of the curriculum on all pupils and particularly those with special educational needs and disabilities and those eligible for pupil premium ■ ensure that staff development needs are identified and CPD is well planned and resourced to support delivery of the curriculum ■ hold leaders to account for the quality of education
Stakeholder engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ monitor staff workload and wellbeing and pupil wellbeing regularly ■ engage with pupils, staff, parents and the wider community to identify areas of strength and improvement ■ build effective partnerships with external stakeholders (such as local employers) to improve educational standards for all pupils
Safeguarding Refer to NGA safeguarding guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ influence a positive culture of safeguarding ■ provide strategic oversight and monitoring of safeguarding policies and practice ■ understand the risks that their pupils are likely to face
Statutory requirements Refer to NGA compliance resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ use the services of a professional clerk to stay up to date and receive advice on the board's legal duties ■ comply with their statutory requirements including their legal duties under The Equality Act ■ use an effective process to ensure up-to-date information is uploaded to the school or trust website

3. How schools are inspected

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

3.1 Judgement areas

One or two inspectors (depending on school size) evaluate the school against the following key judgements which are consistent for both graded and ungraded inspections.

Where relevant, inspectors will also make judgements on early years or sixth-form provision.

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.

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.

Personal development

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

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.

Inspectors will always make a written judgement under 'leadership and management' about whether the arrangements for safeguarding pupils are effective. Where safeguarding is found to be ineffective, it is likely to lead to an inadequate judgement for leadership and management.

NGA and the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) have published [joint advice for governing boards on safeguarding and school inspection](#).

Ungraded inspection focus

Ungraded inspections are likely to concentrate on the following areas within each judgement:

Behaviour – whether schools set 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 provides broader development to enhance spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

3.2 Gathering evidence

Inspectors will 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 that statutory information is correct and looking at how the school engages with stakeholders
- previous inspection information – looking to see that necessary actioned has been taken
- exclusion records, behaviour records and attendance analysis
- documented evidence on the work and priorities of those responsible for governance

Some of this evidence will be looked at before the inspector visits the school. Your governance professional (clerk to the board) is responsible for ensuring that governance documentation is filed correctly and readily accessible for inspectors.

Inspectors will not 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 in situations outside of lessons (such as at break times)
- meet with the governing board ([see section 3.6](#))
- meet with leaders to discuss the school’s self-evaluation and other aspects of management

3.3 Deep dives

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)

3.4 Focus on attendance

Inspectors recognise that the context in which schools operate has changed as a result of the pandemic. They will consider and discuss attendance patterns and the steps taken to ensure the best possible rates of attendance during the pandemic and on an ongoing basis.

NGA's [pupil attendance resources](#) set out the board's role in securing good attendance.

3.5 Governing board meeting with inspectors

Inspectors meet with members of the governing board for around 30 minutes. The chair or governance professional should contact governors/trustees to see who is available; as many governors/trustees as possible should attend the meeting (school staff will not be present).

Where the school is part of a MAT, the meeting will be with the trust board. The academy committee (the local governing body) may also be invited, depending on the scheme of delegation. The trust's [scheme of delegation](#) should be provided to inspectors at the earliest opportunity so that they are clear about lines of accountability.

The purpose of the meeting

The meeting is intended to help inspectors establish whether the board understands its role and carries it out effectively. The discussion should be centred around 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 attending the meeting should be prepared to point out if the discussion has moved into operational rather than strategic areas.

Examples of questions inspectors may ask

The following are examples of the type of questions that governing boards may be asked in their meeting with inspectors.

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 they need to be educated citizens?
10. How do you monitor attendance and absence rates?

4. Inspection feedback and judgements

4.1 The feedback meeting

At the end of the inspection, the lead inspector will hold a feedback meeting in which the main findings of the inspection are explained. This includes provisional grades for each area of judgement and the implications, if relevant, of being judged as 'requires improvement' or being placed in 'special measures'. The inspector will also set out recommendations for improvement.

We recommend that as many members of the governing board as possible attend the feedback meeting to hear the grades awarded and judgements reached. In doing so, board members can begin to understand the work required to tackle any areas for improvement.

We also recommend that the governance professional (clerk to the board) attends 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.

4.2 Inspection report

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

Following 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 where it is felt that the report does not represent the findings discussed at the feedback meeting.

The school is made aware of any subsequent changes 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 has the trust board named as the accountable body, with the chair of the trust board named.

4.3 Inadequate judgements

Schools judged 'inadequate' are categorised as being in special measures or as having serious weaknesses depending on whether the school leadership (including the governing board) have demonstrated the capacity to bring about improvement.

Where a school is judged as 'inadequate', the following action is taken:

- Maintained schools are issued an academy order to become a sponsored academy and subsequently inspected by Ofsted as new schools (in their third year).
- Single academy trusts are moved into a MAT.
- Schools already part of a MAT can be moved to a different MAT where the regional director deems the existing MAT not to have sufficient capacity to bring about the necessary improvement. If an academy is not moved to a different academy trust, it will be subject to monitoring before its next full inspection.

Following an inadequate judgement, Ofsted will carry out monitoring inspections within three-to-nine months of the publication of the graded inspection report. Inspectors will look for evidence of how well leaders are implementing the statement of action and the school's improvement plan.

Further information is available from Ofsted's guidance on [schools causing concern](#); chapter two provides guidance on maintained schools, chapter four covers academies causing concern.

Schools with two or more consecutive Ofsted ratings below 'good' may be subject to an [academisation order](#).

4.4 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 is informed by Ofsted's findings of the school
- plans for improvement are reflected in the board's strategy
- 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 the resulting judgement on staff wellbeing, workload and recruitment

Ofsted e-learning

NGA Learning Link subscribers can access an [Ofsted e-learning module](#) which covers the inspection process, what boards can expect and how to support school leaders.

Ofsted training

NGA also offers a [two-hour training session](#) on preparing for Ofsted to help governors and trustees understand the inspection process and identify any issues that need to be addressed prior to inspection.

Thank you for reading this guide. If you have any feedback you'd like to share, please email kcfeedback@nga.org.uk.

More from NGA

Knowledge Centre: best practice guidance

NGA members get exclusive online access to best practice school governance guidance from NGA's Knowledge Centre. Go to [NGA's Knowledge Centre](#) and log in to browse and download guidance, templates, model policies, information summaries and more.

GOLDline: bespoke advice

NGA's [GOLDline advice service](#) provides independent and timely advice to governing boards with GOLD membership. Our advisers guide members through topics including governance roles and responsibilities, admissions, exclusions, complaints, and board constitution.

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