

Arrangements for Inspecting Schools

Introduction

We aim to be open and transparent about approaches to inspection and this document is intended to explain more about our arrangements for inspecting schools¹.

Our school inspection programme enables us to provide assurance and support improvement at different levels across the education system.

At school level our inspection teams spend time in a school and undertake a wide range of activities. The team gathers evidence and makes evaluations about what is working well and what needs to improve in order to promote and effect improvement within schools.

The scope of our activities in individual schools across the whole country gives us a unique evidence base drawn from observing practice first hand. This enables us to draw conclusions about key areas of strength and aspects for further improvement at a national level.

We are committed to continuing to review and develop our approaches to school inspection and, in doing so strengthen further the role of inspection as a positive tool within Scottish education to help drive improvement in quality and performance across the system. As we move into the next phase of education reform we will enhance our approaches to evaluative activity in ways that further support system-led improvement. In doing so, we will build on the new approaches to inspection introduced in August 2016.

We will work in collaboration with our partners to ensure our approaches are clear, transparent and act as a crucial tool in helping schools continually improve. We will increase opportunities to develop a school inspection programme that is targeted to those areas that will generate the greatest benefits for children and young people; support collaborative partnerships; and promote a self-improving system. We will do this in partnership with schools and communities, and increasingly ensure a collaborative model involving children and young people as well as local teams is developed.

How often do we inspect schools?

As announced in October 2017, we will carry out at least 250 school inspections each academic year.

This will include:

- inspections to enable us to provide evidence to the Scottish Government for the National Improvement Framework (NIF);
- shorter more focused inspections on themes or aspects of education;
- regional/national thematic inspections of specific aspects of education across a sample of schools based on key focus areas;
- inspections in response to identified risks; and
- further inspections of schools where we have identified important weaknesses in the quality of education or provision.

When we inspect schools in response to identified risks, in almost all cases, we give local authorities and schools across all sectors notice of our intention to carry out an inspection. However, we retain the right to carry out unannounced inspections in response to identified risks if that is required.

¹ The term 'school' is used throughout to refer to primary schools, secondary schools, special schools and all-through schools

When an inspection shows that a school is not providing a sufficient quality of education or provision we will continue to engage with the school in order to secure improvements for children and young people, usually in partnership with the local authority and going forward with Regional Improvement Collaboratives. We may revisit to review progress and carry out a further inspection.

The Chief Inspector will determine, on an annual basis, the scale and balance of the school inspection programme in agreement with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, who may also commission specific inspection activity through the Chief Inspector. We intend to publish the details of our school inspection programme in June each year as part of our annual programme of inspection activity across different sectors of education.

Schools are selected for inspection on a proportionate basis, using a sampling approach, rather than a cyclical model. Our overall programme of school inspections will reach across local authorities. This enables us to report confidently on the quality of provision across Scotland.

We use predetermined criteria to select an annual sample of 120 schools to enable us to provide evidence for the NIF. The criteria takes account of the context and characteristics of schools, including the type of school, deprivation and balance across local authorities.

We select other schools for inspection on an annual basis taking account of the context and characteristics of schools, including the type of school and balance across local authorities.

When selecting any school for inspection we will consider other factors, including local circumstances as well as the length of time since the last inspection.

What do we focus on during school inspections?

We are, first and foremost, interested in children's and young people's learning experiences within and beyond the classroom; their achievements, and how the school is ensuring these are of the highest possible quality.

We focus on how a school is performing, the impact it is having on improving outcomes for children and young people and the capacity for continuous improvement. We take into account the context and nature of the school, its children and young people and their needs, and look at approaches to safeguarding.

It is very important to us that we hear the voice of parents and carers, stakeholders, employers and learners during school inspections. We do this in a number of ways, including asking the headteacher to issue a pre-inspection questionnaire. Inspectors often meet with representatives of these groups during inspection. They are also helped in hearing the views of learners and parents by Lay Members. We value the contribution young people can make to our inspection programme and are in the process of developing a young inspectors programme.

