

Q&A guidance:

Ofsted inspection of schools from September 2019

Accountable governance

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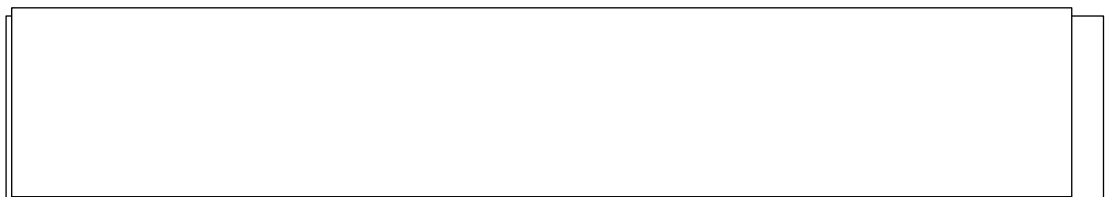


National Governance Association

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the leading membership organisation for governors, trustees and clerks in state-funded schools, academies and free schools in England.

We are an independent 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 do this by providing information; guidance and advice; undertaking research; delivering face-to-face training, e-learning and consultancy; and holding conferences and events. We ensure the views of governors are represented at the national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

To find out more about NGA, its services and membership, please visit the NGA website www.nga.org.uk.





This guidance has been updated following changes to the Ofsted framework which came into effect on the 1st September 2019. NGA has released a [feedback form](#) which it is asking governors and trustees to complete following their inspection. The form will help NGA to evaluate how those governing experience an Ofsted visit and whether it assists schools to improve. Responses will be fed back anonymously to Ofsted, in particular to ensure that the inspection process takes into account the views and needs of governing boards.

1. What is the purpose of Ofsted inspections?

Ofsted inspections are designed to provide independent judgements on the quality of provision of a school or other setting. Its reports are publically available, meaning that parents and the wider community can draw on their findings.

Ofsted is a non-ministerial department independent of the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE does, however, use Ofsted judgements for some aspects of school accountability (see NGA's [powers of intervention guidance](#)).

2. What types of school inspection are there?

There are two main types of inspection that are relevant for schools, details of which are set out in the following inspection handbooks:

- [School inspection handbook](#): for section 5 or 'full' inspections, conducted over two days, which result in a full set of graded judgements (see question 10 below).
- [Handbook for section 8 or monitoring inspections](#): conducted over two days in all schools apart from those with less than 150 pupils on roll. Section 8 inspections do not result in a change in the graded judgements of a school. However, a section 8 inspection can become a section 5 or 'full' inspection at any time during the inspection process.

There is also a [separate handbook](#) setting out details of how safeguarding is inspected in all education settings.

3. What type of inspection will our school receive and how often?

How often schools are inspected depends principally on their previous inspection judgement. However, a school may receive a "no formal designation" inspection at any time if there are concerns about how the school is conducted or its standards.

'Outstanding': mainstream primary and secondary schools judged by Ofsted to be 'outstanding' are subsequently exempt from routine inspection. However, they are subject to regular desk-based risk assessments (which look at publicly available performance data) which can trigger inspection. An inspection may also be triggered if there have been parental complaints or if there are safeguarding concerns.

Special schools, pupil referral units, and maintained nursery schools judged to be 'outstanding' are all exceptions to this rule. This is because their performance data is not likely to give a reliable account of their performance without detailed contextual information.



‘Good’: a school judged to be ‘good’ receives a ‘section 8’ inspection approximately every four years, unless it has undergone a significant change or there are significant concerns about its performance in which case it would receive a full inspection. If inspectors did not find enough evidence that a school remained ‘good’ at a previous ‘section 8’ inspection, the next inspection would be a full ‘section 5’ inspection.

‘Requires improvement’: a school judged to require improvement usually receives a two-day full inspection within 30 months after the inspection that made the judgement and at least one monitoring inspection before this.

However, a monitoring inspection will not normally apply to a school that has been judged as requires improvement for the first time.

‘Inadequate’: the majority of schools judged as being inadequate will receive an academy order or, if a single academy trust will be required to join a multi academy trust, or if part of a multi academy trust will be ‘re-brokered’ to a new trust and therefore would subsequently be inspected as new schools. Where this is not the case, the timing of the next full inspection will depend on the rate of improvement but will normally be within 30 months after the previous inspection, with a programme of monitoring inspections in the interim.

New schools: usually receive their first inspection in their third year of operation. A school that has converted to academy status is classified as a new school (though if it was previously ‘outstanding’ it would remain exempt from routine inspection).

