

# The common inspection framework: education, skills and early years

Framework for inspections carried out, respectively, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended), section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the Education and Inspections Act 2006, and the Childcare Act 2006.

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The common inspection framework sets out how Ofsted inspects maintained schools and academies, non-association independent schools, further education and skills provision and registered early years settings in England.

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## Introduction

1. The common inspection framework was devised by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) for use from September 2015. It sets out the principles that apply to inspection and the main judgements that inspectors make when conducting inspections of maintained schools, academies, non-association independent schools, further education and skills providers and registered early years settings.<sup>1</sup>
2. The common inspection framework ('the framework') is designed to bring together the inspection of different education, skills and early years settings to provide greater coherence across different providers that cater for similar age ranges. It ensures more comparability through inspection when children and learners move from one setting to another. It supports greater consistency across the inspection of different remits.
3. The framework reflects relevant legislation for each type of setting.<sup>2</sup> It is accompanied by an inspection handbook for each of the four remits:
  - early years
  - maintained schools and academies
  - non-association independent schools
  - further education and skills.
4. The handbooks set out how each of the inspection judgements will be made. They reflect the needs and expectations of different phases and the differences between various age groups. Inspectors will inspect the type of provision for which they have the appropriate expertise and training. A full set of all documents, including for the registration and inspection of different types of early years settings, is available.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 20 contains a full list of the settings covered by the common inspection framework.

<sup>2</sup> These inspections are carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended); ([www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents)), the Education and Inspections Act 2006; ([www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents)), section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014; ([www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/3283/contents/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/3283/contents/made)) and the Childcare Act 2006; ([www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21/contents)). All inspections carried out using the new common inspection framework will continue to meet relevant legislative requirements.

<sup>3</sup> [www.gov.uk/guidance/changes-to-education-inspection-from-september-2015](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/changes-to-education-inspection-from-september-2015). This framework does not apply to Ofsted's registration of early years settings.

## Principles of inspection and regulation

5. Ofsted is required to carry out its work in ways that encourage the services it inspects and regulates to improve to be user-focused and to be efficient and effective in their use of resources.<sup>4</sup>
6. Inspection provides independent, external evaluation that includes a diagnosis of what should improve. It is based on gathering a range of evidence that is evaluated against an inspection framework and takes full account of our policies and relevant legislation in areas such as safeguarding, equality and diversity.
7. Inspection provides important information to parents, carers, learners and employers about the quality of education, training and care being provided. These groups should be able to make informed choices based on the information published in inspection reports. Under the common inspection framework, readers will be able to compare different inspection reports quickly and easily, particularly where the reports are about provision for children or learners of similar ages.
8. The framework introduces a common set of judgements across a range of types of provision, underpinned by consistent criteria for reaching those judgements. Inspectors will take comparable approaches to gathering evidence in different settings, although there may be some variation (driven by the age of learners and the type of provision). Inspectors will comply with relevant guidance and codes of conduct,<sup>5</sup> but they will always seek to be curious as well as compliant.
9. Inspection provides assurance to the public and to government that minimum standards of education, skills and childcare are being met; that, where relevant, public money is being spent well; and that arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## How does inspection seek to promote improvement?

10. Inspection supports improvement in education by setting standards, reporting on performance against other relevant standards set by government, and raising expectations of performance in all settings and remits inspected and regulated. It provides challenge and the impetus to act where improvement is needed.

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<sup>4</sup> As set out in the Education and Inspections Act 2006;  
[www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents).

<sup>5</sup> Such as the Home Office Code of Practice on Powers of Entry, December 2014.  
[www.gov.uk/government/publications/powers-of-entry-code-of-practice](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/powers-of-entry-code-of-practice).

