The education inspection framework

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.

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

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Introduction

1. The education inspection framework has been devised by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for use from September 2019. It sets out the principles that apply to inspection, and the main judgements that inspectors make when carrying out inspections of maintained schools, academies, non-association independent schools, further education and skills providers and registered early years settings in England.[1]

2. The education inspection framework ('the framework') applies to the inspection of different education, skills and early years settings to ensure comparability when learners[2] move from one setting to another. It supports consistency across the inspection of different remits.

3. The framework reflects relevant legislation for each type of setting.[3] 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 remit 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 types of provision for which they have appropriate expertise and training.

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[1] Paragraph 19 contains a full list of the settings covered by the education inspection framework.
[2] The term 'learners' is used for expediency throughout this framework to encompass in a single word those attending education, skills and registered early years settings. It should be read as including: 'children' in early years provision, 'pupils' in all schools, 'students' in sixth forms and colleges, and 'apprentices', 'trainees' and 'adult learners' in the range of FES providers. Greater distinction is made in each of the inspection handbooks.
[3] These inspections are carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended); www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents; the Education and Inspections Act 2006; 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; and the Childcare Act 2006;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.

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.[4]

6. Inspection provides independent, external evaluation that includes a diagnosis of 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 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.

8. The framework sets out the judgements that apply to all education, skills and early years provision. These are underpinned by consistent, researched criteria for reaching those judgements. Inspectors will take comparable approaches to gathering evidence in different settings, although there may be some variation, for example depending on the age of learners and the type of provision. Inspectors will comply with relevant guidance and codes of conduct,[5] but they will always try to be curious.

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.

A force for improvement

10. Ofsted exists to be a force for improvement through intelligent, responsible and focused inspection and regulation.[6] This is our guiding principle, and the primary purpose of inspection under this framework is to bring about improvement in education provision.

11. Through the use of evidence, research and inspector training, we ensure that our judgements are as valid and reliable as they can be. These judgements focus on key strengths, from which other providers can learn intelligently, and

[4] As set out in the Education and Inspections Act 2006; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents.
[5] Such as the 'Powers of entry: code of practice', Home Office, March 2015; www.gov.uk/government/publications/powers-of-entry-code-of-practice.
[6] For more information see 'Ofsted strategy: 2017 to 2022', Ofsted, September 2017; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-strategy-2017-to-2022.

areas of weakness, from which the provider should seek to improve. Ofsted inspections act as a trigger to others to take action.

Helping to protect learners

12. Inspectors will always take into account how well learners are helped and protected so that they are kept safe. Although inspectors will not provide a separate numerical grade for this important aspect of a provider's work, they will always make a written judgement under leadership and management about whether or not the arrangements for safeguarding learners are effective.

13. Ofsted's document 'Inspecting safeguarding in early years, education and skills settings'[7] sets 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.

14. Inspectors are also required to be familiar with the statutory guidance in relation to safeguarding and take this into account when inspecting:

- 'Keeping children safe in education: Statutory guidance for schools and colleges on safeguarding children and safer recruitment'[8]
- 'Working together to safeguard children'.[9]

The Equality Act 2010

15. Inspectors will assess the extent to which the provider complies with relevant legal duties as set out in the Equality Act 2010[10] and the Human Rights Act 1998.[11]

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[7] 'Inspecting safeguarding in early years, education and skills settings', Ofsted, October 2018; www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-safeguarding-in-early-years-education-and-skills-from-september-2015.
[8] 'Keeping children safe in education', Department for Education, September 2018; www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2.
[9] 'Working together to safeguard children', Department for Education, August 2018; www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2.
[10] The Equality Act 2010 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents.
[11] The Human Rights Act 1998 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/contents.

Expectations of inspectors

16. It is important that inspectors and providers establish and maintain a positive working relationship based on courteous and professional behaviour. Ofsted expects its inspectors to uphold the highest professional standards in their work, and treat everyone they meet during inspections fairly and with respect and sensitivity.