4. If a school is governed as part of a group, how does this affect inspection?

Groups of schools include both federations and multi-academy trusts. The governance structure in a group of schools will span all schools within the group. However, Ofsted will inspect schools within federations and multi academy trusts (MATs) on an individual basis.

In a MAT, as well as there being a trustee board accountable for all the academies within the trust, it is common for there to be local academy committees or regional level committees (often referred to as “local governing boards”.) The scheme of delegation detailing the governance structure and lines of accountability within the MAT should be provided to inspectors at the earliest opportunity so that they can ensure that the inspectors are clear about lines of accountability and what this means in terms of local governance functions. As the trustee board is ultimately accountable for the performance of all the schools within the trust, inspectors should always meet with or speak to its representatives.

When inspecting a school that is part of a MAT, Ofsted will notify the senior executive leader of the MAT and the chair of trustees immediately after the school has been notified. During the inspection, the senior executive leader and the chair of trustees will be invited to meet with the inspector. In larger MATs, it is likely that this responsibility may need to be shared with other trustees and members of the executive team. They are also invited to attend the final feedback meeting (see question 13 below).

Ofsted does not provide graded judgements on the effectiveness of MATs. It does, however, carry out focused inspections of schools within MATs and follow these up by holding discussions with leaders at trust level (both the board of trustees and the operational staff). The outcome of these focused inspections is a letter summarising the findings and providing a narrative judgment on how effectively the MAT is improving its schools.



5. How should the school prepare for an Ofsted inspection?

In NGA's view, the best way to prepare for an Ofsted inspection is to ensure that the school is meeting its core purpose which in maintained schools is to promote high standards of education and in academies is to fulfil their charitable object of advancing education for the public benefit. There are many myths about what is required to ensure a successful inspection and recently Ofsted have made efforts to dispel such 'myths' by emphasising that they are interested in the effectiveness of activities rather than any particular form or approach. Governing boards should challenge any activity for which the only justification is preparation for Ofsted inspection.

Robust school self-evaluation is a vital element of school improvement and being well equipped for inspection. There is no prescribed format for self-evaluation but the governing board should ensure that an effective system is in place. An effective system is one that provides a secure understanding of the school's strengths, weaknesses and feeds in to the strategy for addressing areas that need developing and improving.

On a practical level, it is useful to have a plan in place for letting people know that an inspection is taking place (staff, governors or trustees, parents) and for how the inspectors will be supported throughout the inspection e.g. where they can park, which office will they use, who will provide refreshments etc.).

See question 20 for details of NGA training and consultancy available to help the governing board prepare for an Ofsted inspection.

6. How and when does the school find out about an upcoming inspection?

Inspections are carried out at short notice so that inspectors can get an accurate picture of how the school operates day-to-day. Ofsted will usually contact the headteacher (or most senior member of staff available) by telephone between 10.30am and 2pm of the working day before the inspection, after which an email confirmation will be sent to the school.

Following the initial notification, the lead inspector will phone the Headteacher. Ofsted have enhanced inspectors' off-site preparation and contact with the school introducing a 90-minute phone call between the lead inspector and the headteacher (or their nominated delegate) on the afternoon before inspection begins. This will include the arrangements for the visit and setting a suitable time during the inspection for a meeting with members of the governing board.

7. Who informs the governing board of an inspection?

The headteacher or a member of staff should inform the whole governing board as soon as possible after being notified of the inspection. The governing board should agree a procedure for how this will happen: for example, the headteacher may telephone the chair, who would then notify the rest of the governing board. It can be useful to think about who the main point of contact will be if the chair is not available. This is particularly important for Section 8 inspections of small schools (less than 150 pupils on roll) which only last one day.

8. What happens during an inspection?

At the start of the inspection, the lead inspector will meet with the headteacher to discuss arrangements for the inspection activities. Inspectors will gather evidence about the school through:

- looking at national performance data, including the achievement of specific groups of pupils e.g. disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)



- inspectors will not use internal data as evidence during inspection; though they will be interested in the conclusions drawn and actions taken from any internal assessment information, they will not seek to examine or verify that information first hand
- looking at school's records and documentation

Inspectors will also:

- talk to pupils and look at their work
- undertake lesson visits/observations including joint observations (carried out alongside the headteacher or other leader)
- observe pupils in situations outside of lessons
- meet representatives of the governing board (see questions 11 and 12 below)
- meet with parents
- meet with the executive leaders to discuss the school's self-evaluation and other aspects of school management

Inspectors will not make graded judgements of the lessons they observe. Ofsted have recently made significant efforts "to dispel myths that can result in unnecessary workloads in schools". For example, Ofsted does not require marking or lesson planning to be presented in any specific format. For more information on 'inspection myths', [see the Ofsted website](#).

