

A focus on improvement: proposals for maintained school inspections from September 2009



About Ofsted

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills was established in April 2007. It builds on the strengths of four previous inspectorates and the reach of the new organisation is extensive. It brings together the regulation and inspection of day care and children's social care, and the inspection of local authority children's services, schools, colleges, initial teacher education, work-based learning, Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Services, adult education and more.

Why do we have school inspection?

Inspection provides an independent, external evaluation of the quality and standards of a school. It is about raising standards and improving the well-being of children and young people and the quality of their lives.

The published inspection report tells parents, the school and the wider community about the quality of education at the school and whether pupils achieve as much as they can. The findings from the inspection provide information to parents about how well the school compares with others locally and nationally, and sets out what the school needs to do to improve.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's annual report to Parliament on the quality and standards of education in England is based on all the inspections conducted in the previous academic year, including those that focus on themes across schools conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectors and Additional Inspectors. This state of the nation report ensures that inspection drives improvement in policies, as well as in individual schools.

Introduction

1 The Education and Inspections Act 2006, which established the new Ofsted, requires us to carry out our work in ways which encourage the services we inspect and regulate:

- to improve
- to be user-focused
- to be efficient and effective.

2 The ways in which we will meet these requirements are set out explicitly in our strategic plan, which was published in April 2007. In that document we set out our intentions to ensure that inspection has more impact on outcomes for children and learners of all ages and to make inspection more coherent, rigorous and proportionate.

3 We have therefore reviewed our arrangements for the inspection of schools to ensure they are coherent and well matched to the needs of the user and the quality of the service and that they develop our ability to target inspection where it will make the most difference. Our proposals are set out in this consultation document.

The proposals in brief

What are the key differences between the current arrangements and the new proposals?

- Inspections will be more tailored to the needs of the school. All schools judged to be satisfactory or inadequate in their most recent full inspection will be inspected within three years; in general, schools judged good or outstanding will be inspected within six years, although one 'health check' report will be published in the intervening years.
- Inspectors will take more account of the views of parents in deciding when a school needs to be inspected.
- There will be increased focus on the progress made by different groups of children and young people which could include those most likely to underachieve, the most vulnerable and the most able. The well-being of learners, the quality of learning and the quality of teaching will feature strongly in the inspection.
- Inspectors will take more account of the capacity of the school to improve than in the current arrangements.
- Schools' senior managers will be involved more consistently in the inspection process.
- The inspection of federations and partnerships will be coordinated.
- Some inspections will have a specific focus, such as looked after children.
- Criteria for outstanding and good schools will be more explicit and standards for satisfactory and inadequate will be defined so that schools are much clearer about what they need to do to improve.
- We will report more explicitly on whether the school provides good value for money.
- We will explore whether 'no notice' inspection is feasible.

Who will be involved in developing the proposals and how?

4 In developing these proposals we have already consulted with nearly 1,000 headteachers and other professionals, and have held discussions with focus groups of parents and children.

5 We intend to carry out further consultation with parents and pupils, teachers and headteachers, governing bodies, local authorities and other stakeholders as the proposals develop.

6 We will be testing and developing our proposals over the next year. We therefore intend to carry out a variety of pilot inspections beginning in the summer term of 2008 and continuing throughout autumn and into the spring of 2009. These pilots will involve local authorities, schools, parents and pupils. Each set of pilots will be evaluated and the outcomes will be shared through our website and publications. Our aim is to ensure that the process is as clear and transparent as possible, and that people can see that their views have been listened to and are aware of the changes that have been made as a result.

When will the new inspections begin and what happens next?

7 The new arrangements will be introduced in September 2009, by which time all schools will have been inspected at least once under the current arrangements.

8 Guidance resulting from the pilot arrangements and consultation will set out how we intend to conduct inspections, and inspectors will be trained in the new arrangements.

9 Any proposals requiring legislation will be subject to parliamentary approval. It is of course for Government to decide whether to put such changes to Parliament, and when to do so. The response to this consultation will be used in those decisions.

