

Hundreds of formerly outstanding schools reinspected

From 2012, schools that had been judged outstanding were legally exempt from further regular inspection, unless there were specific concerns about the school. The exemption was lifted in 2020.

Today's commentary notes that over 80% (308) of these schools that had a graded inspection last year did not retain the outstanding grade. The majority were judged to be good. However, around a fifth were rated requires improvement (17%) or inadequate (4%).

When selecting schools for inspection, Ofsted prioritised those that had gone the longest without inspection, which for some was as long as 15 years ago. The average for schools inspected last year was 13 years.

When the exemption ended, 43% of exempt schools had not had a graded inspection for at least 10 academic years, and a further 38% had gone between 5 and 10 academic years.

Since their last inspection many of these schools will have experienced significant change, including a new headteacher, new governors, or becoming an academy managed by a multi-academy trust.

Ofsted's Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, said:

Regular inspection gives parents confidence in the quality of their child's school. Exempting outstanding schools deprived parents of up-to-date information. It also left a lot of schools without the constructive challenge that regular inspection provides.

The exemption was a policy founded on the hope that high standards, once achieved, would never drop, and that freedom from inspection might drive them even higher. These outcomes show that removing a school from scrutiny does not make it better.

There were 3,900 outstanding primary and secondary schools when the exemption was introduced, and 3,400 were outstanding when it ended.

Some 1,400 schools remained outstanding throughout the period because they were not inspected at all and so kept their grade. About 1,900 schools ceased to be outstanding (usually after an inspection triggered by a risk assessment), and 1,500 additional schools were judged outstanding during the exemption period.