At the end of the inspection, the lead inspector will hold a final feedback meeting, explaining their main findings and the provisional judgements (see question 13 below).

9. My school is receiving a Section 8 inspection. How is this different?

Schools which were judged 'good' at their previous inspection and special schools or pupil referral units which were judged 'outstanding' will receive a section 8 inspection approximately every four years. The purpose of a section 8 inspection school is to confirm whether the school remains good or outstanding under the definition of overall effectiveness set out in the school inspection handbook - they do not result in individual graded judgements

In primary schools (with fewer than 600 pupils on roll), section 8 inspections are carried out by one lead inspector. In large primary schools and secondary schools (with less than 1,100 pupils) the lead inspector will be accompanied by another inspector. In large secondary schools (with more than 1,100 pupils on roll) the lead inspector will normally be accompanied by two inspectors.

Inspectors carrying out a section 8 inspection are on-site for two days in the majority of schools, apart from schools with less than 150 pupils on roll, which will receive a one day inspection.

Section 8 inspections start from the assumption that the school or provider remains 'good' and will look at the accuracy of the school's self-evaluation. If the school remains 'good', the lead inspector will write to the school confirming this and that safeguarding remains effective. The letter will highlight the school's strengths and next steps for improvement but not contain a full set of judgements.



If during the section 8 inspection, serious concerns are raised about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education being provided, the school will receive a section 5 “full” inspection which will usually take place within 48 hours.

If the inspectors do not have serious concerns but are of the view that the inspection judgement may change either because they have been unable to evidence that the school remains ‘good’ or because the evidence found may indicate that the school is now ‘outstanding’, the school will receive a letter setting out the findings - the next inspection will be a full inspection.

Where the inspectors believe the school may be ‘outstanding’, the full inspection will take place within two years (but may be sooner). Where the inspectors believe the school’s performance may have declined from ‘good’, the full inspection will usually take place within two years but will be no later than five years since the previous full inspection.

10. What judgements do inspectors make about the school?

During a full (Section 5) inspection, Ofsted make judgements on the following aspects of a school:

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

Judgements are also made on the following as appropriate:

- Early years provision
- 16 to 19 study programmes

These feed into a judgement on the ‘overall effectiveness’ of the provision at the school. This is the headline judgement which is commonly referred to.

Each judgement is graded on the following scale:

- ‘outstanding’ (grade 1)
- ‘good’ (grade 2)
- ‘requires improvement’ (grade 3)
- ‘inadequate’ (grade 4)

Schools which are ‘inadequate’ overall are put into one of two sub-categories: ‘serious weaknesses’ or ‘special measures’, depending on whether the school leadership (including the governing board) have demonstrated the capacity to bring about improvement.

The [School inspection handbook](#) contains a description of what each grade means within each area of judgement.

As previously noted, during a section 8 inspection of a ‘good’ school inspectors do not make a full set of judgements. Instead, they seek to establish whether or not the school remains ‘good’.



11. How does Ofsted judge the effectiveness of governance?

The governance of a school forms part of the judgement on the 'effectiveness of leadership and management'. Inspectors will meet with those responsible for governance and will also look at documentation relating to the governing board's work. The meeting between the inspectors and members of the governing board should take place without school or trust staff being present.

Paragraphs 225 – 230 in part 2 of the [School inspection handbook](#) set out what inspectors will consider when judging the effectiveness of leadership and management. Most of this applies either directly or indirectly to the governing board as well as to senior staff. In addition paragraphs 232 – 240 set out what inspectors will consider when forming a judgement on the effectiveness of governance. These paragraphs give an indication of the kind of questions that governing boards can expect to be asked by inspectors although inspectors will also ask about specific lines of inquiry that have emerged from evidence seen during the inspection

Paragraph 241 of the handbook refers to the use of the Pupil Premium and says that inspectors will assess how leaders and governors have spent the pupil premium, their rationale for this spending and its intended impact.

The Safeguarding section of the handbook (paragraphs 271–280) sets out the importance and place of safeguarding. These paragraphs should be considered alongside the [Inspecting safeguarding in early years, education and skills setting document](#), which sets out the key points inspectors will consider in terms of safeguarding. Inspectors will judge how governors and trustees discharge their responsibilities for making sure that safeguarding procedures are properly followed in schools. This does not mean that governors and trustees are expected to review their school's central record, it's about making sure the overarching culture is right. What is your school doing to identify children that may be at risk of harm? How is your school helping those children and fulfilling its duties?

