

News story: Ofsted seeking views on improved approach to short inspections

Ofsted today launched a [consultation on proposals to improve the short inspection](#) model.

Short inspections began in September 2015 as a proportionate approach to inspecting schools previously judged to be good. They last for one day and begin with the assumption that the school remains good.

Most schools inspected this way keep their good rating. But when the lead inspector decides there is insufficient evidence to confirm the school is still good, or thinks it may now be outstanding, they will convert the short inspection into a full inspection. A team of inspectors then arrives at the school within 48 hours, to gather more evidence and reach a final judgement. Currently, around one third of short inspections convert to full inspections.

While this inspection model has been widely welcomed, both school leaders and inspectors have told us that the 48 hour conversion period can be challenging, for the following reasons.

1. Inspection schedules often change at the last minute, which can mean standing down Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) at short notice.

OIs are typically busy school leaders who have booked time off to inspect, and these last minute changes are frustrating and impractical.

Many OIs say they would like to lead more short inspections, but they are put off by the uncertainty in whether a short inspection will convert.

2. The decision to convert a short inspection is usually taken mid-afternoon, and a team of inspectors then arrives on site early the next day.

School leaders tell us this experience can be overwhelming. It can be a particular burden on large schools, where up to 8 inspectors are needed for the full inspection.

3. In about 20% of cases, before a short inspection takes place it is already clear that a school is facing complex circumstances that warrant a full inspection.

In these cases, moving straight to a full inspection would be less disruptive for the school and a better use of Ofsted's resources.

Today's consultation proposes 2 operational changes to improve the conversion process.

1. When a short inspection converts, the full inspection will be completed within a maximum of 15 working days, rather than 48 hours.

This will allow Ofsted to give OIs 5 to 10 days' notice of an inspection, and provide more certainty about the number of days they need to be away from their own school. Where an inspection converts because of safeguarding concerns, the full inspection will still complete within 48 hours.

2. A full inspection will automatically take place in around 1 in 5 cases where Ofsted has prior evidence that a school is in complex circumstances.

Ofsted will select these schools through the standard risk assessment process.

To reduce the burden on very large schools, Ofsted will also continue the current practice of having a small team of inspectors carry out the converted full inspection over 2 days, rather than a large team on 1 day.

Ofsted's National Director of Education, Sean Harford said:

Short inspections are collaborative experiences, encouraging dialogue between inspectors and school leaders. And they've been widely welcomed by head teachers. But we've also heard concerns about the practicality of the 48 hour conversion window.

We're determined to keep the benefits of the short inspection model. But as we continue to develop an inspection programme that embraces the knowledge and skills of frontline practitioners, we need to make sure it works for those who give up their time to support us.

We are confident that these changes will ensure we use limited inspector time as efficiently as possible, while also reducing the burden on schools.

These are not fundamental changes; the inspection methodology will stay the same. And most good schools will still receive short inspections, and most will stay good.

The proposed changes would affect all good maintained schools and academies, as well as outstanding maintained nursery schools, special schools and pupil referral units, which are not exempt from inspection.

Ofsted is piloting the changes in around 35 schools during the summer term.

The consultation opens today and closes on 18 August 2017. If the proposals are accepted, it's expected that the changes will take effect immediately after the October half term this year.