

# Summary of the Changes to the Ofsted School Inspection Handbook

## Culture of safeguarding

Schools should have an open and positive culture around safeguarding, which puts pupils' interests first. This is outlined in more detail in paragraph 367 to mean schools:

- Protect pupils from serious harm, both online and offline
- Are vigilant and maintain an attitude of 'it could happen here'
- Are open and transparent, share information with others and actively seek expert advice when required
- Make sure all those who work with pupils are trained well so they understand their responsibilities and the systems and processes the school operates, and are empowered to 'speak out' where there may be concerns
- Actively seek and listen to the views and experiences of pupils, staff and parents/carers, taking prompt but proportionate action to address any concerns, where needed
- Have appropriate child protection arrangements, which:
  - Identify pupils who may need early help, and who are at risk of harm or have been harmed
    - This can include, but is not limited to, neglect, abuse (including by their peers), grooming, exploitation, sexual abuse and online harm
  - Secure the help pupils need and refer in a timely way to those who have the expertise to help (if required)
  - Manage safe recruitment and allegations about adults who may be a risk to pupils
- Are receptive to challenge and are reflective of their own practices to ensure that safeguarding policies, systems and processes are kept under continuous review

## Inspectors will evaluate the effectiveness of your whole-school approach to safeguarding

Inspectors will:

- Want to find out how well staff keep pupils safe
- Not make judgements about safeguarding based solely on the evidence that the school presents during the inspection
  - To examine the safeguarding culture, inspectors will take into account a range of evidence so they are able to evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements over time
- Look for evidence of effective safeguarding practice and the impact of this practice on all pupils
- Examine how a school is implementing its safeguarding policies and processes effectively, and how it keeps them under review
- Make sure the school has proper arrangements in place for sharing information appropriately with relevant parties, including forwarding information to schools and post-16 or post-18 providers and other agencies
- Determine whether there have been any safeguarding incidents or allegations since the last inspection, and whether the school has taken appropriate action to safeguard the pupils affected and/or to deal with allegations
- Take into account comments about safeguarding from staff, pupils and parents/carers
- Triangulate evidence gathered during the inspection to evaluate the effectiveness of the safeguarding culture that has been established in the school
  - If inspectors can't corroborate this evidence because they're prevented from talking to pupils on inspection, then safeguarding will likely be judged ineffective

See paragraphs 368 to 378.

## Ineffective safeguarding

Paragraphs 384 to 385 explain that:

- Ineffective safeguarding is when there are serious or widespread failures in the school's safeguarding arrangements. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils:
  - Do not meet statutory requirements, or they
  - Give serious cause for concern, or
  - The school has taken insufficient action to remedy weaknesses following a serious incident
- Examples of ineffective safeguarding include:
  - Insufficient action is being taken to remedy weaknesses following a serious failure of safeguarding arrangements
  - Safeguarding allegations about staff members are not being handled appropriately
  - Clear evidence of serious failures in safeguarding practice that lead pupils or particular groups of pupils not to be safe in school
  - Statutory requirements, such as breaches of the requirements for Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, are not being met
  - Pupils have little confidence that the school will address concerns about their safety, including risk of abuse, because leaders have not taken their views seriously and/or addressed relevant concerns
  - Pupils, particularly vulnerable pupils, are not on the school site (whether long term, temporarily or for part of the school day) and the school is either not clear where those pupils are or not able to give reassurances as to the steps taken to safeguard them when off-site. This can include children absent from education and children attending inappropriate, unregistered or unmonitored alternative provision

### Provisional outcomes

The handbook now confirms (paragraph 151) that you can share the inspection outcome with whoever you deem appropriate.

This includes sharing it (in confidence) with those not involved in the school, as long as the information isn't made public or shared with parents/carers.

### New section - 'conduct during inspection'

Paragraphs 8 to 10 explain that:

- Inspectors are expected to follow [Ofsted's code of conduct](#)
  - This was mentioned in the old handbook, but the link to the code of conduct is much clearer
- Inspectors will:
  - Uphold the highest professional standards in their work
  - Treat everyone fairly, and with respect and sensitivity
- Providers should be open, honest and transparent, and not withhold or conceal evidence, or provide false, misleading, inaccurate or incomplete information

### New section - 'schools raising concerns'

You should raise any concerns you have about an inspection, inspectors' conduct, or any potential or perceived conflicts of interest, at the earliest opportunity.

You can raise concerns at any point during an inspection, including during:

- The inspection planning conversation
- Meetings between leaders and inspectors
- The final feedback meeting

Ofsted will take your concerns seriously, and the act of raising a concern won't impact the inspection findings or how Ofsted considers your school.

