

# School inspection framework FAQs

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## Preamble

Ofsted will be introducing a new way of inspecting schools in January 2012. In the spring of 2011, we consulted on these plans and received over 1,300 responses. We also made use of our consultative panels of parents and learners and held meetings with key professional associations and other stakeholders. We have completed 150 pilot inspections to evaluate the proposed arrangements. Details of the new arrangements were published in draft on 30 September.

Because so many people are interested in what we will be doing, including parents, teachers, and children and young people, we have produced answers for the most frequently asked questions (FAQs) about the new arrangements. If there is anything we have not addressed, please email us at [schoolsfaqs@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:schoolsfaqs@ofsted.gov.uk) and we will try to address your concerns. Where a relevant issue is raised by a number of people we will update these FAQs.

## The FAQs

### 1. Why are you introducing this new process now?

The new arrangements build on our existing framework for inspecting schools and respond to the evidence we have gained in recent Annual Reports. We have for some time been concerned that too much teaching is no better than satisfactory, that there are a high number of schools that have been judged satisfactory at successive inspections, and also about the proportion of primary age children not reaching the necessary levels in reading. The new arrangements are designed to focus on these and other key areas. We are also responding to plans in the Education Bill, which is currently being considered by parliament.

### 2. When will this new way of inspecting begin?

We aim to introduce the new arrangements in January 2012. We will be publishing all of the details about how this will work well before then so that everyone involved has plenty of time to get ready.

### 3. What are the main things you will be looking at?

The new inspections will focus on fewer things and the issues that are considered most important in schools – pupils' achievement, teaching and learning, leadership and management, and the behaviour and safety of pupils.

To make these judgements, inspectors will be undertaking more lesson observations and will also focus on reading, literacy and numeracy skills, including hearing pupils read in primary school inspections.

4. How much will you rely on exam and test results to make your judgements?

The progress that children make in school is very important as well as their results in exams and tests. Schools can be judged satisfactory or better for what children currently attending the school achieve even when recent examination results are below average, as long as these are improving well and pupils are making good progress from their starting points.

Key considerations will be the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress and the success of actions the school has been taking to improve achievement and the quality of education. Just as importantly, inspectors will observe how well pupils are doing in lessons, and discuss with pupils what their experiences have been, as well as examining the school's assessment records.

5. Can you explain the changes in how you will be measuring 'value-added' by schools?

While the technical CVA measure may be going, there will still be a very clear focus on measuring the improvement or 'value-added' progress for different groups of pupils during their time at a school. The judgement on pupils' achievement, which takes account of standards of attainment but also pupils' learning and the progress they have made, will remain at the heart of our inspections. We expect there to be a strong correlation between the overall effectiveness judgement and that for pupils' achievement. In all circumstances, inspectors will evaluate the achievement of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.

6. Are there any specific arrangements in relation to special schools? Will progress be measured in the same way?

Inspectors will make the same set of judgements in special schools as they will in mainstream schools. In making the judgement about pupils' achievements, the evaluation schedule makes it clear that while many pupils with special educational needs are not precluded from attaining as well as or better than their peers, special consideration must be given to those groups of pupils whose cognitive ability is such that their attainment is unlikely ever to rise above 'low'. In these circumstances, the judgement on achievement will be based on an evaluation of the pupils' learning and progress relative to their starting points at particular ages and any assessment measures held by the school, but should not take account of their attainment compared to national benchmarks.

7. Is it right that you will no longer automatically inspect outstanding schools?

Subject to the legislation currently passing through parliament becoming law, primary, secondary and academy converter schools judged to be outstanding at their last inspection will no longer be routinely inspected unless there are concerns about their performance. This will allow Ofsted to focus valuable resources on those schools that most need improvement.

8. Won't standards in outstanding schools slip because you are not inspecting them?

The government has decided that schools judged to be outstanding at their last inspection should no longer be routinely inspected. We believe this will allow us to focus our efforts on those schools that most need improvement.

There will be safeguards in place to ensure that outstanding schools that are declining can be picked up. We will have a rigorous annual risk assessment process that will check the performance of outstanding schools and will also include consideration of complaints and information from parental questionnaires on our website, and take account of changes in leadership.

In addition, Ofsted will also continue to visit outstanding schools as part of our 'survey' inspections where we look at National Curriculum subjects and particular aspects of school life.

9. How often will satisfactory and good schools be inspected?

Schools judged to be satisfactory will be inspected within three years of their last inspection. Schools judged as good at their last inspection could go up to five years between inspections, provided they keep performing well.