## Helping to protect children and learners

11. Inspectors will always have regard for how well children and learners are helped and protected so that they are kept safe. Although inspectors will not provide a separate numerical grade for this key aspect of a provider's work, inspectors will always make a written judgement under leadership and management about whether or not the arrangements for safeguarding children and learners are effective.
12. Ofsted has published a document setting out the approach inspectors should take to inspecting safeguarding in all the settings covered by the framework. It should be read alongside the framework and handbooks:
  - 'Inspecting safeguarding in early years, education and skills settings'.<sup>6</sup>
13. It is also essential that inspectors are familiar with the statutory guidance in relation to safeguarding:
  - 'Keeping children safe in education: Statutory guidance for schools and colleges'<sup>7</sup>
  - 'Working together to safeguard children'.<sup>8</sup>

## Groups of learners

14. Inspection is primarily about evaluating how well individual children and learners benefit from the education provided by the school or provider. Inspection tests the school's or provider's response to individual needs by observing how well it helps all children and learners to make progress and fulfil their potential. In making judgements, inspectors will pay particular attention to the outcomes for the following groups:
  - disabled children and learners and those who have special educational needs
  - children and learners in specialist provision
  - boys/men
  - girls/women
  - the highest and lowest attaining children and learners

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<sup>6</sup> *Inspecting safeguarding in early years, education and skills settings*, Ofsted, August 2015; [www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-safeguarding-in-early-years-education-and-skills-from-september-2015](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-safeguarding-in-early-years-education-and-skills-from-september-2015).

<sup>7</sup> *Keeping children safe in education*, Department for Education, July 2015; [www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2).

<sup>8</sup> *Working together to safeguard children*, Department for Education, March 2015; [www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2).

- children and learners for whom English is an additional language
- children and learners from minority ethnic groups
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and learners
- lesbian, gay and bisexual children and learners
- transgender children and learners
- young carers
- children and learners attending alternative provision
- children and learners with medical conditions
- disadvantaged<sup>9</sup> children and learners
- children looked after and care leavers
- older learners
- children and learners of different religions and beliefs
- ex-offenders
- teenage mothers
- other vulnerable groups.<sup>10</sup>

## **The Equality Act 2010**

15. Inspectors will assess the extent to which the school or provider complies with relevant legal duties as set out in the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998, promotes equality of opportunity and takes positive steps to prevent any form of discrimination, either direct or indirect, against those with protected characteristics in all aspects of their work.<sup>11</sup>

## **Conduct during inspection**

16. Inspectors must uphold the highest professional standards in their work and treat everyone they encounter during inspections fairly and with respect and sensitivity.

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<sup>9</sup> In schools, 'disadvantaged children and learners' specifically refers to those for whom the pupil premium or early years pupil premium provides support.

<sup>10</sup> In the common inspection framework and the handbooks relating to it, the terms 'groups of pupils' or 'groups of learners' are groups included in this list.

<sup>11</sup> The Equality Act 2010; [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents).

17. Inspectors will:

- evaluate objectively, be impartial and inspect without fear or favour
- uphold and demonstrate Ofsted values at all times<sup>12</sup>
- evaluate provision in line with frameworks, national standards or regulatory requirements
- base all evaluations on clear and robust evidence
- declare all actual and perceived conflicts of interest and have no real or perceived connection with the provider that could undermine objectivity
- report honestly and clearly, ensuring that judgements are fair and reliable
- carry out their work with integrity, treating all those they meet with courtesy, respect and sensitivity
- take all reasonable steps to prevent undue anxiety and minimise stress
- act in the best interests and well-being of service users, prioritising the safeguarding of children and learners at all times
- maintain purposeful and productive dialogue with those being inspected and communicate judgements sensitively but clearly and frankly
- respect the confidentiality of information, particularly about individuals and their work
- respond appropriately to reasonable requests
- take prompt and appropriate action on any safeguarding or health and safety issues
- use their title of HMI or Ofsted Inspector only in relation to their work for Ofsted.