10 We welcome your responses to this consultation paper and the questions included at the end of the document in Annex A. Please submit your responses to the questions and any other comments you wish to make using the online responses form available from the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. All other responses should be clearly headed School Inspection Project and sent by email to schoolinspectionproject@ofsted.gov.uk or by post to School Inspection Project, Ofsted, Alexandra House, 33 Kingsway, London WC2B 6SE. The consultation will be open until 11 August 2008.

Why change school inspection?

An increased focus on improvement

11 Our strategic plan states that we will focus inspections on those areas and issues where they will have the most impact on outcomes for learners. We have set ourselves challenging targets for improvement. We intend to help:

- reduce the number of children and learners receiving inadequate provision
- increase the number of good and outstanding schools
- have a positive impact on the quality of those schools we inspect
- ensure that our inspections take account of people's views and drive providers to do the same
- publish reports that are even clearer and more concise in ways that are more accessible to users
- make explicit judgements in all our reports on the value for money provided by schools.

12 Since 2005 and the focus on self-evaluation in inspection, we have noticed increasing confidence in the ways in which schools use performance data to establish their priorities and evaluate their progress.

13 Nevertheless, if education in England is going to compare favourably with the best in the world, standards need to improve. In fact they have stalled. Not only that, but the gap between outcomes for specific groups of children and young people and the majority remains too large. The Children's Plan sets out ambitious goals for the educational attainment and well-being of children and young people by 2020 and the challenge for the school system in the 21st century is clear: how do we reduce the gap in outcomes and opportunities between the majority of children and young people and those who continue to lag behind?

14 When provided with good schools, where the quality of teaching is consistently high and support services are effective, we know disadvantage can be reduced. Our increased monitoring of those schools about which we are concerned, including a number of schools we judged to be satisfactory, is paying off. Inspection can be a powerful lever for improvement.

15 These are encouraging signs, but there is still a long way to go. Although many of these schools go on to become good and outstanding, too many fall back and become inadequate. The key challenges, therefore, are to improve the weakest, and to prevent those that are improving from slipping back.

16 We want to continue to reduce the scale of inspection for the best schools to enable us to focus our efforts where they are most required. Since 2006, 20% of the schools inspected have received a lighter touch 'reduced tariff' inspection, with fewer inspectors in school and for a shorter time. These were schools with performance data, previous inspection outcomes and local intelligence which indicated that their provision was likely to be highly effective. In April 2007, this proportion was raised to 30% of schools on a trial basis.

17 These reduced tariff inspections have demonstrated that it is possible for us to use the information we hold on each school to identify whether the school requires a very light touch inspection or not. For example, 93% of the schools currently identified for a light touch inspection are judged by inspectors to be either good or outstanding. We believe we are now in a position to identify more precisely what type of inspection is needed and when.

Why change school inspection? continued

Putting children and young people first

18 We will continue to report on our statutory responsibilities. These are:

- the quality of the education provided in the school
- how far the education provided in the school meets the needs of the range of children and young people at the school
- the educational standards achieved in the school
- the quality of the leadership and management of the school, including whether the financial resources made available to the school are managed effectively
- the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils at the school
- the contribution made by the school to the well-being of the pupils.

From September 2008 we will also report on the contribution made by schools to promoting community cohesion.

19 In judging any school, a number of basic questions need to be asked. The most fundamental of these are:

- What is the overall effectiveness of the institution?
- What is its capacity to improve?
- What is the quality of learning in the school? Are all the children or young people making the progress and attaining the standards they should?
- Is the well-being of children and young people promoted appropriately and are their views being valued?

■ Are leadership and management effective in ensuring that:

- the teaching is consistently effective and has a positive impact on learning?
- equality, diversity and community cohesion are taken into account?
- the views of parents and children and young people are listened to and acted upon?
- the curriculum meets the needs of all learners?
- resources are adequate and used well?
- all learners are supported effectively?

■ What are the key actions that will help the school to achieve further improvement?

20 These questions also form the basis of the inspection frameworks used across our broader remit.

The changes to school inspection in detail

Inspections will be proportionate to risk and focused on improvement

21 In the new proposals, good and outstanding schools will continue to be subject to a lighter touch and will be inspected within six years of their most recent full inspection. A sample of these schools will be inspected each year although this will vary in depth for each school. Our new proposals are designed to 'raise the bar' on schools that are coasting, have inconsistent performance or are slipping by identifying them quickly and inspecting them more frequently.