This is covered in paragraphs 11 and 12.

### Inspection timings

Ofsted already published this information in June 2023, but it's now folded into the handbook.

This includes where a school is placed in serious weaknesses due to safeguarding alone, inspectors will return within 3 months for an early monitoring inspection (paragraph 151).

### Inspectors will protect the anonymity of people they speak to

When inspectors gather evidence from pupils, parents or other stakeholders in person (for example, informal meetings at the start or end of the day), Ofsted will make every attempt to protect individuals' identity.

This is explained in paragraph 115.

### Meetings with staff

Paragraph 116 explains that:

- Staff can have a colleague from the school or trust present with them in meetings with inspectors
- Every effort should be made to make sure staff can speak freely, especially if they are accompanied by senior leaders

### Proportionate consideration of evidence from pupils, parents/carers and staff

This is peppered throughout the handbook, for example:

- When talking to pupils, inspectors will consider this evidence alongside other evidence (paragraph 250)
- A school's open and positive culture around safeguarding includes actively seeking and listening to the views and experiences of pupils, staff and parents/carers, and taking prompt but proportionate action to address any concerns (paragraphs 367 and 408)

### New section - attendance

This is part of how Ofsted evaluates behaviour and attitudes (paragraphs 292 to 295):

- Inspectors expect schools to:
  - Do all they reasonably can to achieve the highest possible attendance
  - Analyse absence and persistent absence rates for all pupils, and different groups, compared to local and national averages. Inspectors want to see how this feeds into your school's approach
  - Have attendance as a high priority where it's not consistently at, or above, where it reasonably should be
  - Have a strong understanding of the causes of absence
  - Have a clear strategy that takes into account the causes of absence
- Inspectors will judge favourably (even where attendance is not consistently high) where:
  - You're aware of the issues affecting attendance
  - You have a clear strategic plan in place
  - There's a track record of improvement that demonstrates your capacity to improve attendance

## Behaviour challenges

Ofsted has made some tiny additions to how it inspects behaviour (paragraphs 298 to 299):

- Inspectors will recognise that the context in which schools operate regarding behaviour has changed since the pandemic
- Inspectors will judge favourably where they see evidence of poor behaviour if:
  - You're aware of the issues affecting behaviour
  - You have a clear strategic plan in place
  - There's a track record of improvement that demonstrates your capacity to improve behaviour

## Capacity to improve

Ofsted has made it clearer what this means (paragraph 180).

To decide whether your school has the capacity to improve, inspectors will consider your school's potential and the extent to which you:

- Are able to identify and prioritise the right issues
  - Shown by accurately identifying issues and evaluating them to identify future issues
- Take appropriate and timely action to address identified issues, including how you effectively use internal and external support
- Have a track record of improvement, even if you haven't achieved the desired outcome yet
  - This will give inspectors confidence that improvements will be swift and sustainable
- Have done all you reasonably can in the time available and in the circumstances

## Separation by sex

The handbook makes it clearer that (paragraphs 355 to 357):

- You have an obligation not to discriminate against pupils on the basis of protected characteristics
- Unless permitted by an exception under the Equality Act 2010 (such as positive action or in relation to competitive sport) it may be unlawful for schools to separate pupils on the basis of any protected characteristic such as sex, religion, belief or gender reassignment while at school

If an inspector finds evidence of potentially less favourable treatment because of a protected characteristic, they must take legal advice.

Where:

- The issue is complex, and advice will take longer than anticipated, inspectors may pause the inspection until they receive advice
- Inspectors consider that there is sufficient evidence that a school is unlawfully discriminating against its pupils, inspectors will write about this in the inspection report and the separation may have an impact on the grade given

## Relationships and sex education (RSE)

Secondary schools' requirement to teach RSE includes any sixth-form provision (paragraph 318).

## Broader definition of 'off-rolling'

The definition now includes where a school (paragraph 401):

- Encourages a sixth-form student not to continue with their course of study, or

- Retains a pupil on the school roll but does not allow them to attend school normally, without a formal exclusion or suspension

## Clarity on terminology

Ofsted has added 5 more definitions to its section on terminology (paragraph 18):

- 'School' - this means a maintained school or an academy. Ofsted will specify 'maintained school' or 'academy' where applicable
- 'Leaders' - staff who are responsible for making key decisions about how the school operates, and will always include the headteacher
- 'Trust' - any academy trust, including single-academy trusts and multi-academy trusts
- 'Board of governors' - refers to the accountable authority for a maintained school
- 'Board of trustees' - refers to the accountable authority of a trust

## Other minor clarifications and changes

There have been a number of tweaks and changes throughout the handbook, including:

- The board of governors (maintained schools) or the board of trustees (academies) can request that the school they're responsible for be inspected. This will be a graded inspection (paragraph 52)
- Aligned inspections of **boarding and residential special schools**:
  - The 2 inspection teams will share inspection evidence where appropriate, including pupils' attendance and if concerns are raised with inspectors about the welfare of the children in the school and/or boarding or residential provision (paragraph 75)
  - Arrival and departure times of education and social care teams will differ throughout the inspection according to the requirements of each remit's framework (paragraph 76)
- Aligned inspections of schools that are **registered as children's homes**:
  - The 2 inspection teams will share inspection evidence where appropriate, including pupils' attendance and if concerns are raised with inspectors about the welfare of the children in the school and/or children's home (paragraph 79)
- **Concurrent inspections for linked provision** (this applies when 1 or more schools have arrangements to share important aspects of their provision, such as sixth-form programmes or an inclusion unit):
  - Inspectors can share key lines of enquiry that emerge during planning, where the issues are likely to affect both/all of the schools (paragraph 81)
  - Inspectors can share findings with the inspectors in the other inspection team (paragraph 81)
  - Inspectors won't rely solely on shared evidence to make their judgements (paragraph 82)
- **Academies**: if your trust has over 40 schools, the chair of trustees can delegate attendance at some inspection meetings to another trustee. But this can't be more than half of meetings (paragraph 99)
- When **preparing for inspection**, inspectors will also consider any other information about the school (including safeguarding) that is publicly available, including information reported in the press or online (paragraph 101)
- During the **inspection planning conversation**, inspectors will ask the headteacher to read Ofsted's [code of conduct](#) and tell them to raise any issues or concerns as soon as possible with the lead inspector (paragraph 94)
- Clarification that **PRUs and alternative provision (AP)** settings are not necessarily expected to deliver the National Curriculum (paragraph 214)
- The expectation that the school week be 32.5 hours long is now required by 1 September 2024 at the latest (previously, the deadline was September 2023) (paragraph 223)
- **Academies**: when talking about the curriculum with leaders, this will include talking to relevant trust leaders about their role. Where the trust has made decisions that affect the curriculum, inspectors will want to understand how and why the trust made those decisions, and the impact on pupils (paragraph 242)

- When looking at **maths**, inspectors will draw on information from the Year 4 multiplication check (paragraph 262)
- When **evaluating behaviour and attitudes**, inspectors will (paragraph 310):
  - Analyse the school's own analysis and understanding of the absence, persistent absence and severe absence rates, and how this has fed into your prioritisation strategy
  - Speak to trust leaders about the role the trust plays in the school's behaviour policies
- **Academies:** when evaluating leadership and management, the role of trusts will still be relevant, including how they assure and ensure that decision-making about implementation of trust policy is leading to a high-quality education for pupils (paragraph 341)
- When evaluating a school's approach to **safeguarding on an ungraded inspection**, the handbook has updated its bullets in line with the culture of safeguarding (paragraph 408)
- Inspectors may identify minor improvements (such as admin errors or out-of-date policies) that need to be made to the school's safeguarding practices during the inspection (paragraphs 411 and 489):
  - Inspectors will give schools the chance to rectify these issues
  - The school can still be judged effective for safeguarding, even where minor improvements can't be resolved before the end of inspection
- **Sixth form:** where your sixth form offers T-levels, inspectors will consider this provision as part of the 'quality of education' (paragraph 431)

### What's been removed?

- The handbook no longer explains that reports will often contain a separate paragraph that addresses the governance of the school (paragraph 135)
- The school's approach to harmful sexual behaviour no longer mentions when this will be assessed during an inspection (it used to be considered as part of curriculum, behaviour, pastoral support and safeguarding) (paragraph 145)
- While the handbook no longer mentions that local authorities and trusts responsible for inadequate schools need to prepare a statement of action, you're still [required](#) to do this. This is still included in paragraph 37 of Ofsted's [monitoring handbook](#)
- The handbook no longer mentions circumstances when it's appropriate to judge a setting as requires improvement for leadership and management, rather than inadequate
  - It now says that where safeguarding is ineffective, leadership and management is likely to be judged as inadequate (paragraph 406)
- Leadership and management grade descriptor:
  - 'Safeguarding is effective' has replaced the old descriptor 'the school has a culture of safeguarding that supports effective arrangements [...]' (paragraph 449)
- Overall effectiveness grade descriptor:
  - For 'requires improvement', the descriptor now says 'safeguarding is effective' (paragraph 459)
  - Ofsted has removed the following sentence: 'If there are any weaknesses in safeguarding, they are easily rectified and there are no serious failings that leave pupils either being harmed or at risk of harm'