

Press release

## Changes made to school inspections

Ofsted has today announced changes to improve aspects of its work with schools.

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From:

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Published

12 June 2023

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Changes to inspection processes, a revised complaints procedure and new wellbeing investment from government, are part of a package of measures being announced following a wide-ranging debate about the impact of school inspections.

Revisions to school inspections will see inspectors return more quickly to schools graded inadequate where this is only due to ineffective safeguarding, and proposed changes to Ofsted's complaints process will increase transparency and make it easier for schools to raise concerns.

The Department for Education (DfE) already funds the charity Education Support, to provide wellbeing help for school leaders, and that programme will now be doubled in size to support an additional 500 heads by March 2024. In the longer term, the DfE commits to further expand its mental health and wellbeing offer beyond March 2024.

In April, Ofsted's Chief Inspector [Amanda Spielman made a statement](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/hmci-commentary-improving-how-we-work>) broadly setting out some changes Ofsted was considering making to inspections. Since then, we have been in regular discussion with union leaders, other sector representatives and the DfE about a package of measures to improve aspects of our work with schools.

Today we are able to announce more about these changes, many of which will take effect immediately, with the rest introduced from September this year:

## Inspecting safeguarding

Inspectors will now return more quickly to schools graded inadequate overall due to ineffective safeguarding, but where all other judgements were good or better. We will return within 3 months of an inspection report being published, and parents will be informed of this intention in the report. If the school has been able to resolve the safeguarding concerns it is likely to see its overall grade improve.

From September, we will offer schools greater clarity about the threshold for effective versus ineffective safeguarding through our inspection handbook, as well as regular blogs and webinars. We will also describe ineffective safeguarding more clearly in inspection reports, to help reassure parents and others that these judgements are not made lightly.

## Complaints

We are today launching a formal consultation on significant changes to the complaints system, aimed at resolving complaints more quickly through improved dialogue between Ofsted and providers, reducing the administrative burden on those making a complaint, and increasing transparency in the process.

Read the [consultation proposals and have your say](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-ofsteds-post-inspection-arrangements-and-complaints-handling-proposals-2023) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-ofsteds-post-inspection-arrangements-and-complaints-handling-proposals-2023>).

## Information for schools

As set out in a blog post published today, we are giving schools more information about the broad timing of their next inspection. Schools will still get one day's notice of an inspection, but the blog gives more clarity about the year they are likely to be inspected. This will be particularly helpful for schools that have been exempt from inspection for many years. We are also continuing to engage with all outstanding schools that were last inspected before September 2015 through face-to-face seminars with inspectors.

Read the ['When will my school be inspected?' blog post](https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2023/06/12/when-will-my-school-be-inspected/) (<https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2023/06/12/when-will-my-school-be-inspected/>).

Inspectors will be clear that it is up to a headteacher to decide which colleagues, or others, they share their inspection outcome with – being aware that judgements are provisional until the report is finalised. Provisional outcomes can sometimes change and shouldn't be published or shared with parents until finalised. This will also now be set out in the covering letter that accompanies draft inspection reports.

From September, when discussing areas of weakness, inspection reports will refer to 'the school' by default, rather than individuals. The contextual information at the end of reports will also be amended to list all those with responsibility for the school.

Amanda Spielman said:

“ When we inspect schools our priority must always be children's education and wellbeing – but at the same time we want to make sure inspection is as positive an experience for school staff as it can be. Since the sad death of Ruth Perry, there has been considerable debate around Ofsted's work and I want to reassure people that we are listening to their concerns, and thinking carefully about how we can revise aspects of our work without losing our clear focus on the needs of children and their parents.

“ We have listened to many voices in this debate. I'm particularly grateful to union leaders, other sector representatives and the Secretary of State for the constructive discussions we've had over the last couple of months, which have helped us with this package of measures.”

Gillian Keegan, Secretary of State for Education said:

“ Ofsted is central to this government's success in raising school standards, and it is right it continues to evolve.

- “ We must ensure our school leaders have the support they need, which is why today we are significantly expanding our wellbeing support. This expansion will help make sure head teachers have access to support whenever they need it.
- “ Taken together, today’s announcements are a really important step. I have committed to continuing our work on improving the way we inspect our schools with Ofsted and the family of Ruth Perry following her tragic death.”