22 The identification of the schools to be inspected and inspection dates will be based on a regular assessment of the information available about the school's performance. A large amount of information on schools is already in the public domain. Early work suggests that the key indicators for identifying when schools need to be inspected and the type of inspection they need may include:

- parents' and children and young people's views
- previous inspection judgements
- measures of standards
- indicators of well-being
- measures of progress
- trends over time
- attendance
- school and local area context indicators
- staff turnover.

23 This is not a definitive list, and not all of these may end up being included. Further work needs to take place with schools and local authorities to test and develop the model and to investigate the effect of other variables, such as financial data. We also want to talk to parents about key indicators.

24 Discussion with a range of stakeholders indicates that there are a number of other factors, such as the change of headteacher or turbulence in the senior management team, which may also be important risk factors.

Question 1

Is it appropriate to leave the inspection of good and outstanding schools for an interval of six years between inspections?

The health check

25 Six years is a long time between inspections even for the best schools. We believe that parents need more regular information about the progress of the school that their child attends and more up-to-date information for choosing the right school for their child. All schools that do not have an inspection – that is a visit by an inspector – will have a published health check on their progress within three years of their most recent full inspection, to give parents the information they require.

26 The Ofsted health check may make use of a range of material, including published data, the views of parents and pupils, the school's self-evaluation and local authority information. This information will be analysed and interpreted by an inspector to ensure that it is translated into a meaningful commentary where the school appears to be making appropriate progress.

Question 2

Are the proposals for what an Ofsted health check should include appropriate?

The changes to school inspection in detail

continued

Satisfactory and inadequate schools

27 We know, and independent research has confirmed, that regular monitoring of schools has a positive impact on improvement. We intend to build on the successful monitoring of schools where weaknesses were identified during their most recent full inspection but where the school was, nonetheless, judged to be satisfactory. Where a school is identified as satisfactory overall and its capacity to improve is no more than satisfactory, there is evidence from inspection that improvement is often too slow. We want to encourage local authorities and other support agencies to target these schools for additional support. These schools will receive a monitoring visit by us between 12 and 18 months after their inspection to see whether they have made sufficient progress; they will also receive an inspection within three years of their most recent full inspection. Where insufficient progress has been made, the school is likely to be judged inadequate.

28 Schools are currently given a Notice to Improve if their inspection indicates that they are inadequate and that they need to improve significantly. The vast majority will have demonstrated a capacity to improve. A monitoring visit takes place between six and eight months after the inspection. A full inspection takes place after a year if the school is no longer judged to be inadequate. Over 90% of these schools improve over the year and are no longer judged inadequate. We therefore intend to maintain the current arrangements, although we will consider whether a Notice to Improve can be removed following a monitoring visit.

29 Schools judged to require special measures are inadequate overall and do not have the capacity to improve. They will continue to receive two to three monitoring visits a year to check on the progress they are making, and will be inspected after two years if they have not improved sufficiently to be judged satisfactory.

30 What does this mean for schools? The following table sets out the frequency and type of inspection a school might receive.

School grade in the most recent full inspection	Frequency and type of inspection
Outstanding (Grade 1)	Health check within three years. Inspection within six years.
Good (Grade 2)	Health check within three years. Inspection within six years.
Satisfactory (but improving) (Grade 3)	Inspection within three years of the most recent full inspection.
Satisfactory (with capacity to improve judged no better than satisfactory) (Grade 3)	Monitoring visit within 12 to 18 months of the most recent full inspection and an inspection within three years of the most recent full inspection.
Inadequate Notice to Improve (Grade 4)	Monitoring visit within six to eight months of the most recent full inspection and an inspection after a year.
Special measures (Grade 4)	Monitoring visits two or three times a year following the most recent full inspection and an inspection two years after the most recent full inspection.

Question 3

Are the proposals for targeting inspection at satisfactory and inadequate schools appropriate?

The time inspectors spend in school

31 No inspection will last longer than two days. The size of the inspection team will depend on the size and complexity of the school. The smallest inspection will be one inspector for one day, as for example in a small primary school. The largest will be up to five inspectors for two days, such as in the largest secondary school.

