

Education Inspection Framework 2019: Inspecting the quality of education

Guidance at a glance

Introduced in September 2019, Ofsted's **Education Inspection Framework 2019** outlines the principles that underpin how inspectors will judge the effectiveness of schools and colleges.

This paper does not seek to replicate the information Ofsted provides in its inspection handbook but is intended to provide clarification and insight into specific aspects of the inspection of the quality of education.

The Quality of Education judgement is a limiting judgement. In order for a school to be judged good under a full inspection it must be judged good for its quality of education. Likewise, in order to be judged outstanding overall, a school must be judged outstanding for its quality of education (which requires a school to meet all of the good criteria and then the outstanding criteria).

Ofsted inspects the quality of education by exploring three aspects:

- intent
- implementation
- impact

This paper looks in greater detail at the following:

Section 1 Intent

Section 2 The 90-minute phone call

Section 3 Deep dives

Section 4 Further information

1 Intent

As far as Ofsted is concerned, curriculum intent is not just about having a grand vision. You may have the intention to develop 'lifelong learners' or 'global citizens', but this doesn't necessarily say much about how and why the curriculum is designed as it is.

Intent is about the 'what' of the curriculum: it is as much about explaining the route pupils take to get to the top of a mountain as it is about describing the view when they get there.

Much of the detail of intent will be explored within subjects, but leaders should have a top-level understanding of how and why the curriculum is set out as it is.

Key questions

- What do you want pupils to know and be able to do?
- What plans do you have in place to achieve this?
- Which children get what curriculum?
- Do all children get the same curriculum? If not, why?

And to ensure you are really talking about intent:

Why **that**?

Why **then**?

So, if you are talking about what you want pupils to study and the order in which that is planned, you are probably talking about intent as Ofsted see it.

The choices you make about what you want pupils to learn should give insight into:

- curriculum ambition
- sequencing
- breadth and balance
- inclusivity

Ofsted has said it does not expect schools or subjects to write 'intent statements'. The following are helpful extracts from a [blog](#) by Ofsted's Heather Fearn:

"Intent is about what leaders intend pupils to learn. It's as simple as that. Intent is everything up to the point at which teaching happens. Good intent, according to our handbook, has the following features:

- a curriculum that is ambitious for all pupils
- a curriculum that is coherently planned and sequenced
- a curriculum that is successfully adapted, designed and developed for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- a curriculum that is broad and balanced for all pupils

"In evaluating the school's educational intent, inspectors will primarily consider the curriculum leadership provided by senior, subject and curriculum leaders.

"Inspectors will talk to senior leaders to find out whether the curriculum is broad and balanced. Is it at least as ambitious as the national curriculum?"

“In secondary schools, we will evaluate whether the curriculum is as broad and balanced as possible, for as long as possible. We will look at whether pupils (if appropriate) are able to study a strong academic core of subjects, such as those offered by the EBacc. We will consider whether there is high academic/vocational/technical ambition for all pupils and find out if some pupils or groups of pupils are missing out.”

The national curriculum

Ofsted has said it will check that maintained schools are delivering on their obligation to teach the national curriculum. It has also said that although academies are not legally obliged to teach the national curriculum as such, inspectors will expect the curriculum in academies to at least match the national curriculum for breadth and ambition. Essentially, this means everyone will need to be mindful of the requirements of the national curriculum. Inspectors carrying out ‘deep dives’ (covered further in Section 3) are likely to have with them a copy of the national curriculum for that subject.

The national curriculum outlines top-level outcomes. These are often multi-faceted summaries that encompass a range of knowledge and skills. These could be described as being ‘composites’, and each composite is made up of its constituent parts, the ‘components’.

While the national curriculum outlines the composite outcomes, it does not detail the components that pupils need to know in order to achieve these and it does not specify the sequence in which they should be taught.

Inspectors will probe deep dive subjects to find out what the intended ‘composite’ outcomes are and the component parts the curriculum specifies.