17. In meeting this expectation, inspectors will:

- evaluate objectively, be impartial and inspect without fear or favour
- uphold and demonstrate Ofsted values at all times[12]
- evaluate provision in line with the framework, inspection handbooks, national standards or regulatory requirements
- base all evaluations on clear and strong evidence
- declare all actual and perceived conflicts of interest and have no real or perceived connection with the provider that could undermine the objectivity of the inspection
- 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 to minimise stress
- act in the best interests and well-being of learners, prioritising the safeguarding of learners at all times
- maintain purposeful and productive communication with those being inspected and inform them of judgements sensitively, but clearly and frankly
- respect the confidentiality of information as far as possible, particularly when the information is about individuals and their work
- respond appropriately to reasonable requests
- take prompt and appropriate action on any safeguarding or health and safety issues

[12] For more information about Ofsted's values, see 'Ofsted strategy: 2017 to 2022', Ofsted, September 2017; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-strategy-2017-to-2022.

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- use their title of Her Majesty's Inspector or Ofsted Inspector only in relation to their work for Ofsted.

Expectations of providers

18. In order to establish and maintain a positive working relationship, Ofsted expects providers to:

    - be courteous and professional, treating inspectors with respect and sensitivity
    - enable inspectors to carry out their visit in an open and honest way
    - enable inspectors to evaluate the provision objectively against the framework, handbooks and national standards or regulatory requirements
    - provide evidence – or access to evidence – that will enable the inspector to report honestly, fairly and reliably about their provision. This includes the opportunity for inspectors to meet with learners
    - work with inspectors to minimise disruption, stress and bureaucracy
    - ensure the health and safety of inspectors while on their premises
    - maintain purposeful and productive communication with the inspector or the inspection team
    - bring 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.

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Provision inspected under the education inspection framework

19. The framework applies to the inspection of:

- maintained schools and academies under section 5[13]
- 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 schools[14]
- further education colleges, sixth-form colleges and independent specialist colleges
- independent learning providers
- community learning and skills providers
- employers funded by the Education and 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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[13] 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.

[14] 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 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

20. 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

21. The framework ensures that a coherent set of judgements are made across the different education, skills and early years settings. The methods used by inspectors to gather evidence and the main criteria used by inspectors to make judgements are set out in the remit handbooks. In most instances, these methods and criteria are common across the different remits, but there will inevitably be some variation.

Overall effectiveness

22. Inspectors will use all the available evidence to evaluate what it is like to be a learner 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.

Key judgements

23. Inspectors will also make graded judgements on the following areas using the four-point scale:

- quality of education
- behaviour and attitudes
- personal development
- leadership and management.

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What inspectors will consider when making judgements

24. 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. Inspection remit handbooks explain how these criteria are applied in each context.

Quality of education

25. Inspectors will make a judgement on the quality of education by evaluating the extent to which:

Intent

- leaders adopt or construct a curriculum that is ambitious and designed to give all learners, particularly the most disadvantaged, the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life
- the provider's curriculum is coherently planned and sequenced towards cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills for future learning and employment
- the provider has the same academic, technical or vocational ambitions for almost all learners. Where this is not practical – for example, for some learners with high levels of special educational needs and/or disabilities – their curriculum is designed to be ambitious and to meet their needs
- learners study the full curriculum. Providers ensure this by teaching a full range of subjects for as long as possible, 'specialising' only when necessary

Implementation

- teachers[15] have good knowledge of the subject(s) and courses they teach. Leaders provide effective support for those teaching outside their main areas of expertise
- teachers present subject matter clearly, promoting appropriate discussion about the subject matter being taught. They check learners' understanding systematically, identify misconceptions accurately and provide clear, direct feedback. In doing so, they respond and adapt their teaching as necessary, without unnecessarily elaborate or differentiated approaches
- over the course of study, teaching is designed to help learners to remember in the long term the content they have been taught and to integrate new knowledge into larger concepts

[15] Throughout the framework, the term 'teachers' should be read as including early years practitioners and lecturers, trainers and assessors.

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- teachers and leaders use assessment well, for example to help learners embed and use knowledge fluently or to check understanding and inform teaching. Leaders understand the limitations of assessment and do not use it in a way that creates unnecessary burdens for staff or learners

- teachers create an environment that allows the learner to focus on learning. The resources and materials that teachers select – in a way that does not create unnecessary workload for staff – reflect the provider's ambitious intentions for the course of study and clearly support the intent of a coherently planned curriculum, sequenced towards cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills for future learning and employment

- a rigorous approach to the teaching of reading develops learners' confidence and enjoyment in reading. At the early stages of learning to read, reading materials are closely matched to learners' phonics knowledge

Impact

- learners develop detailed knowledge and skills across the curriculum and, as a result, achieve well. Where relevant, this is reflected in results from national tests and examinations which meet government expectations, or in the qualifications obtained

- learners are ready for the next stage of education, employment or training. Where relevant, they gain qualifications that allow them to go on to destinations that meet their interests, aspirations and the intention of their course of study. They read widely and often, with fluency and comprehension.