Consideration of no notice inspection

32 Over recent years, we have reduced the notice period to two working days. Headteachers tell us that this has worked well. However, parents and pupils tell us that we should make more of the 'drop in' inspection, in order that we see the school as it really is. Clearly, there are practical difficulties in mounting an inspection with no notice at all, both for the inspectors carrying out the inspection and for the school. Significant challenges will be involved, including how to ensure that users' and parents' views are heard. However, given the clear support of parents and pupils, and the fact that a no notice inspection would entail the minimum of bureaucracy and disruption for schools, we intend to trial whether it is feasible over the next 12 months.

Question 4

Is there a place for unannounced inspections?

Ways to test the views of parents

33 If inspection is to become a six-yearly event in some schools, we need to be able to respond quickly to parents' concerns if a school is not doing as well as it should and the quality of provision begins to slide. Mechanisms for gathering complaints about schools by parents and others are already established through powers given to us in the 2006 Act and these can be used to bring forward an inspection. However, to take more account of the views of parents and children and young people in deciding when a school needs to be inspected, what sort of inspection it requires and how well the school is doing, we intend to gather their views through surveys. These could be coordinated locally, in collaboration with local authorities.

34 The surveys could provide important indicators of parents' and pupils' perceptions of a school's contribution to Every Child Matters outcomes, such as whether children feel safe or how well the health of children and young people is promoted. We will be discussing these options with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) over the coming months.

35 In addition, more attention will be given to the ways in which schools routinely engage with parents, pupils and the community between inspections. This will include how schools gather views and whether they can demonstrate that they have taken action based on these views which has led to improvement.

36 These arrangements will supplement the parents' questionnaire used in school inspections at the moment. We are currently benchmarking the responses to current questionnaires in order to compare the views of parents from one school with those of another. This will be a focus for our discussions with parents over coming months.

37 Inspectors will continue to use the responses gathered through questionnaires to guide the focus of the inspection. They will continue to observe lessons, talk to groups of pupils and staff, and focus on the capability of the learners to take responsibility for their own learning and participate in the life of the school. In addition, they will survey teaching and non-teaching staff in schools to establish their views. We believe these proposals will ensure a greater focus on stakeholders' views, as part of the inspection process and between inspections.

Question 5

Do you agree that we should put in place a national survey which captures the views of children and young people?

Question 6

Do you agree that we should put in place a survey which captures the views of school staff?

Question 7

Do you agree that a national survey of parents should take place annually?

The changes to school inspection in detail

continued

The involvement of the senior management team in the inspection process

38 For inspection to drive improvement, it has to have value for those being inspected. Independent research conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research has indicated that inspections have most impact where feedback and interaction between the inspectors and the staff in the schools are of a high quality.

39 Schools tell us that one of the most valuable developments in the current inspections is the involvement of the senior management team in the inspection process. In the shortest inspections and in small schools, inspectors will often carry out joint observations of lessons and undertake much of the inspection shadowed by the headteacher. While this collaborative approach should not be misunderstood as an inspection done with the school, it has a great deal to recommend it as it allows a professional dialogue to develop quickly between inspectors and senior staff in the school. It also allows senior staff to understand how judgements are arrived at. These developments are well worth extending and we will make this shadowing arrangement a formal part for the inspection.

Question 8

Should the senior management of the school play a greater part in inspection by shadowing the inspectors?

Inspection will be transparent and consistent

An increased focus on the achievement of different groups of children and young people, teaching and learning and the capacity to improve

40 The new proposals will retain many of the features of the current arrangements, such as the use of self-evaluation as the starting point of the inspection, observation of teaching and learning, and interviews with staff, children and young people and governors. Inspectors will still require information about the school to enable them to prepare for inspection. However, most of this information is already in the public domain.

41 The majority of the inspection will be spent exploring those issues which are important in the school. Attention will focus on whether particular groups of pupils are achieving as well as they should, including those in the most vulnerable circumstances and the most able. We will specifically judge how well the school fulfils its duties in terms of equalities and community cohesion. We will also seek evidence of, and make judgements about, outcomes in relation to the well-being of all learners. This means that inspectors are likely to spend more time than they currently do in classrooms, inspecting the quality of teaching and the impact it is having on the quality of learning. They will discuss with children and young people what they know, understand and can do, how well they have mastered the basic skills, and judge whether they are becoming independent learners.