## **ENDS**

### **Notes for editors/further background**

#### **Inspecting and reporting on safeguarding**

Only 1.3% of all state schools are currently judged ineffective for safeguarding, and in the last 18 months only 12 state schools have been judged good or better in every area apart from safeguarding. This figure has remained broadly the same pre-and post-COVID.

Although these circumstances are rare, we understand that schools in this situation will want to improve safeguarding quickly and parents will want to know this has been done. So, where a school that would otherwise be good or outstanding is graded inadequate due to ineffective safeguarding, inspectors will now return within 3 months of the report’s publication to carry out a monitoring inspection. If the school has successfully dealt with safeguarding concerns in that time, this will be recognised through a new inspection report and grading, meaning the school will only have an overall judgement of inadequate for a short period.

The Secretary of State will then be able to decide whether to revoke any academy order applying to the school, or withdraw any warning notice issued to an existing academy, and will not have taken any decision pre-empting the re-inspection.

We also recognise that there is desire among schools for greater clarity about the threshold for effective versus ineffective safeguarding, and the difference between minor weaknesses and more significant issues. This will be set out in the school inspection handbook from September, and reflected in our inspector training. Ofsted will also communicate directly with schools, through webinars and blogs, to make it very clear what constitutes ineffective safeguarding and the high threshold for reaching this judgement.

Ofsted will also work to make sure ineffective safeguarding is more clearly described in inspection reports, so that the significance of weaknesses is not obscured. This will provide reassurance to parents and others that these judgements are not made lightly.

#### **Clarity about the timing of inspections**

In normal circumstances school leaders can roughly estimate the likely timing of their next inspection. However, this became more difficult following the pandemic,

which has increased anxiety – particularly for formerly exempt outstanding schools. Today, Ofsted is providing greater clarity for headteachers in a detailed blogpost. This detail will also be included in the inspection handbook from September.

## **Additional information for outstanding schools**

We recognise that leaders in many formerly exempt schools have not experienced inspection for a very long time and may be worried about what to expect. So we have started holding face-to-face seminars for all outstanding schools inspected before September 2015. These are being offered in small groups by teams of HMI.

## **Messaging around provisional outcomes and draft reports**

Ofsted's current inspection handbook already states that headteachers can share draft inspection outcomes and reports with relevant school staff and those with governance responsibilities. However, the covering letter that accompanies draft reports will now make clear that it is entirely for a headteacher to decide who to share their report with, as long as they are aware that outcomes are provisional until the report is finalised.

We will also provide assurance to schools that, with a small number of exceptions, staff can choose to be accompanied by a colleague when they talk to inspectors.

We will continue to host regular webinars to help school leaders and staff understand elements of inspection and address areas of anxiety.

## **Language in reports**

We are looking at how we can de-personalise the language used in inspection reports, particularly in reference to areas of weakness, so that we refer by default to 'the school', rather than to individuals. We will also amend the contextual information in our reports to refer to all those with responsibility for the school. This will take effect in September.

## **Consultation on the complaints process**

Ofsted is today launching a formal consultation on significant changes to the complaints system, most of which have been piloted over the last few months. Key proposals include:

- extending on-site dialogue during inspections, to help address any issues at an early stage
- introducing a new opportunity for providers to contact a Senior HMI the day after an inspection if they have concerns about the process or outcome
- a new conversation between the complainant and the investigator at the beginning of the process, aimed at making it more responsive to the specific concerns

- new arrangements for formal challenges to inspection outcomes to be considered sooner than is currently possible, so they can be addressed and reports finalised more quickly
- allowing complainants to escalate concerns to the Independent Complaints Adjudication Service for Ofsted (ICASO) at an earlier point in the process
- a new, periodic review of closed complaints by external representatives, to provide additional scrutiny and challenge

Press office

8.30am to 6pm Monday to Friday 0300 013 0415

Published 12 June 2023

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## Explore the topic

[Inspection and performance of schools \(/education/inspection-and-performance-of-schools\)](/education/inspection-and-performance-of-schools)

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