Questions to consider:

Are you clear on the intended ‘composite’ outcomes at particular stages?

Are the right components in place?

Are they taught in the right order?

2 The 90-minute phone call

Ofsted will continue to notify schools of an inspection the day before the inspection takes place (except for unannounced inspections).

From September 2019, inspectors will also hold a longer introductory phone call with headteachers.

This call consists of two parts:

- 1) Shorter planning conversation
- 2) Education-focused conversation

The total length of the call is a maximum of 90 minutes. This is a maximum duration, not a target, and the call may take less time.

The latest **School Inspection Update** from Ofsted gives useful clarification around this important phone call:

“Inspectors will use this conversation to understand:

- the school’s context and the progress it has made since the previous inspection, including any specific progress made on areas for improvement identified at previous inspections that remain relevant under the EIF
- the headteacher’s assessment of the school’s current strengths and weaknesses, particularly in relation to:
 - the curriculum

- the way teaching supports pupils to learn the curriculum
 - the standards pupils achieve
 - pupils' behaviour and attitudes
 - the personal development of pupils
- the specific areas of the school (for example, subjects, year groups, aspects of provision) that should be focused on during the inspection.

“The conversation will end once inspectors understand the headteacher's view of the school's context, progress and strengths and weaknesses. Crucially, it will only end once inspectors and leaders have a **shared understanding of the subjects and areas that will be subject to curriculum 'deep dives' on the first day of inspection.**”

This is worth repeating: a key purpose of the call is for leaders and inspectors to reach a 'shared understanding' of the subject areas that will undergo 'deep dives'.

There are further points to note:

- Headteachers might find it useful to consider in advance of this call which subjects inspectors are likely to propose for deep dives. Inspectors will draw on information in the Inspection Data Summary Report (IDSR) to help them, but school leaders' views will be considered as well. For inspections carried out before validated data is published, inspectors may well refer to the previous year's IDSR.
- The aim is to have a 'shared understanding'. This means leaders should have absolute clarity about where the deep dives will take place. If not, raise this with inspectors before the call ends.
- School leaders should have an opportunity to suggest areas for deep dives. While some of these may be areas of perceived or relative weakness, leaders can also suggest areas of strength. We expect inspectors to factor such suggestions into their thinking about where to focus deep dives.
- There is no rule about which subjects will undergo deep dives in secondary schools, although in primary schools one will always be carried out into reading. It may be that practicalities such as the expertise of inspectors will play a role in determining some subjects identified for deep dives.

“There is no requirement for this conversation to be one continuous call. If the headteacher needs to pause the conversation for practical reasons or wants time to draw another colleague into the call, inspectors will act reasonably to accommodate this.” (School Inspection Update, July 2019)

During the educational-focused conversation, inspectors will want to know about these in particular:

- leaders' 'top-level' curriculum intent
- progress since the last inspection
- particular issues to do with subjects or phases

While Ofsted says “Inspectors will not expect leaders to have any particular information or evidence to hand in the conversation”, headteachers are likely to find it helpful to have done some thinking about this call in advance.

ASCL's **2019 SEF toolkit** includes a headteacher's commentary template to support leaders in being ready for this call. This is intended to be a light-touch activity and should not lead to workload for colleagues.

Identifying when key meetings, such as meetings with curriculum leaders, can take place will probably form part of the 90-minute phone call. You might, therefore, find it useful to have a copy of staff timetables to hand if this is feasible.

Inspectors may ask you to send timetables to them after the call so they can shape the plan for the deep dive subjects that have been agreed.

3 Deep dives

Summary

Ofsted will inspect the quality of education in schools by carrying out 'deep dives' into a chosen sample of subjects.

The deep dive approach will also be used for Section 8 inspections, as well as for Section 5 full inspections.