## Expectations of providers

18. It is important that inspectors and providers establish and maintain a positive working relationship based on courteous and professional behaviour. Ofsted expects providers to:

- be courteous and professional, treating inspectors with respect and sensitivity
- apply their own codes of conduct in their dealings with inspectors
- enable inspectors to conduct their visit in an open and honest way

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<sup>12</sup> For more information about Ofsted's values, see *Raising standards, improving lives: Ofsted's strategic plan*, Ofsted, July 2014; [www.gov.uk/government/publications/raising-standards-improving-lives-ofsted-strategic-plan-2014-to-2016](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/raising-standards-improving-lives-ofsted-strategic-plan-2014-to-2016).



- enable inspectors to evaluate the provision objectively against the frameworks, standards or regulatory requirements
- provide evidence that will enable the inspector to report honestly, fairly and reliably about their provision
- work with inspectors to minimise disruption, stress and bureaucracy
- ensure the good health and safety of inspectors while on their premises
- maintain a purposeful dialogue with the inspector or the inspection team
- draw any concerns about the inspection to the attention of inspectors promptly and in a suitable manner
- recognise that sometimes inspectors will need to observe practice and talk to staff and users without the presence of a manager or registered person.

## **The frequency and type of inspections**

19. Ofsted is committed to inspecting in a proportionate way so that resources are focused where they are needed most. Ofsted undertakes inspection activity depending on the specific provider and the legislation governing the inspection within that remit. Some inspection activity is based on a regular cycle of inspection and other inspections are based on an assessment of risk. Inspections can also take place at the request of the Secretary of State.<sup>13</sup> Intervals between inspections are set in relation to the type of inspection required for different providers. Further details about the different types of inspection and their frequencies can be found in the relevant inspection handbook.

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<sup>13</sup> For example, all independent schools are inspected at the direction of the Department for Education (DfE), which is the registration authority for independent schools. Therefore, Ofsted may be asked to inspect an independent school at any time. This might occur, for example, where the DfE has particular concerns about a school.

## Provision inspected under the common inspection framework

20. The common inspection framework applies to the inspection of:
- maintained schools and academies under section 5<sup>14</sup>
  - non-maintained special schools (as approved by the Secretary of State under section 342 of the Education Act 1996)
  - pupil referral units
  - non-association independent<sup>15</sup> schools
  - further education colleges, sixth form colleges and independent specialist colleges
  - independent learning providers
  - community learning and skills providers
  - employers funded by the Skills Funding Agency to train their own employees
  - higher education institutions providing further education
  - providers of learning in the judicial services
  - National Careers Service – careers advice and guidance
  - registered early years settings.

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<sup>14</sup> This includes all sponsor-led academies, academy converter schools, academy special schools, free schools, special free schools, maintained nursery schools and alternative provision academies. University technical colleges (UTCs) and studio schools, 16 to 19 academies and 16 to 19 studio schools are also inspected under this framework.

<sup>15</sup> An independent school is defined in section 463 of the Education Act 1996, as amended as:

'any school at which full-time education is provided for—  
 (a) five or more pupils of compulsory school age, or  
 (b) at least one pupil of that age for whom a statement is maintained under section 324, or who is looked after by a local authority (within the meaning of section 22 of the Children Act 1989),  
 and which is not a school maintained by a local education authority or a special school not so maintained.'

This definition brings into the scope of an inspection a number of very small independent schools, many of which have dual registration as an independent children's home and provide exclusively for vulnerable looked after young people who may also be disabled or have a special educational need.

## **The grading scale used for inspection judgements**

21. A four-point grading scale will be used in all inspections to make the principal judgements:
- grade 1: outstanding
  - grade 2: good
  - grade 3: requires improvement
  - grade 4: inadequate.

## **Judgements made by inspectors**

22. The common inspection framework ensures that a coherent set of judgements are made across the different education, skills and early years settings. The methods adopted by inspectors to gather evidence and the main criteria used by inspectors to make judgements are set out in the different remit handbooks. In most instances, these methods and criteria are common across the different education, skills and early years remits.