42 The main focus of the inspection will remain the overall effectiveness of the school. However, more attention will be placed on the capacity of the school to improve than is currently the case. Self-evaluation is important; a school that does not know its strengths and weaknesses is unlikely to be able to put in place well targeted plans, which lead to improvement. Working effectively in partnership with other institutions and local services says much about the school's capacity to improve. In addition, inspectors will look closely at the performance management arrangements and the targets the school is setting itself and its pupils, and ask whether they are sufficiently challenging, whether they are realistic, and whether the resources being allocated to them are likely to lead to their achievement.

Question 9

Do you agree that inspectors should focus more attention on the achievement of different groups of pupils?

Question 10

Do you agree that inspection should take more account of the capacity of the school to improve?

Changes to grade criteria and the introduction of grade thresholds

43 We do not propose to change the current grading scale, which is:

1. outstanding
2. good
3. satisfactory
4. inadequate.

44 Nevertheless, we recognise that there has been extensive debate about the use of the word ‘satisfactory’ and what this means. In addition, while it has been widely recognised that contextual value added (CVA) is a better measure of progress than what went before, concerns have been expressed that it is given too much weight in the current arrangements, often at the expense of the standards that pupils attain.

45 We therefore intend to define each grade so that schools and inspectors know what has to be achieved in order to be outstanding and good and what constitutes satisfactory. We will set indicators that define minimum standards for learners’ outcomes, such as Key Stage 2 results and the proportion of learners gaining five A*–C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics.

Question 11

Should Ofsted continue to use CVA as a measure of schools’ progress?

Question 12

Do you agree that we should define minimum standards for learners’ outcomes?

Defining accountability through inspection

Coordinated inspections of federations and partnerships

46 In carrying out our functions we have focused on individual institutions. Governors and headteachers are held to account for what goes on within their establishments, including the quality of teaching, learning and welfare and the performance of the institution in contextual and absolute terms.

47 The new proposals recognise that the inspection of schools needs to report on the effectiveness of individual institutions, and that schools increasingly work as part of wider consortia and partnerships to deliver education and care within an area.

48 We have identified a common set of principles and a common set of questions that will inform the inspections carried out across all inspections of education and care. This will help to ensure greater consistency in the judgements that are made across colleges and schools and across the Early Years Foundation Stage in schools and early years settings.

49 A number of partnerships have had a direct impact on the outcomes that children and young people achieve in the school where they are registered. We are keen to ensure that these partnerships are drawn into the accountability framework.

50 Schools working in partnership will be asked to demonstrate how well they understand the experience the learner is getting from the partnership. They will be asked how working in partnership results in high quality teaching, better learning and more effective outcomes for the learner, for example in relation to 14–19 curriculum opportunities.

51 Where a school has a close partnership with other institutions and/or services which support the well-being of children and young people, we will ensure that wherever possible the inspection of members of the partnership is conducted at the same time. In this way inspections can, as a matter of course, include a judgement about the impact of the partnership arrangements on children’s and young people’s outcomes. We will report on the performance of children and young people who are enrolled at a school but also taught within the partnership arrangements.

The changes to school inspection in detail

continued

Question 13

Should we inspect the impact of partnerships on outcomes for pupils?

Survey inspections

52 We undertake inspections of subjects and themes separately from full school inspections. These will continue, as they are an important way to gather evidence and influence the system.

53 In the new proposals a routine inspection may have a particular focus. This could be specific to a locality, for example where a comprehensive area assessment identifies a weakness within an area, such as provision for looked after children. In this case every inspection of a school within that area might be expected to focus on provision for this particular group of children in order to see what action is being taken locally and whether it is having an impact. We believe that this will not only support local improvements, but can also contribute to reporting on important national issues and to the identification of best practice.

Changes to the reporting arrangements

54 There will be two kinds of published report:

- a health check for some schools which will take the place of an inspection report
- a report following an inspection visit which includes a grade profile, a letter to pupils and a letter to parents.

