

Ofsted inspection

A guide for governing boards

November 2021



The expert organisation for school
governors, trustees, clerks and
other governance professionals

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NGA Ofsted research

NGA's March 2020 [research report](#) looks at the experiences and feedback from governors and trustees whose schools have recently undergone an Ofsted inspection to help identify the role governance plays and should play in the inspection process.



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, the results of which are published online.

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 an 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 boards should expect when they meet with inspectors
- know what steps can be taken after the inspection to support school improvement

Ofsted changes from September 2021

Ofsted have amended the school inspection handbook to reflect recent research, changes to policy and in recognition of the impact of COVID-19. In summary, the changes mean that inspectors will now:

- agree safety protocols that the inspection team will follow
- carry out inspections on-site with some limited activities carried out remotely if necessary
- focus on understanding the impact of COVID-19 and seek to understand how school leaders have adapted their school development plans
- want to know how schools have adapted and prioritised the curriculum during the pandemic
- discuss pupils' attendance with school leaders and seek to identify how schools have achieved the best possible attendance
- inspect how sexual abuse and harassment is dealt with and whether appropriate action has been taken to address and prevent such issues occurring
- consider the school's [career offer](#) in complying with the Baker clause
- evaluate the school's use of tutors as part of the quality of education judgement
- consider the school's delivery of the early career framework

Our [Ofsted webinar](#) provides more information about the amendments made to inspections to account for COVID-19.

1. Types of inspection

Section 5 inspections are the standard, full-length inspection, normally lasting 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

Section 8 inspections normally last two days and do not result in a graded judgement. This type of inspection may be deemed to be a section 5 inspection if the inspector finds that the school's overall effectiveness or safeguarding provisions may have declined.

1.1 Frequency of inspections

Judgement at last inspection	Frequency of subsequent inspection
Good or outstanding*	Section 8 inspection around every four years
Requires improvement	Section 5 inspection within approximately six terms
Inadequate	Depends on whether the school leadership (including the governing board) have demonstrated the capacity to bring about improvement – see section 4.2

Outside of this, Ofsted will carry out an inspection at any time where there are serious concerns (about safeguarding or leadership, for example).

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

- Schools last inspected before September 2015 will receive a section 5 inspection
- Schools last inspected after September 2015 will receive a section 8 inspection

1.2 Summary evaluations of MATs

Section 5 and 8 inspections are carried out on an individual school basis. However, Ofsted carry out [summary evaluations of multi academy trusts \(MAT\)](#) which look at the extent to which the trust is delivering a high quality education and improving pupils' outcomes. Summary evaluations look at the same areas covered in the education inspection framework.

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 will also meet trustees and visit individual academies to capture the views of academy leaders and staff.

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 the inspection.

2. Before an inspection

Ofsted will usually telephone the headteacher to give notice of an inspection the day before the 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.

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](#).

Deferrals

Ofsted's [deferral policy](#) details the limited circumstances where a school's request to defer an inspection may be granted, including for reasons relating to COVID-19.

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 their 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 the expected progress is not being made
- the plans in place to address this

The areas above will 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.

Areas 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 NGA 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 ■ know what pupils leave the school knowing and having done ■ receive sufficient data to monitor the outcomes detailed in the strategy
Quality of education	<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
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 strengths and improvement ■ build effective partnerships with external stakeholders (such as local employers) to improve educational standards for all pupils
Safeguarding Safeguarding: a guide for governing boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ influence a positive culture of safeguarding ■ provide strategic oversight and monitoring of safeguarding policies and practice ■ ensure the single central record is kept up to date ■ understand the risks that their pupils are likely to face
Statutory requirements 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. During an inspection

The [education inspection framework](#) sets out how Ofsted inspects schools and is accompanied by [section 5](#) and [section 8 inspection handbooks](#).

Most Ofsted inspections will involve one or two inspectors depending on the size of school. Inspectors evaluate the following areas:

Quality of education

This judgement considers 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 of the education they have received (the 'impact').

You can read more about the role that governing boards have in influencing and supporting the quality of education that all pupils receive in our [guide to curriculum effectiveness](#).

Behaviour and attitudes

Inspectors consider how leaders and staff create a safe, calm, orderly and positive environment in the school and the impact this has on the behaviour and attitudes of pupils and their academic attainment.

Personal development

This judgement focuses on developing 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.

Section 8 inspection focus

Section 8 inspections are likely to concentrate on the following elements within each judgement area:

Behaviour

- Whether schools set high expectations for pupils' behaviour and conduct and applies this fairly and consistently.
- Whether staff and pupils create a positive environment in which bullying is not tolerated.

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).

Pupil's wider development – the extent to which the curriculum provides goes beyond academic development to enhance spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

3.1 Deep dives

Inspectors will conduct 'deep dives' into three to four subject areas to identify whether the school's curriculum offer is broad, balanced, and sequential through each stage of school. This will provide evidence on curriculum intent, implementation and impact. This will entail:

- discussions with senior leaders, curriculum leaders, teachers and pupils
- scrutiny of pupil's work
- visits to a sample of lessons (carried out alongside a school leader)

3.2 Focus on safeguarding

Following Ofsted's [review of sexual harassment and online abuse](#) in schools, inspectors will be placing a particular focus on the school's policies and actions in dealing with safeguarding issues. Inspectors will look to identify how incidents are recorded and dealt with, alongside cross-agency working and communication with key stakeholders. Governing boards should be aware of the nature of any concerns raised by parents and pupils and should be assured that school leaders have taken the right steps to overcome these issues.

Our [guide to the governance of safeguarding](#) provides more information on strategic oversight and monitoring.

3.3 Gathering evidence

Inspectors will gather evidence from a range of sources, including the following:

- National performance data – exploring trends and areas for improvement.
- Parent View responses – looking to see if there is any pattern to complaints such as bullying, behaviour or homework.
- School website – checking that statutory information is up to date and looking at how the school engages with stakeholders.
- Previous inspection data – looking to see that everything has been actioned as recommended.
- Exclusion records, behaviour records and up-to-date 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 3.4](#))
- meet with the executive leaders to discuss the school's self-evaluation and other aspects of school management

3.4 Governing board meeting with inspectors

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

Where the school is part of a multi academy trust, the meeting will be with the trust board. It may also include an academy committee (the local governing body), 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 purpose of the meeting is 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. Members of the board 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 children?
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?

3.5 The final 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, including provisional grades for each area of judgement. The lead inspector will also highlight recommendations for improvement.

We recommend that as many members of the governing board as possible attend the feedback meeting with inspectors to hear first-hand the grades awarded and the judgements that have been 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. After an inspection

4.1 Draft 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 for the school to challenge any factual inaccuracies or where it is felt that the use of language does not fully 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.

4.2 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 multi academy trust.
- Schools already part of a MAT can be moved to a different MAT where the regional schools commissioner 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 3 to 9 months of the publication of the section 5 inspection report. Inspectors will look for evidence of how well leaders are implementing the statement of action and the school's improvement plan.

Read Ofsted's guidance on [schools causing concern](#) – chapter two provides guidance on maintained schools and chapter four focuses on academies causing concern.

4.3 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

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.

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