The Scottish approach to bringing about improvement in schools is based on the idea that schools will evaluate their own work and then take action to share effective practice and plan for any necessary improvements. In doing this, they are supported and challenged by their local authority and by inspection. So we place an importance on exploring the extent to which a school has the ability to self-evaluate and drive its own improvement as part of inspection.

We use the quality frameworks [How good is our school? \(4th edition\) \(HGIOS4\)](#) when inspecting schools. We identify a selection of quality indicators (QIs) or themes within QIs to evaluate and report on as part of school inspections. Which QIs or QI themes we use will depend on the focus of the inspection.

For those inspections carried out to enable us to provide evidence for the NIF we focus on the following QIs:

- 1.3 Leadership of change
- 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment
- 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement
- 3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

Over the coming year we will develop further our shorter more focused inspections. We will explore with stakeholders ways in which we can make best use of our school inspection programme to support the improvement work of local authorities and Regional Improvement Collaboratives. This may include carrying out a sample of school inspections across a local authority or Regional Improvement Collaborative based on agreed aspects of education; QIs or themes within QIs.

As well as publishing inspection reports for individual schools, we will explore the potential ways of using the findings from school inspection activity to support the identification of highly-effective practice and potential impact of leadership and professional learning programmes.

In addition, we will carry out regional/national thematic inspections of specific aspects of education across a sample of schools based on key focus areas. The focus of our thematic inspections will be highlighted as part of our annual programme of inspection activity across different sectors of education. We will use these thematic reviews to provide an evidence base for improvement and focus to raise attainment.

How do we share our findings?

At the end of the inspection our team will share with the school their findings, outlining the strengths and aspects for development they have identified, and discuss possible next steps.

We use what we learn about a school to produce and publish a letter to parents and carers. The letter will indicate strengths of the school and aspects that need to be improved. We also provide a statement of the confidence we have in the school's capacity to improve the quality of its own work. In the letter we will specify any further inspection activities we will undertake and, if appropriate, how we will continue to engage with the school in order to secure improvements. In addition, we will publish a summary of our findings based on the evidence gathered during the inspection.

Inspection reports are available on our [website](#). Reports remain on our website for five years, after which they are removed as they are considered outdated. Reports older than five years are available on request.

For our national thematic inspections we will also publish a report, which will bring together the key messages from what we have seen across schools we have inspected. This will help schools to benefit from the evidence we have gathered nationwide as they plan their next steps in continuous improvement.

As part of the annual NIF evidence reports, we share the following evidence and grade evaluations gathered through primary, secondary and special school inspections:

School leadership	Data on the percentage of school inspections where QI 1.3: Leadership of change is graded as 'good' or 'better'.
Parental engagement	From parents' pre-inspection questionnaires, the percentage of parents who are satisfied with their engagement and involvement as indicated across a range of measures/questions.
	From parents' pre-inspection questionnaires, the percentage of parents who are satisfied their child's progress with learning, and the quality of reporting about their child's progress as indicated across a range of measures/questions.
Assessment of children's progress	Data on the percentage of school inspections where QI 3.1: Ensuring wellbeing, quality and inclusion is graded as 'good' or 'better'.
	School inspection data on the effectiveness of moderation of teacher professional judgement of Curriculum for Excellence levels in literacy and numeracy.
School improvement	Data on the percentage of school inspections where QI 2.3: Learning, teaching and assessment is graded as 'good' or 'better'.
	Data on the percentage of school inspections where QI 3.2: Raising attainment and achievement is graded as 'good' or 'better'.

Education Scotland

Denholm House
Almondvale Business Park
Almondvale Way
Livingston EH54 6GA

T +44 (0)131 244 4330

E enquiries@education.scotland.gsi.gov.uk

www.education.gov.scot

© Crown copyright, 2018

You may re-use this information (excluding images and logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence providing that it is reproduced accurately and not in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Education Scotland copyright and the document title specified.

To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence>
or e-mail: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.