## **Overall effectiveness**

23. Inspectors will use all the available evidence to evaluate what it is like to be a child, learner or other user in the provision. In making the judgements about a provider's overall effectiveness, inspectors will consider whether the standard of education, training or care is good or outstanding. If it is not at least good, inspectors will consider whether it requires improvement or is inadequate.
24. Inspectors will also make graded judgements on the following areas using the four-point scale:
- effectiveness of leadership and management
  - quality of teaching, learning and assessment
  - personal development, behaviour and welfare
  - outcomes for children and learners.

## **What judgements will be made under short inspections?**

25. As of September 2015, Ofsted undertakes short inspections for maintained schools, academies and further education and skills providers that were judged good at their previous inspection. Short inspections take place approximately every three years. A short inspection will confirm that the previous grade for overall effectiveness is accurate and the setting remains good and that safeguarding is effective. These arrangements also apply to special schools,

pupil referral units and maintained nursery schools that were judged good or outstanding at their previous inspection.<sup>16</sup>

26. A short inspection does **not** result in individual graded judgements. It does **not** change the overall effectiveness grade of the school or provider. If inspectors believe that a change of grade may be necessary, they will trigger a full inspection,<sup>17</sup> which will make the full set of graded judgements using the four-point grading scale.

## What inspectors will consider when making judgements

27. Inspectors will use the following criteria to make each of the graded judgements. These criteria are common for all the types of provision covered by the framework. Individual inspection handbooks for each remit explain how these criteria are applied in each context.

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

28. Inspectors will make a judgement on the effectiveness of leadership and management by evaluating the extent to which leaders, managers and governors:
- demonstrate an ambitious vision, have high expectations for what all children and learners can achieve and ensure high standards of provision and care for children and learners
  - improve staff practice and teaching, learning and assessment through rigorous performance management and appropriate professional development
  - evaluate the quality of the provision and outcomes through robust self-assessment, taking account of users' views, and use the findings to develop capacity for sustainable improvement
  - provide learning programmes or a curriculum that have suitable breadth, depth and relevance so that they meet any relevant statutory requirements, as well as the needs and interests of children, learners and employers, nationally and in the local community
  - successfully plan and manage learning programmes, the curriculum and careers advice so that all children and learners get a good start and are well prepared for the next stage in their education, training or employment

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<sup>16</sup> These settings are currently not exempt from routine inspections if they are judged outstanding.

<sup>17</sup> The term 'full inspection' refers to the standard inspections across the remits covered by this consultation, for example section 5 inspections for schools or full inspections for further education and skills providers.

- actively promote equality and diversity, tackle bullying and discrimination and narrow any gaps in achievement between different groups of children and learners
- actively promote British values<sup>18</sup>
- make sure that safeguarding arrangements to protect children, young people and learners meet all statutory and other government requirements, promote their welfare and prevent radicalisation and extremism.

29. Inspectors will always report on whether or not arrangements for safeguarding children and learners are effective.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

30. Inspectors will make a judgement on the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment by evaluating the extent to which:

- teachers, practitioners and other staff have consistently high expectations of what each child or learner can achieve, including the most able and the most disadvantaged
- teachers, practitioners and other staff have a secure understanding of the age group they are working with and have relevant subject knowledge that is detailed and communicated well to children and learners
- assessment information is gathered from looking at what children and learners already know, understand and can do and is informed by their parents/previous providers as appropriate
- assessment information is used to plan appropriate teaching and learning strategies, including to identify children and learners who are falling behind in their learning or who need additional support, enabling children and learners to make good progress and achieve well
- except in the case of the very young, children and learners understand how to improve as a result of useful feedback from staff and, where relevant, parents, carers and employers understand how learners should improve and how they can contribute to this
- engagement with parents, carers and employers helps them to understand how children and learners are doing in relation to the standards expected and what they need to do to improve
- equality of opportunity and recognition of diversity are promoted through teaching and learning

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<sup>18</sup> For a definition of these values, see the *Prevent Strategy*, [www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-strategy-2011](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-strategy-2011).

