

# Ofsted: 101 ideas to help you manage inspection

## BUILD CONFIDENCE

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| <p><b>1</b> Whether preparing for or coping with inspection, always focus on doing what is right for your pupils.</p> <p><b>2</b> Remove Ofsted as a driver when talking to staff and pupils. Focus on positioning improvements as being in the best interests of pupils, staff and the community.</p> <p><b>3</b> Keep a copy of the Ofsted handbook and myths guidance to hand.</p> <p><b>4</b> Be mindful of workload at all times, for you and your staff. Inspection should not generate extra work for teachers, and the ideas outlined in this document are typically low cost in terms of money and time.</p> <p><b>5</b> Stay up-to-date with the latest developments, subscribe to Ofsted's email alerts and their school inspection updates.</p> | <p><b>6</b> Create a one-page Ofsted readiness plan which briefly summarises who will undertake easily-overlooked tasks during the inspection, from putting out cones in the car park to notifying parents.</p> <p><b>7</b> Check your website periodically to ensure it is compliant with the latest requirements.</p> <p><b>8</b> Review your school's previous inspection report: what was done to address any issues? What was the impact of this work?</p> <p><b>9</b> Be on top of your policies, reviewing annually (or more frequently) to ensure they are accurate and compliant. Share this work with your governors.</p> <p><b>10</b> Gather your own staff, pupil and parent survey responses and ensure they stay current. Having your own evidence to hand is invaluable.</p> | <p><b>11</b> Share with pupils when their feedback has led to action. Pupil feedback provides a valuable perspective for inspectors.</p> <p><b>12</b> Support your senior team, they help to carry the weight of inspection. Invest in building their confidence and knowledge base.</p> <p><b>13</b> Avoid 'mocksteds'. They can undermine confidence and carry little weight with inspectors.</p> <p><b>14</b> Give your staff the space to share concerns. There's no worse time to find out about a potential problem than on the day!</p> <p><b>15</b> Encourage middle leaders to work long-term with staff to ensure marking is in line with your policy. No colleague should need to mark books the night before inspection.</p> <p><b>16</b> Develop a safeguarding culture, creating a commitment to safeguarding which is at the heart of every aspect of your work.</p> |
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## RECEIVING 'THE CALL'

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| <p><b>17</b> Know who will take the call if you are not available.</p> <p><b>18</b> Plan the call. Have three bullet points ready by the phone that you want to convey during the initial call. What distinctive features about your school do you want inspectors to know from the start?</p> | <p><b>19</b> Know how you will cascade information. Many schools will arrange a short staff meeting at the end of the day after the phone call is received.</p> <p><b>20</b> Inspectors may or may not ask to see self-evaluation in advance. Either way, providing a strategic summary is a crucial way to set out your position from the outset.</p> | <p><b>21</b> You may be asked to structure the timing of inspection activities. Try to shape these strategically, thinking about the evidence you really want inspectors to see.</p> <p><b>22</b> Know in advance the usual information and evidence inspectors ask for upon arrival. There is a list in the inspection handbook.</p> |
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## THE DAY BEFORE: KEY MESSAGES

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| <p><b>23</b> Remind staff that it's business as usual. Your focus remains, as ever, on the quality of teaching.</p> <p><b>24</b> Share your plans. Tell staff if there are particular aspects or evidence that you plan to celebrate or acknowledge in your meeting with inspectors.</p> <p><b>25</b> Remind staff they are encouraged to speak to inspectors, but this will always be an 'on the record' conversation. Their words could be recorded in the evidence base.</p> | <p><b>26</b> Remind staff with supervision duties to be prompt and proactive. It's all too easy for normal processes to be forgotten amongst the pressure of inspection but a happy, calm lunchtime and breaks set the right tone.</p> <p><b>27</b> Provide pastoral support. Encourage any worried or anxious staff members to speak to their line manager or SLT.</p> <p><b>28</b> Encourage staff members to share concerns with you about the inspection process.</p> | <p><b>29</b> Be clear about the process. For schools undergoing a short inspection, let staff know the visit could result in a full inspection.</p> <p><b>30</b> If undergoing a short inspection, have a conversion strategy in place, just in case. Remind staff that conversion would not necessarily mean an upgrade or downgrade.</p> <p><b>31</b> Decide how you will brief pupils. Some schools prefer a low-key announcement, others hold assemblies. Discuss with senior colleagues what will work best for you.</p> |
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## THE MORNING OF INSPECTION