10. Will there be any change to how much time inspectors spend in schools?

No; inspectors will still normally be in schools for two days.

11. Will you keep the same system of grading schools?

Schools will still be judged as outstanding, good, satisfactory or inadequate.

12. Will you be introducing unannounced inspections for all schools?

No, the amount of notice given will stay the same; normally this is up to two days. This ensures enough time for us to get the views of parents and school governors as part of the inspection. It is always possible for us to undertake an unannounced inspection where we deem it necessary.

13. What about unannounced spot checks for schools where behaviour is a concern – are you doing these?

Yes; this autumn, Ofsted will trial some unannounced monitoring visits of satisfactory schools where behaviour is a weakness. The trial will help determine whether unannounced visits are workable and give a clearer picture of behaviour in schools. The results will inform our future monitoring visits to schools where there is a significant need to improve behaviour. By testing out unannounced monitoring visits, we will see if there is even more we can do to help schools address behaviour problems.

14. What about the judgements that are being dropped – isn't there a risk of things being missed?

We are confident that the new inspection framework will provide a robust evidence base for judging how well a school is performing. Inspectors will consider the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and how well the curriculum meets pupils' needs, which encompass important aspects not in the four principal judgements, such as community cohesion and a school's approach to special educational needs. The judgement on the school's leadership and management will also take these areas into account.

15. How can we make comparisons to previous inspection results when the system is changing again?

The government has made it clear in the Education Bill that they want to see some significant changes to the principal judgements made by inspectors.

We will continue to be able to give clear information about how a school is doing at the time of the inspection. Although the system is changing, it will be possible to make comparisons over time for the key judgements on teaching, achievement, behaviour and school leadership.

16. How will you be ensuring that pupils with any particular needs are being considered?

We are committed to ensuring that the quality of education for all groups of children is fully assessed in our inspections. We do not believe this requires a single judgement for particular groups of pupils because this evidence will form a key element of all principal judgements. Inspectors will always consider how well different groups of pupils are achieving and any differences between the achievement of different groups of pupils and that of all pupils nationally will be closely considered. Pupils' learning and progress will remain very important in judging achievement. Inspectors will also look for evidence about the quality of provision for different groups of pupils and will evaluate whether the school is doing all it should to promote equality of opportunity.

17. When it comes to the behaviour judgement, will you simply judge the outcomes (how pupils behave) or the measures schools are taking to impact on behaviour?

We will look at both. We understand that how a child behaves is not exclusively determined by the actions of the school, but we know schools play a very important role in improving a pupils' behaviour.

18. How are you going to ensure that equality issues are properly considered as part of the new way of inspecting?

We will be considering equality throughout all of our judgements. We believe it should be reflected in all aspects of school life and to have a standalone judgment is not the most appropriate way to ensure the principles of equality permeate all elements of school.

19. Are there any risks in dropping the requirement for a judgement on effective care, guidance and support – couldn't this result in schools stopping to look carefully at children's well-being?

Children's well-being is very important and inspectors will continue to look at this throughout inspection. Considering how children are being supported will form part of our evaluation of the quality of teaching, leadership and management, behaviour and safety, as well as how well a school promotes their pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

20. How will the new framework ensure that safeguarding of pupils remains central to a school's ethos if there are no specific judgements on this area?

Our inspections will continue to look closely at this – in particular as part of the leadership and management judgement where inspectors will take account of the school's arrangements for safeguarding its pupils as an essential legal responsibility of school leaders, including governors. However, it will also be linked to the judgement on behaviour and safety and feed into our evaluation of how well a school promotes their pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

21. Will you be requiring schools to audit the sexual orientation of pupils at their school?

No. It is important in any school that there is awareness of the needs of pupils and that they are supported to achieve. We do not have a checklist of groups that each school must identify – it is for the school to decide which pupils might need additional support. Inspectors have long had a legal duty to look at how well schools are ensuring they meet the needs of all their pupils. Parents would expect no child or groups of children to be left behind, and all to feel safe and able to thrive. Ofsted has identified in recent reports, for example, how some schools are not doing enough for their lowest attaining pupils, which are often white working class boys.

22. The views of parents are going to form an important part of the risk assessment process. How will you ensure that the online system is not abused?

Parents' views provide a really important insight into how well schools are doing and Ofsted is committed to improving the way we collect these. We are confident we will have the right balance of measures to ensure this system is robust and will treat parents and schools fairly while giving the opportunity for parents to give their views without too many obstacles being put in their way. We will be launching the full details soon.