Up-to-speed on: Ofsted’s school visits from Autumn 2020

Full Ofsted inspections will not resume until January 2021; however, Ofsted has released details of its “phased return to inspections” that will start with an interim period of school visits during the Autumn term. This article breaks down what you need to know.

**Key points**

The key points are as follows:

* [Ofsted has piloted the visits in September 2020, ahead of a full roll out in October](#_When_will_the)
* [All ‘inadequate’ schools will be visited, alongside a sample of schools with other grades](#_Which_schools_will)
* [Visits will focus on a number of areas, including barriers to managing a full return and how schools are ensuring pupils resume learning the full curriculum](#_What_will_the)
* [Ofsted has released new details about how the visits will be conducted](#_What_happens_during)
* [Ofsted has said these visits are not full inspections](#_Are_the_visits)
* [Ofsted has published an operation note about how early years visits will be conducted](#earlyyear)
* [Ofsted will publish a finalised letter of their findings to the website within 38 days of the visit](#after)
* Next steps

Read on to learn more information about each key point.

# When will the visits take place?

Ofsted interim visits will take place from 28 September to December 2020 inclusive.

# Which schools will Ofsted visit?

Ofsted will select a sample of approximately 1,200 schools with as even a spread as possible across Ofsted regions and LAs. All schools judged as ‘inadequate’ will be visited, alongside a sample of schools with other Ofsted grades.

Ofsted will still conduct registration visits and regulatory activity in early years settings. Pre-registration visits and emergency section 8 inspections in maintained schools and academies will also continue to be undertaken.

# What will the visits focus on?

Visits will focus on:

* Identifying the barriers schools have faced and are still facing in managing the return to full-time education for pupils.
* How leaders are ensuring pupils resume learning the school’s curriculum, including the blend of classroom teaching and remote learning (where remote learning is required).
* How pupils are settling back into expected routines and behaviours.
* How any specific health and wellbeing issues that have been identified in pupils are being addressed and what local and national support may be needed.
* Safeguarding.

# [Updated] What happens during a visit?

Schools will normally receive a telephone call to notify them of a visit at 10:00am on the school day before. In this phone call, the lead HMI will discuss the logistics of the visit with the headteacher or the most senior available member of staff. School leaders may request a deferral of the visit during this notification call, or before 4:30pm on the notification day.

Visits will normally last for one day, with inspectors usually arriving no earlier than 10:00am and leaving no later than 4:00pm, and will be based around a series of conversations with senior and middle leaders regarding the key areas of focus set out above. If documentation is needed to support discussions, inspectors will use what schools have already. Inspectors will not visit lessons or look at pupils’ work, but they may talk to staff and/or pupils if the headteacher agrees it is safe and appropriate to do so.

Inspectors will not normally meet with governors, trustees, MAT leaders or LA representatives during these visits, nor will they ask schools to circulate the usual parent, pupil or staff questionnaires, as these will not be used during interim visits.

Before leaving, the lead inspector will share the planned content of the feedback letter to check for understanding and accuracy.

At the end of the pilot scheme, Ofsted published a brief operational note about how the visits will be conducted, based on 121 visits conducted between 14 and 18 September. The briefing is available [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-schools-september-2020?utm_source=3078fd0b-4308-4e09-a593-ca0b24823141&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate).

# [Updated] Are the visits the same as full inspections?

Ofsted has said that, although the visits technically fall under the inspection remit, these visits should not be considered as such, and they will not:

* Use ‘[The education inspection framework](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework)’ and ‘[School inspection handbook](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif)’.
* Result in any grade or progress judgement.
* Judge schools on their response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic during the Spring and Summer 2020 terms.
* Require schools to prepare any pre-written planning or other documentation.
* Ask schools for documents or records in a certain format.
* Provide any evidence or lines of enquiry for later inspection events.
* Require teachers to prepare any lesson plans or examples of assessment, or to put up any displays.
* Use lesson visits as a method of collecting evidence.
* Involve a general review of a school’s policies.
* Use parent, pupil or staff questionnaires.

If inspectors have significant concerns about the school, usually due to poor safeguarding arrangements or a breakdown in leadership and management, they may treat the visit as an no formal designation (NFD) inspection. Inspectors will not, however, treat the visit as a routine inspection, except in exceptional circumstances.

How will early years visits be conducted?

Providers that are currently judged less than ‘good’ and that had safeguarding and welfare actions raised at their last inspection will be visited.

For most providers, there will be an on-site visit; however, there may be rare occasions where a telephone call is used as an alternative. Settings will be notified of a visit on the day before by 12:30pm. During this notification call, the inspector will speak to the most senior member of staff available to make practical arrangements for the visit and allow time to discuss the context of the setting and purpose of the visit.

Inspectors will prepare for visits, and collect evidence during the visit, in line with its guidance for carrying out regulatory visits in the [early years compliance handbook](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-provider-non-compliance-action-by-ofsted).

Ofsted has said inspectors will be sensitive to the challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic when conducting visits.

Inspectors will look at what action leaders and managers have taken since the setting’s last inspection and will confirm whether the provider is meeting any actions set that relate to the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the EYFS statutory framework. As the DfE has disapplied the learning and development requirements of the EYFS framework until 25 September 2020, inspectors will not check whether they have met requirements relating to these areas set at the last inspection. After 25 September 2020, providers must meet the learning and development requirements in full.

Visits will not result in an inspection grade; however, inspectors can take regulatory or enforcement actions if needed. Following a visit, Ofsted will publish an outcome summary confirming:

* Whether the provider has met the actions raised at the last inspections.
* Whether Ofsted needs to take any further action.

Read Ofsted’s [operational note](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/interim-visits-registered-early-years-providers?utm_source=52a45221-5be8-4575-81db-c51b32938815&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate) for further details on how early years interim visits will be conducted.

**What happens after a visit?**

* Ofsted will send a draft letter to the school detailing the inspectors’ findings within 18 working days. This draft letter may be shared with other public bodies.
* Schools will have five working days to comment on the draft letter.
* Ofsted will share the final letter with the school within 30 working days, responding to schools’ comments within this letter. The school has five working days after receiving this final letter to submit a formal complaint if they wish to do so.
* The letter will be published to Ofsted’s reports website within 38 working days of the visit.

**What’s next?**

* Read Ofsted’s article in full [here](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/education-plans-from-september-2020).
* We’ll keep you up-to-date with any further announcements about these visits. To be kept informed, add this article to your ‘Watch list’.

## Bibliography

Ofsted (2020) ‘Education plans from September 2020’ <<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/education-plans-from-september-2020>> [Accessed: 19 October 2020]

Ofsted (2020) ‘Interim phase: maintained schools and academies’ <<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/interim-phase-maintained-schools-and-academies>> [Accessed: 19 October 2020]

Ofsted (2020) ‘Interim visits: registered early years providers’ <<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/interim-visits-registered-early-years-providers>> [Accessed: 19 October 2020]

SchoolsWeek (2020) ‘Ofsted admits ‘visits’ fall under inspection remit after NAHT legal challenge’ <<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/ofsted-admits-visits-fall-under-inspection-remit-after-naht-legal-challenge/>> [Accessed: 16 October 2020]