Key points:

- There will be three to five in primary schools (**always** including reading, and often including mathematics)
- There will be four to six in secondary schools
- They will always include at least one foundation which is subject being taught during the inspection. Inspectors may do deep dives into other foundation subjects not being taught during the inspection.
- Deep dives can only be carried out in curriculum subjects. So, there will not be cross-curricular deep dives themed on pupil groups, such as disadvantaged pupils, or by prior attainment or phase.
- If there is sixth form or early years provision in a subject undergoing a deep dive, that element would be included as part of the subject deep dive.
- The quality of education for disadvantaged and SEND pupils are threads which run through ALL deep dives into subjects.

Deep dives are about trying to connect evidence gathered through a range of inspection activities. For each subject, these activities will include:

- 'top-level' discussion with school leaders
- discussion with curriculum leader with responsibility for that subject
- lesson observations
- scrutiny of pupils' work
- discussions with pupils
- discussions with subject teachers

Inspectors will try to ensure discussions with leaders and curriculum leaders happen at the start of Day 1 so these discussions frame the rest of the deep dive. However, if logistics prevent this from happening inspectors will carry out these activities in whatever order is necessary.

We advise leaders to take any reasonable steps to help ensure discussions with leaders and curriculum leaders can take place early in the deep dive, while taking into account anything which could substantially undermine the education of pupils or wellbeing of staff. Identifying when these meetings can take place will form part of the 90-minute phone call.

Through the deep dive process inspectors want to get to grips with the thinking that curriculum plans are based on and how they are enacted by teachers. This means that simply having some sort of vision statement is not sufficient.

‘Top-level’ discussion with school leaders

Some evidence for this part of the deep dive might be gathered during the 90-minute phone call (see Section 2) but it is likely that inspectors will want to seek leaders’ perspectives on deep dive subjects early on Day 1 of the inspection.

In particular, inspectors will make an “evaluation of senior leaders’ intent for the curriculum in this subject or area, and their understanding of its implementation and impact.”

Inspectors will want to see evidence in person and are likely to use the mantra ‘let’s see that in action together’.

Curriculum leaders

Arguably, this is where the focus of inspection has most shifted in the new framework. ‘Curriculum leaders’ is likely to mean heads of department in secondary schools but in small primary schools it could be that it is a senior leader who oversees a particular subject. This is why Ofsted is not referring to these people as ‘middle leaders’ - they could sit at different points in the school structure. As far as Ofsted is concerned, the curriculum leader is the person who leads the curriculum in that subject.

Inspectors will make an “evaluation of curriculum leaders’ long- and medium-term thinking and planning, including the rationale for content choices and curriculum sequencing.”

In particular, inspectors will be interested in exploring:

- Are plans and schemes in place and appropriate?
- How does prior content prepare for what’s coming in the curriculum (eg next month, next year)?
- Are content choices and activities appropriate for the subject?
- How is assessment used to check that necessary components are learned?
- What systems are there to support non-specialists/inexperienced teachers?
- How do whole school priorities affect the quality of education at the subject level?

At its most simple, inspectors are trying to probe the rationale for decisions curriculum leaders make about the curriculum, especially in relation to choices over what to teach and the order it is taught in. This can be summarised by two key questions: why that, and why then?

Work scrutiny

Inspectors will carry out an in-depth work scrutiny as part of each deep dive, usually alongside the curriculum leader.

Key points

- Minimum of six books per year group (minimum of two year groups – doesn’t have to be consecutive)
- Not about judging progress from one point to another. Inspectors are looking to see how the intended curriculum is being implemented effectively
- In some subjects, work is not written or in books; evidence will be in quality of pupils’ performance (eg in art, music, drama).
- If at start of academic year and little work in books, inspectors will give greater weight to other aspects of deep dive.

Lesson observations

This part of the deep dive is primarily concerned with finding out how the intended curriculum is being enacted by teachers. Is it consistent with the aspects discussed? Inspectors will assess the sequence of lessons, not individual lessons and as such, individual lessons and teachers should not be graded.