Behaviour and attitudes

26. Inspectors will make a judgement on behaviour and attitudes by evaluating the extent to which:

- the provider has high expectations for learners' behaviour and conduct and applies these expectations consistently and fairly. This is reflected in learners' behaviour and conduct

- learners' attitudes to their education or training are positive. They are committed to their learning, know how to study effectively, are resilient to setbacks and take pride in their achievements

- learners have high attendance and are punctual

- relationships among learners and staff reflect a positive and respectful culture. Learners feel safe and do not experience bullying or discrimination.

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Personal development

27. Inspectors will make a judgement on the personal development of learners by evaluating the extent to which:

- the curriculum extends beyond the academic, technical or vocational and provides for learners' broader development, enabling them to develop and discover their interests and talents
- the curriculum and the provider's wider work support learners to develop their character – including their resilience, confidence and independence – and help them know how to keep physically and mentally healthy
- at each stage of education, the provider prepares learners for future success in their next steps
- the provider prepares learners for life in modern Britain by: equipping them to be responsible, respectful, active citizens who contribute positively to society; developing their understanding of fundamental British values; developing their understanding and appreciation of diversity; celebrating what we have in common and promoting respect for the different protected characteristics as defined in law.

Leadership and management

28. Inspectors will make a judgement on the effectiveness of leadership and management by evaluating the extent to which:

- leaders have a clear and ambitious vision for providing high-quality, inclusive education and training to all. This is realised through strong, shared values, policies and practice
- leaders focus on improving staff's subject, pedagogical and pedagogical content knowledge to enhance the teaching of the curriculum and the appropriate use of assessment. The practice and subject knowledge of staff are built up and improve over time
- leaders aim to ensure that all learners complete their programmes of study. They provide the support for staff to make this possible and do not allow gaming or off-rolling[16]

[16] There is no legal definition of 'off-rolling'. However, Ofsted defines 'off-rolling' as:
the practice of removing a learner from the provider's roll without a formal, permanent exclusion or by encouraging a parent to remove their child, when the removal is primarily in the interests of the provider rather than in the best interests of the learner. Off-rolling in these circumstances is a form of 'gaming'.

- leaders engage effectively with learners and others in their community, including – where relevant – parents, carers, employers and local services
- leaders engage with their staff and are aware and take account of the main pressures on them. They are realistic and constructive in the way they manage staff including their workload
- leaders protect their staff from bullying and harrassment
- those responsible for governance understand their role and carry this out effectively. They ensure that the provider has a clear vision and strategy and that resources are managed well. They hold leaders to account for the quality of education or training
- those with responsibility for governance ensure that the provider fulfils its statutory duties, for example under the Equality Act 2010, and other duties, for example in relation to the 'Prevent' strategy and safeguarding
- the provider has a culture of safeguarding that facilitates effective arrangements to: identify learners who may need early help or who are at risk of neglect, abuse, grooming or exploitation; help learners reduce their risk of harm by securing the support they need, or referring in a timely way to those who have the expertise to help; and manage safe recruitment and allegations about adults who may be a risk to learners and vulnerable adults.

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

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Arrangements for different types of provision

30. 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 those additional judgements and activities.

Early years

31. The 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

    and

    www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-provider-non-compliance-action-by-ofsted

Non-association independent schools

32. 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

Schools with early years settings

33. Maintained schools, 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 carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended by the Education Act 2011) or section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. Provision for two- and three-year-olds in schools is inspected as part of a school inspection. This contributes to the judgement about the overall effectiveness of the school.

Schools with sixth forms

34. Maintained schools, academies and non-association independent schools are given a separate grade for sixth-form provision as part of school inspections carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended by the Education Act 2011) or section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. This contributes to the judgement about the overall effectiveness of the school.

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Settings with residential and boarding provision

35. The inspection of boarding and residential provision will be carried out 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 or 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

    and

    www.gov.uk/guidance/social-care-common-inspection-framework-sccif-residential-provision-of-further-education-colleges

Further education and skills provision

36. Further education and skills providers will also have the following types of provision graded where appropriate: education programmes for young people; adult learning programmes; and apprenticeships. These contribute to the judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

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