A list of possible questions that governors and trustee may be asked during their meeting with inspectors is included as an annex to this document. The list can be used as part of the board's preparation however it is only intended as a guide and should not be viewed as a "shortcut" to having a full, contextualised understanding of the school at which you govern.

12. Who will Ofsted inspectors want to speak to about governance?

All governors and trustees are entitled to attend the meeting with inspectors. Inspectors will speak to as many trustees or governors as possible on inspection. Most inspections now last two days, which should make it easier to arrange those meetings. Governors/ trustees should plan for who will be available to meet with the inspectors, and the chair should be sure to inform the vice chair if they are going to be unavailable during the period when an inspection is expected. If individuals aren't able to be at the school during the inspection, they can offer to speak to the inspector by phone. This would be particularly important if, for example, the chair was unavailable.

When inspectors speak to those responsible for governance, they will explore the contribution that governors make to the life of the school, informed by the first-hand evidence they have been gathering. The headteacher and other members of staff do not sit in on these meetings.



In a multi academy trust (MAT), it is the trust board which is ultimately accountable for the governance of the school and therefore inspectors should speak to trustees. As a minimum, inspectors will always notify the chair of trustees that the inspection is taking place and ask to speak with them. If there is an academy committee (often known as a local governing body), to which the trust board have delegated some governance functions, it will be common practice for inspectors to meet with committee members.

13. Can I attend the final feedback meeting?

Yes. At the end of an Ofsted inspection, the inspector(s) hold a final feedback meeting in which the main findings of the inspection are explained, including the provisional grades for each judgement. This meeting will be attended by the executive leader and often also by other members of the senior leadership team. All members of the governing board are entitled to attend this meeting.

The format of school inspection reports has changed considerably under the 2019 Education Inspection Framework and as a result there is no longer a paragraph on the effectiveness of governance. **This makes the attendance of governors or trustees at the final feedback meeting even more crucial:** inspectors will want to give you a full and detailed picture of what the inspection has found. The training that inspectors receive places an emphasis on this.

It is both permissible and recommended that the clerk to the governing board attends to take a written note of the meeting and this may be shared with all those responsible for the governance of the school, regardless of whether they were able to attend the meeting or not. However, the note should remain confidential among trustees, governors and staff until the inspection report is published.

The provisional grades given in this meeting are confidential to the school leadership as they may be subject to change (Ofsted carry out quality assurance of inspectors' judgements).

This does not, however, mean that they cannot be shared with governors or trustees who were not available to attend the meeting: **the whole governing board is entitled to know the provisional outcomes** but these must not be shared beyond the governing board until the final inspection report is sent to the school.

14. Can we check the report before it is published?

Yes. Following an inspection, the draft report is sent to the school 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 or convey the findings. The draft report is confidential to the relevant members of the school leadership, which includes the governing board.

Ofsted will give the school a deadline for making comments, for schools found to be 'good, this is usually only 24 hours and so it is critical that the headteacher shares the report with the chair promptly. After this time period has passed, the school will be informed of any changes that have been made to the draft report.

Schools in MATs should check that the report has the trust named as the accountable body with the chair of the trust named, not LGB chair.



15. When will the report be published?

The final report will be sent to the school by email, usually within 25 working days of the inspection. However where a school is judged as 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate', the report may take several weeks as in these cases, Ofsted's internal quality assurance checks take longer. The school then sends the report to parents, after which it is published on Ofsted's website.

16. The school has been judged 'inadequate': what happens next?

A school which is judged 'inadequate' overall will be classified either as having 'serious weaknesses' (if it is underperforming but its leadership has demonstrated the capacity to bring about improvement) or requiring 'special measures' (if the leadership have not demonstrated capacity to improve the school).

The Education and Adoption Act 2016 introduced a duty on the secretary of state for education to issue an academy order to any school judged 'inadequate'. Effectively, this means that any 'inadequate' maintained schools will become sponsored academies and the regional schools commissioner (RSC) will be involved in finding a suitable sponsor.

If a school is already a single academy trust, the funding agreement will be terminated and the school moved into a multi-academy trust (MAT) – though there is no automatic requirement for this to happen.

For schools already part of a MAT, where an RSC deems the existing MAT not to have sufficient capacity to bring about the necessary improvement, they can choose to move a school within a trust to another MAT. This is known as "re-brokering".

Schools that are converted to academy status will subsequently be inspected by Ofsted as new schools (in their third year). If an academy is not "re-brokered" to a different academy trust, it will be subject to monitoring before its next full inspection.