55 The published health check will incorporate a textual analysis of the key indicators set out in paragraph 26 the self-evaluation of the school and the views of the local authority. It will set out what evidence has been included in the report, the context of the school, its overall effectiveness and when the next inspection might take place. It is likely to be no more than two sides long and will be written in plain language which is accessible for parents and learners.

56 The report following an inspection will be a short written text (perhaps no more than six sides long) setting out the overall effectiveness of the school, its capacity to improve and a comment on each of the elements listed in paragraph 18. The report will include a set of grades for each of the elements in an annex. The letter to pupils will remain and will be written in clear and accessible language. We also intend to introduce a letter to parents. This will set out the overall judgement on the school, and it will also tell parents in what areas they should expect the school to improve in the future and the action the school should take to make that improvement. We have established a readers' panel and will trial the style of letters to ensure that they are accessible.

57 The report will contain recommendations which set out what actions the school needs to take to improve. For example, where a school is satisfactory the recommendations will concentrate on what the school must do to become good. Of particular importance will be the clarity of recommendations; they must leave schools in no doubt about what needs to be done: 'improve teaching', for example, is unhelpful and insufficient information.

58 The current inspections, in particular those conducted in one day, are particularly challenging for inspectors. Nevertheless, the changes set out in this paper raise the bar for inspectors as they are expected to play their part in the improvements that schools make.

Question 14

Should the inspectors' recommendations focus more precisely on the action the school should take to become good or better?

Question 15

Should we write a letter to parents, setting out what the school should achieve by the next inspection and the actions the school needs to take to make that improvement?

How would it work in practice?

59 Getting the practical concerns right is important when devising new arrangements. Schools might expect:

- every three years a published health check or an inspection
- a monitoring visit or visits where the school had been graded satisfactory or inadequate and the capacity to improve had been graded inadequate or satisfactory in the most recent full inspection
- an annual survey of parents
- surveys of children, young people and staff
- an inspector or inspection team visiting for no more than two days
- a single inspection event where the school has more than one type of provision
- on some inspections the inclusion of a local or national focus
- coordinated inspections as appropriate and where the school is in a partnership
- survey visits between inspections.

60 The outline of the inspection would be much as it is now. Assuming little or no notification, it might be:

Contact	We telephone and inform the school that an inspection will take place or that the health check will be sent for checking for factual accuracy by the school.
Where there is to be no visit	The school will be given two weeks to consider the health check prior to publication on our website.
Where there is to be an on-site inspection	
Day 1	Lead inspector contacts school and agrees programme with senior team. The member of the senior team who will work with the inspection team is identified.
Days 2 and 3	Inspectors on site (a large proportion of inspector time will be spent judging the quality of learning).
Day 4	Feedback given to the school together with actions for further development.
Following week	Written report. Report, letter to parents and letter to pupils sent to school for comment prior to publication.

61 The short notice or no notice model cannot guarantee significant contact with parents, but we will request parental views and the views of children and young people and staff at the school through questionnaire and/or electronic means just prior to the inspection or at the start of the inspection. These will be focused questions based on the outcomes of the national survey and will allow inspectors to judge whether the school has dealt with issues raised previously.

62 A number of consequent issues would arise if the approach to inspection envisaged here were adopted. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector proposes to discuss with the Secretary of State the implications of changing the inspection interval for some schools from three years to six. Work is currently under way with the DCSF, as set out in the Children's Plan, to identify key performance indicators for schools which relate to children's well-being and on the best way to gather the views of parents and pupils.

Conclusion

63 We are proposing changes which should ensure that inspection does more to drive improvement where it is most needed; takes greater account of the needs of those being inspected; targets resources where they will have the greatest impact on outcomes for learners; and uses resources as efficiently as possible. In this paper we have proposed an approach that we believe will be effective, will drive greater improvement and will ensure that we are more user focused. Crucially, we also believe the improvements are achievable in a climate of reducing resources. We look forward to receiving comments.

Annex A

We welcome your responses to this consultation paper and the questions included. Please submit your responses to the questions and any other comments you wish to make using the online response form available from www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Question 1

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Question 2

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Question 3

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Question 4

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