Inspectors should seek to contextualise within the lesson sequence notable aspects of curriculum implementation that are observed. For example, if inspectors notice that pupils are spending what appears to be a long time on a particular piece of learning, rather than judged this to be 'low challenge', inspectors should try to find out why this curricular decision has been made. It may, for example, be that the teacher is deliberately trying to help pupils over-learn so they become fluent in their understanding and application. This may be an entirely appropriate curriculum aim and inspectors need to dig into such questions rather than make superficial judgments. This is why inspectors should not consider individual lessons to be the unit of analysis; it is sequences of lessons that matter.

Key information

- Inspectors will observe four to six lessons per deep dive.
- Inspectors will spend at least 15 minutes in each lesson.
- Inspectors are assessing sequence of lessons, not individual lessons.
- Feedback to teachers is not on individual basis but as a group. This meeting also gives inspectors an opportunity to talk to teachers about the quality of education and follow up any queries.
- Inspectors will probe the selection and sequencing of the curriculum. These two simple questions are a useful rule of thumb: Why this? Why then?
- Inspectors will consider how teachers support pupils to remember content long term.
- Inspectors don't expect primaries to teach by subject, but they will explore subjects as the focus of deep dives.
- Inspectors will explore the subject specific pedagogy teachers use. Are the activities right for the curriculum intent?
- Inspectors may also gather evidence towards other judgements as they go, such as behaviour and attitudes.

Pupil discussions

- Pupils are likely to be drawn from the lessons inspectors visited
- Inspectors likely to select the pupils (or at least classes they are drawn from)
- Pupils in two-or-more year groups
- Talking to pupils with their books is likely.
- Extent to which a love of reading is promoted across the school should always be at the back of inspectors' minds.

Discussions with teachers

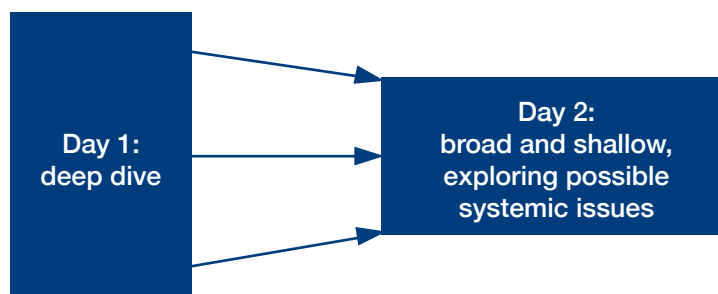
- Undertaken with groups of staff from the deep dive subject
- Will try to include all or most of staff seen teaching, plus others not seen teaching
- How are teachers helped to improve their subject knowledge, alongside their pedagogical knowledge?
- How are non-specialists supported?

Bringing it together

At the end of Day 1, inspectors will collect together the evidence they have gathered in each deep dive subject and begin to explore as a team any emerging threads. They will try to identify any 'systemic' issues (these could be strengths and weaknesses) and these will then be explored on Day 2.

If Day 1 is described as being about 'deep dives', Day 2 could be described as being 'broad and shallow', exploring a few systemic curriculum threads across a wider sample of the curriculum.

Inspectors should not be talking in terms of 'emerging judgements' at the end of Day 1 as these judgements can't be made until the end of the inspection. The end of Day 1 is about inspectors forming hypotheses about systemic issues, which can then be explored on Day 2. It is not about making judgements.



4 Further information

Ofsted Education Inspection Framework 2019

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework>

Ofsted blog by Heather Fearn, 1 July 2019

<https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2019/07/01/busting-the-intent-myth/>

Ofsted, School Inspection Update

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/814954/School_inspection_update_July_2019.pdf

ASCL 2019 Self-evaluation toolkit

<https://www.ascl.org.uk/Help-and-Advice/Accountability-and-inspection/Inspection/ASCL-self-evaluation-tool>

ASCL Curriculum and Inspection Specialist Stephen Rollett