

COVID-19: Ofsted visits in the autumn term

This document covers:

- the purpose of Ofsted interim visits
- an outline of what the interim visits will look like this autumn
- what school leaders and governing boards can expect if their schools are visited by Ofsted

During the partial closure of schools in the summer term, routine Ofsted inspections were suspended. As schools have now fully reopened, Ofsted have begun a phased return to full inspections; carrying out interim visits in schools across England. The visits will be carried out under the powers granted by existing legislation. They will seek to identify the steps that leaders have taken, or are taking, to “provide an appropriate curriculum as they return to full education...and how they ensure that young people are learning in a safe environment”.

The visits follow a pilot by Ofsted – whilst the findings of the pilot will not be published, Ofsted will be reporting on the findings of interim visits as a whole.

Interim visits will not result in any evaluation or graded judgement of a school, nor will they use the education inspection framework and school inspection handbook. School leaders are not required to make any specific preparations for these visits.

The purpose of interim visits is to:

- reassure and inform parents, government and the wider public about how schools are managing to support their pupils on their return to a full education
- help parents and the wider public understand how schools are returning to a normal curriculum
- provide the Secretary of State with a large-scale picture of schools across England

Interim visits will not:

- judge schools on their response to COVID-19 during the spring and summer terms 2020
- require teachers and support staff to prepare lesson plans, put up any displays or show examples of assessments
- visit lessons or look at pupil's work
- use pupil, parent or staff surveys

The sample of schools that will be visited includes:

- approximately 1,200 schools across all Ofsted grades, including all schools that are currently graded as inadequate
- maintained schools, academies and free schools, special schools and centres of alternative provision
- schools spread as evenly as possible across Ofsted regions and local authorities

School leaders will be informed of an upcoming interim visit a day in advance and as per the process set out in [Ofsted's guidance](#).

Deferring a visit

- If the headteacher feels that the visit should be deferred, they can make a request to do so (and may consider doing so if circumstances mean that a visit would hinder their operational management).
- Ofsted will judge each request for deferral on its own merits. Visits may still go ahead when substantial numbers of pupils are not on site but continue to be educated through remote or ‘blended’ learning.

What should school leaders expect from these visits?

The visits will largely comprise discussions between inspectors and the headteacher. The basis for this will be a series of open-ended questions which will allow inspectors to gain an understanding of the school's current position. If the headteacher confirms that it is safe and appropriate to do so, inspectors may talk to staff and/or pupils. Inspectors will work collaboratively with leaders to understand:

- the school's safeguarding arrangements, including how leaders are managing safeguarding during the COVID-19 pandemic and in their local context
- the barriers that the school has faced and may still be facing, in managing the return to full education for all pupils
- how leaders are ensuring that pupils resume learning the school's curriculum, including contingency planning for the use of remote education and the use of catch-up funding
- how pupils are returning to expected routines, behaviour and regular attendance
- how any issues related to special educational needs, disabilities, health, care and wellbeing issues for particular groups of pupils are being addressed
- how leaders have involved stakeholders such as parents and carers on how best to support pupils with special educational needs
- how approaches to remote learning are integrated into the wider curriculum design and plans leaders have in place to follow the guidance from the Department of Education

Feedback at the end of the visit

At the end of the visit, inspectors will briefly provide feedback, which includes the planned content of a published letter to parents (see below). Feedback will not be extensive as inspectors will not have been judging or evaluating the work of the school. Instead, constructive dialogue will take place throughout the visit.

Publication of the letter

Following the interim visits, the lead inspector will publish a brief summary of the discussions that inspectors had with leaders within 18 working days. A draft letter will be sent to the school and possibly other public bodies on what inspectors have found during their visit. The school has 5 working days to comment on the draft letter, process and findings. Ofsted will consider these comments when the final version of the letter is shared with the school within 30 working days.

If the school wishes to submit a formal complaint, it will have until the end of the fifth working day after receiving the final letter to do so. The final and agreed version of the letter will be published on Ofsted's reports website within 38 working days of the visit. If a school places a complaint on this process and it is being investigated, the publication of the letter may be delayed.

The role of governing boards during interim visits

Interim visits will not routinely involve meetings with governors, trustees or multi-academy trust leaders. However, chairs can make a request to their headteacher to be part of the conversation. Governing boards have an essential role in ensuring the wellbeing of executive leaders and as such, NGA would encourage chairs to accompany headteachers for part of the conversations. Ultimately, the decision on who joins the discussion with Ofsted inspectors rests with the headteacher, and this means they could conduct the whole visit by themselves, or invite the chair, other members of the governing board or staff to accompany them.

Further reading

[Ofsted guidance on autumn plans](#)

[NGA COVID-19 information and guidance hub](#)

NGA's [GOLDline advice service](#) has provided an essential service to all governing boards with governance questions during the COVID-19 period. As of September, the service is once again available for NGA GOLD members only.

Our annual GOLD membership is £275 for boards and provides access to all our best practice resources and expert tailored advice. [Sign up](#) to help your board save time and develop professional governance.