- where relevant, English, mathematics and other skills necessary to function as an economically active member of British society and globally are promoted through teaching and learning.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

31. Inspectors will make a judgement on the personal development, behaviour and welfare of children and learners by evaluating the extent to which the provision is successfully promoting and supporting children's and other learners':

- pride in achievement and commitment to learning, supported by a positive culture across the whole provider
- self-confidence, self-awareness and understanding of how to be a successful learner
- choices about the next stage of their education, employment, self-employment or training, where relevant, from impartial careers advice and guidance
- where relevant, employability skills so that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment, self-employment or training
- prompt and regular attendance
- following of any guidelines for behaviour and conduct, including management of their own feelings and behaviour, and how they relate to others
- understanding of how to keep themselves safe from relevant risks such as abuse, sexual exploitation and extremism, including when using the internet and social media
- knowledge of how to keep themselves healthy, both emotionally and physically, including through exercising and healthy eating
- personal development, so that they are well prepared to respect others and contribute to wider society and life in Britain.

## **Outcomes for children and other learners**

32. Inspectors will take account of current standards and progress, including the provider's own data, and make a relevant judgement on academic and other learning outcomes for children and learners by evaluating the extent to which they:

- progress well from their different starting points and achieve or exceed standards expected for their age
- attain relevant qualifications so that they can and do progress to the next stage of their education into courses that lead to higher-level qualifications and into jobs that meet local and national needs.

## Arrangements for different types of provision

33. In addition to the judgements set out in the framework, inspectors will need to make a variety of other judgements and undertake regulatory activity in different types of provision. This section sets out what those additional judgements and activities are.

### Early years

34. The common inspection framework sets out how Ofsted will inspect providers on the Early Years Register. In addition to inspection, Ofsted is also responsible for the registration and regulation of these providers. Details about the registration and regulation of settings on the Early Years Register can be found at:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/become-a-registered-early-years-or-childcare-provider-in-england](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/become-a-registered-early-years-or-childcare-provider-in-england)

and

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-provider-non-compliance-action-by-ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-provider-non-compliance-action-by-ofsted).

### Non-association independent schools

35. Non-association independent schools are subject to the Independent School Standards. Inspectors will check that schools meet these standards during inspection. Further details can be found at:  
[www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/3283/contents/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/3283/contents/made).

### Schools with early years settings

36. Maintained schools and academies and non-association independent schools that have Early Years Foundation Stage provision are given a separate grade for that provision as part of school inspections conducted under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended by the Education Act 2011). This contributes to the judgement about the overall effectiveness of the school. The age of children that exempts schools from registering as early years providers has been lowered from three to two. Provision for two-year-olds in schools is inspected as part of a school inspection.

### Schools with 16 to 19 study programmes

37. Maintained schools and academies and non-association independent schools are given a separate grade for sixth form provision as part of school inspections conducted under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended by the Education Act 2011). This contributes to the judgement about the overall effectiveness of the school.

## Settings with residential and boarding provision

38. The inspection of boarding and residential provision will be conducted under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding or residential provision, as appropriate. Further details of how these boarding/residential inspections will be carried out can be found at:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-framework-for-inspecting-boarding-and-residential-provision-in-schools](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-framework-for-inspecting-boarding-and-residential-provision-in-schools)

and

[www.gov.uk/guidance/social-care-common-inspection-framework-sccif-residential-provision-of-further-education-colleges](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-care-common-inspection-framework-sccif-residential-provision-of-further-education-colleges)

## Further education and skills provision

39. Further education and skills providers will also have the following types of provision graded where appropriate: 16 to 19 study programmes, adult learning programmes, apprenticeships, traineeships, provision for learners with high needs and 14 to 16 full-time provision. These contribute to the judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.