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| <p><b>32</b> Break the ice. Most inspectors like to meet staff to introduce themselves. This can help to relax colleagues who might otherwise only meet inspectors as they enter their classroom, and is to be encouraged.</p> <p><b>33</b> Agree beforehand with inspectors that you will introduce them to staff and that a colleague will then take them to their meeting room, leaving you to talk to staff in confidence.</p> | <p><b>34</b> If you have other business to raise with staff whilst inspectors are present, feel free to do so. They want to see you leading as you would normally.</p> <p><b>35</b> Let staff know if you plan to meet them at the end of the day to give them an update. Setting your plans out early is reassuring, and means colleagues will know what to expect.</p> | <p><b>36</b> Remind staff how you will notify of them of the inspection and progress at the end of the day (whether it is going to convert or not, where applicable).</p> <p><b>37</b> Repeat key messages from the day before: business as usual, try not to worry.</p> |
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## PUPIL POWER: INVOLVING YOUR LEARNERS

- 38** Inspection is a chance for pupils to show how wonderful they are. Encourage them to talk to and interact with inspectors.
- 39** Remind pupils of the many reasons to be proud of their school, but don't overdo it.
- 40** You may be asked to assemble groups of pupils to meet inspectors. Give a representative sample but it is useful if your pupils have experience of talking to adults about their school.
- 41** Don't overplay the significance of the inspection. Seek to limit nerves for pupils as well as for colleagues.
- 42** Remember that inspection is a team effort. It's much easier if this ethos underpins your school on a day-to-day basis and not just at inspection time.

## MANAGING THE DAY

- 43** Before the inspectors arrive, brief your senior team on what you need from them during the inspection.
- 44** Remind colleagues not to be distracted from their core work of leading the school smoothly and effectively. Keep the focus on what really matters.
- 45** Place inspectors in a comfortable room away from potential problem areas, and supply them with tea and coffee. A warm reception can never hurt.
- 46** Remind reception staff to check inspectors' ID and follow your usual safeguarding procedures. Inspectors will want to see how you keep pupils safe.
- 47** Ensure that staff, and particularly school leaders, are visible through the school day. Most staff do this instinctively but a gentle reminder for them to be prompt and proactive when on supervision duty is helpful.
- 48** Identify any teacher absences and who is covering each lesson. Keep a copy of this information to hand and use it, where possible, to inform where you (don't) go on learning walks.
- 49** Ensure you have periodic meetings with the lead inspector so that you are informed of emerging issues. Inspectors are obliged to offer this.
- 50** Try to get a sense of the key points emerging from meetings with stakeholders through the day.

## EVIDENCE AND OUTCOMES

- 51** Remember that evidence is about impact, everything else is just description.
- 52** Don't overload inspectors with evidence up front. Resist the urge to leave volumes of evidence with inspectors. Have key evidence to hand or know where it is so that you can call on it as required.
- 53** For secondary schools inspected before ASP/IDSR are published, use the ASCL Progress 8 toolkit to analyse your data.
- 54** Summarise your data. Overviews of complex evidence are useful; drill down as needed.
- 55** Consider likely lines of enquiry pre-inspection. These are often drawn from the Inspection Data Summary Report (IDSR). Gather the evidence you will need to support your response, and have it to hand from the outset of the inspection.
- 56** The School inspection handbook tells inspectors to give more weight to the progress of current pupils than that of previous cohorts. Remind inspectors if necessary.
- 57** Know how groups of pupils - as well as whole cohorts and individuals - are performing, but be aware of how small cohort size can lead to invalid judgements. Point this out to inspectors, and be insistent if necessary.

## LEADING BY EXAMPLE

- 58** Illustrate how leadership capacity and capability is fostered at all levels across the school, including middle leaders and governors.
- 59** Don't weigh your middle leaders down with producing lengthy documents for inspection. One-page summaries of key strengths, priorities, actions and impact may be useful in some circumstances (although Ofsted can't expect this).
- 60** Cultivate a shared understanding of the school's strategic direction. What are your strengths, weaknesses, actions and impact of actions? Periodically, share a one or two-page summary with middle leaders and governors.
- 61** Ensure that minutes of governors' meetings reflect the support and challenge they provide. Some governors may not be able to meet with inspectors at short notice but evidence from minutes can be compelling.
- 62** Know your curriculum narrative and why you teach it the way you do, from how it is structured when pupils join you to when they leave, and how this is supported by assessment. What is the impact? How do you ensure it is broad and balanced?
- 63** When it comes to governance, inspectors want to meet with those who hold direct responsibility. This can be complex in some academy trusts. Ensure the scheme of delegation is published on your website.