For more information on which bodies are involved in supporting schools that are causing concern, see NGA's guidance on [powers of intervention](#).

17. Will Ofsted recommend an external review of governance (ERG) if they identify weaknesses in the governance arrangements at a school?

No Ofsted no longer recommend any kind of external review to address specific weaknesses.

However, governing boards do not require a recommendation from Ofsted to commission an ERG: it is good practice to review effectiveness on a regular basis. NGA recommend undertaking a self-review annually and obtaining an external perspective on a regular basis.

[NGA's training and consultancy service](#) carry out ERG and have built extensive experience of supporting and improving governance practice in all types of schools and trusts, including MATs.

18. Will Ofsted recommend a review of how effectively the school is spending its pupil premium money?

No however as is the case with an ERG (see question 17 above) governing boards do not require a recommendation from Ofsted to commission a review of how the school spends its pupil premium money. For more on the pupil premium, see the [dedicated area](#) of the NGA knowledge centre.

The Department for Education have provided [guidance on commissioning a pupil premium review](#).



19. What happens if we have a complaint about an Ofsted inspection?

Ofsted encourages schools to raise concerns with the lead inspector during the inspection to allow them to be addressed as quickly as possible. If you do raise concerns, particularly if they are about the conduct or manner in which the inspection is carried out, be sure that the nature of your concern (with examples) and the outcome of your conversation are recorded by inspectors on their evidence forms. If, for example, the complaint is about the conduct of the lead inspector and can't be resolved directly with that individual, you can request to speak to a manager.

If a complaint is not resolved during the inspection, [Ofsted's complaints procedure](#) gives details of how to proceed.

20. Is there training and development available to help the governing board prepare for an Ofsted inspection?

[E-learning is available on NGA's Learning Link](#) to develop knowledge of the inspection process and to help governors and trustees to better understand what Ofsted requires of both the school and its governing board.

[NGA's consultancy and training service](#) offers a session on preparing for Ofsted. The session is for the governing board and senior leaders, and aims to make all participants aware of what Ofsted expect from the governing board, what 'knowing your school' means, the criteria against which governance is judged and how to be prepared for the Ofsted visit. At the end of the session the governing board and senior leaders should be clear about what needs to be done to ensure that the board is ready for an inspection.

Annex



The following is taken from NGA's preparing for Ofsted training course (see page10)

Ofsted - possible questions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Pick the right questions set – maintained school governors and academy trustees on the left; academy committee members (LGBs) on the right ❖ Do not try and ask them all – focus on questions that best fit your circumstances ❖ Some questions have 'follow on' questions – best not to ask them all at once ❖ Remember, it's only a practice ... 	
For governors and trustees	For academy committee (LGB) members
1. Tell me about your board – the range of backgrounds, skills, experience? How do you make sure your board stays up to date?	1. Are children safe in your school? How do you know?
2. How do you know safeguarding is robust? What 'Prevent' training takes place?	2. How do you know which governance functions are delegated to you?
3. Can you update us on progress made since the last inspection? What areas still need improving?	3. How does your school's vision fit with your trust's vision? And the strategy for achieving the vision – who determines this?
4. How does the board ensure that the curriculum stays as broad as possible for as long as possible?	4. What sources of information do you use to find out the views of parents, staff and children?
5. How do you ensure that pupils gain the essential knowledge they need to be educated citizens, with an appreciation of human creativity and achievement?	5. Can you tell us about the school's curriculum and how it stays as broad as possible for as long as possible?
6. What opportunities do pupils get to participate in and respond positively to artistic, musical, sporting and cultural events?	6. How does your school ensure that pupils gain the essential knowledge they need to be educated citizens, with an appreciation of human creativity and achievement?
7. The gap between disadvantaged and more advantaged pupils is narrowing – how are you using your pupil premium to make this happen?	7. What opportunities do pupils get to participate in and respond positively to artistic, musical, sporting and cultural events?
8. Attendance is good averaging over 96%. But compared to the national average, persistent absence is high. What is being done about this?	8. How do you know what parents think of the school? Do you get the opportunity to feed their views to the trustees?
9. How do you know if parents are happy with the school? How many formal complaints have you dealt with?	9. How is the headteacher's performance managed? Is the process robust?
10. How do you hold your HT/CEO to account?	10. How does the trust support school improvement? Do you have a view about how effective this is?
11. Is there anything else you think I should know about how this school is governed?	11. How do you make the trust aware of any concerns you may have about the performance of the school?