## SELF-EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

- 64** Ofsted has no expectation about what self-evaluation or improvement planning should look like. It should be useful for your school, but also give an accurate view of your school and your leadership.
- 65** Give a clear strategic view: a narrative of your school's strengths, weaknesses, priorities and impact of actions. Tell the story of the progress of current pupils. Support with data but don't re-write the IDSR.
- 66** Don't just describe, evaluate. Use ASCL's Self-Evaluation toolkit to help you ([www.ascl.org.uk/sef](http://www.ascl.org.uk/sef)).
- 67** Consider summarising a lengthy SEF. You can send the overview to inspectors and refer to the detailed version if necessary during meetings.
- 68** Be aware of how the framework functions. Any 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' sub-judgement is likely to lead to the same judgement for overall effectiveness. A school can't be judged outstanding unless teaching, learning and assessment are also outstanding.
- 69** Be candid about your priorities for improvement, whilst not necessarily shining a light on every last thing that could be slightly better. Help inspectors to see the wood from the trees.
- 70** Comment on how key groups are performing but be cautious about drawing big conclusions from small samples of pupils.
- 71** Improvement plans should have clear objectives, success criteria, milestones, and timings. This should link to the SEF to form a cycle of evaluation and improvement.
- 72** Periodically review your progress towards improvements. You don't need to write up lengthy reports for the sake of inspectors but governors will find it useful to be up-to-speed (reflected in minutes of meetings).

## IF INSPECTION GOES WRONG

- 73** Think hard about complaining. Inspection is an emotional and often stressful process. Before risking any additional stress you will want to be sure that the issue will materially affect the outcome of the inspection.
- 74** Be confident.
- 75** Don't assume that complaining will cause problems between you and the inspector. This is not new to them, they are prepared for scrutiny and trained on how to respond to complaints.
- 76** Remind yourself that the inspector is under pressure too. It can be helpful to try and see the inspection from their perspective.
- 77** Ask for the time for a proper discussion of your concerns before the inspection is over - be insistent.
- 78** Ask that a note be made on an evidence form. Otherwise, merely discussing a concern may not result in it being logged as a complaint and, after the event, you could be accused of not raising it during the inspection.
- 79** Know what you want your complaint to achieve. By keeping expectations clear, you are more likely to see your concerns addressed.
- 80** Be open. At different points the lead might ask you if you have any concerns about the inspection. Don't say things are fine if you don't think they are.
- 81** Be careful with language. Remember that your words will be written down, and that polite phrasing leaves less room for misinterpretation.

## POST-INSPECTION COMPLAINTS

- 82** Pause to re-assess the validity of your complaint. Inspection can be stressful, pursuing a complaint more so. Before beginning, consider the implications for your wellbeing, as well as the welfare of the school and pupils.
- 83** Seek the support of your governing body or trust. This helps to ensure that you don't become isolated or unsupported through the complaints process.
- 84** Viewing the online complaints page helps you to see how the complaint is structured, with no commitment to completing the form.
- 85** Write up: be concise, include evidence, refer to the inspection handbook. Above all, be factual.
- 86** Try to re-focus on what really matters – your pupils.

## COMMUNICATING OUTCOMES

- 87** Draft reports are usually restricted and confidential to the school's leaders and governors. It's in your interests to respect this.
- 88** You will be invited to check the draft for factual inaccuracies. Use this opportunity - the turn-around is usually very short.
- 89** Know the timings. Schools should receive the draft within 14 working days of the inspection ending, and the final version published within 19 working days. If the report is subject to extended quality assurance, publication is usually within 28 working days.
- 90** After receiving the final report, schools must provide parents with a copy within five working days. Ofsted will normally publish the report on their website after this time.
- 91** Reconsider your banner: whilst you may be proud of your inspection result, remember Ofsted is not the only mark of success. Perhaps the views of your pupils and parents would be a refreshing and welcome alternative!

## BE INFORMED

- 92** You don't need to be an expert but it will help to have looked at the guidance inspectors use so you know what to expect. Points 93 to 99 are useful to read or have a copy to hand for reference during your inspection.
- 93** Section 5 handbook: outlines the arrangements for full inspections.
- 94** Section 8 handbook: outlines the arrangements for short inspections, monitoring and unannounced behaviour inspections.
- 95** Ofsted myths: additional guidance designed to challenge myths about inspection.
- 96** School inspection updates: newsletters issued to inspectors which outline emerging inspection issues and provide clarification.
- 97** Inspecting safeguarding in early years, education and skills: guidance for inspectors to use when inspecting safeguarding.
- 98** Ofsted posts blogs on inspection issues and offers insights into inspection. You don't need a copy of these but they are worth a read.
- 99** ASCL produces a range of advice and guidance for members, available on the ASCL website
- 100** ASCL members have access to our hotline. You can call us for advice before, during or after your inspection.
- 101** ASCL runs a series of professional development opportunities and bespoke training events which can help in relation to school improvement and inspection.

## ANY QUESTIONS?

### ASCL member hotline

T: 0116 299 1122 | E: [hotline@ascl.org.uk](mailto:hotline@ascl.org.uk) | Tw: @ASCL\_UK

### Ofsted

T: 0300 123 1231 | E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk) | Tw: @Ofstednews

[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted)

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