**Summary**

OFSTED will be carrying out a phased return to inspection, starting with an interim period of visits during the autumn term. They currently intend to resume full routine inspection in January 2021, but keeping the exact timing under review.

**The purpose of interim visits**

These interim visits are intended to reassure and inform parents, government and the public about how schools are managing the return to full education for all pupils.

Interim visits will help parents and the public to understand how individual schools are returning to the school’s normal curriculum.

OFSTED will not be evaluating what leaders did during the spring and summer term 2020, when schools were not open to all pupils, but they may speak with leaders about this in order to understand the broad context of its impact on the school.

*These visits are not intended to be inspections!*

**What do the interim visits involve?**

The visits will be based around a series of professional conversations with senior and middle leaders.

These visits will focus on:

* the barriers that the school has faced, and may still be facing, in managing the return to full education for all pupils
* how leaders are ensuring that pupils resume learning the school’s curriculum, including contingency planning for the use of [remote education](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/guidance-for-schools-coronavirus-covid-19#remote-education-and-online-learning) and the use of catch-up funding
* how pupils are settling back into expected routines and behaviour, including regular attendance
* how any identified and specific issues related to special educational needs, disabilities, health, care, well-being issues for particular groups of pupils are being addressed
* the school’s safeguarding arrangements (focusing on arrangements at the time of the visit but potentially also looking at what was in place at the start of the COVID-19 response)

Discussions on these topics will be based around a series of open-ended questions that allow inspectors to understand the current position of the school.

During these visits, inspectors will:

* **not** use the education inspection framework and school inspection handbook.
* **not** result in any grade or progress judgement; we will publish a brief letter after a visit containing information agreed with leaders about their next steps in managing the return to full-time education for their pupils
* **not** judge schools on their response to COVID-19 during the spring and summer terms 2020, though this may be important as part of understanding the current context of the school
* **not** require any pre-written planning or other documentation for the visit; the lead inspector will make a simple phone call to discuss the logistics of the visit
* **not** ask schools for documents or records in a certain format; we will use what schools have already, if needed to support discussion
* **not** require teachers to prepare any lesson plans or examples of assessment, or to put up any displays for the visit
* **not** use lesson visits as a method of collecting evidence
* **not** involve a general review of a school’s policies
* **not** routinely meet with governors or Trustees
* **not** be using parent, pupil or staff questionnaires as part of the evidence base

**When do the visits start?**

These will take place from September 2020. A sample of schools will be visited as part of a trial throughout September with wider roll-out of these visits from 28th September onwards.

**Which schools will receive a visit?**

OFSTED will visit all inadequate schools and a sample of schools across the other Ofsted grades (outstanding, good, requires improvement).

The sample will include:

* approximately 1,200 schools across all Ofsted grades
* maintained schools, academies and free schools, special schools and centres of alternative provision
* those in cities and coastal, town or rural communities
* as even a spread as possible across different OFSTED regions and local authorities

There is no indication that the date of the previous or any upcoming inspection will influence on the likelihood of an interim visit. This is because these visits are not part of the routine inspection schedule.

No schools are legally exempt from an interim visit, because these are not full inspections. Therefore, outstanding schools will be routinely included within the sample.

**How will schools be notified about the visit?**

The lead HMI will normally contact the school by telephone to announce the visit around 10am on the school day before a visit. If the headteacher is unavailable when the notification call is made, they will ask to speak to the most senior member of staff available.

The purpose of the notification call is to:

* explain the purpose of the visit
* allow the headteacher and lead HMI some time to discuss the context of the school, including the current circumstances in light of COVID-19
* allow the lead HMI and the headteacher to discuss the protective measures in place, including the arrangements for having visitors on site
* agree practical arrangements, such as who the inspectors will meet; this will normally include the headteacher and designated safeguarding leader, though headteachers are free to invite other leaders to participate in the visit, at their discretion
* make any other practical arrangements for the visit

The headteacher may request that the conversation is scheduled for later that day. Inspectors will do their best to accommodate any reasonable requests in terms of the timing of these discussions.

OFSTED will not carry out any of these visits without notification. (Though they do still have the powers to carry out a ‘no formal designation’ inspection without notice for schools, where there may be serious concerns).

**What is the length of the visit?**

Visits will normally last for a day. Inspectors will not usually arrive any earlier than 10am on the day of the visit. They will normally leave no later than 4pm.

The lead HMI will discuss the start and end times of the day with the headteacher during the notification call. This is so that any staggered start or end to the school day can be avoided.

**How will findings from the visit be reported?**

For maintained schools and academies, **visits will not result in an inspection grade or judgement.**

OFSTED will publish a brief letter that establishes the context of the visits and what leaders agree are their next steps in resuming pupils’ full-time education.

**Will there be feedback at the end of the visit?**

At the end of the visit, inspectors will NOT provide extensive feedback to leaders because they have not been evaluating or judging the work of the school. Constructive dialogue will take place throughout the visit.

Before leaving, the lead HMI will share the planned content of the letter with the headteacher to check for accuracy and to summarise their understanding from the discussions on the day.

**Significant concerns**

If, on a visit, inspectors have significant concerns about the school’s arrangements for safeguarding or about a breakdown in the school’s leadership and management, they can arrange to treat the visit as an ‘No Formal Designation’ (NFD) inspection. However, they would not, save in very exceptional circumstances, treat the visit as an inspection under section 5 of the Education Act because these routine inspections are suspended.

If an NFD inspection finds serious concerns, OFSTED will prioritise the school for a section 5 inspection when these regular inspections resume (the DfE currently expects this to be January 2021, with the exact timing being kept under review).

The lead inspector will make any significant concerns clear to leaders during the visit.

**How will inspectors collect evidence during these visits?**

Before the visit:

OFSTED have clearly stated they do not expect leaders to prepare any documentary evidence specifically for a visit. If documentation is needed to support discussion, it should be part of the standard documents or policies that leaders use for the normal day-to-day business of the school.

Leaders are not expected to prepare a self-evaluation or equivalent for the visit. Inspectors will not expect any information to be in any specific format or to be prepared only for Ofsted.

Inspectors will not have access to the school’s inspection data summary report (IDSR) and this will not be used to prepare for these visits.

The lead HMI will have read the school’s previous Ofsted inspection report, only to understand the context of the school at the time of the previous inspection.

During the visit:

Conversations with senior leaders will be the main source of information. Inspectors will not visit lessons or look at pupils’ work. If it is agreed with the headteacher that it is safe and appropriate to do so, they may talk to staff and/or pupils.

Inspectors will look at how approaches to remote learning are integrated into the wider curriculum design, and the plans leaders have in place to follow the [guidance from the Department of Education](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/guidance-for-schools-coronavirus-covid-19#remote-education-and-online-learning).

Inspectors will be alert to any differences in how pupils with different needs or different characteristics are supported. This includes understanding how leaders have involved parents and carers and, as necessary, other professionals and specialist services in working out how best to support pupils with SEND.

Inspectors will **not** routinely meet with governors, trustees, multi-academy trust leaders or local authorities as part of these visits. However, if any of these wish to speak to inspectors, inspectors will try to accommodate a brief conversation. Inspectors can, however, only take into account any matters raised that they consider relevant to the purposes and methodology of the visit, as set out above.

Reviewing safeguarding

Discussions with leaders during the visit will focus specifically on how leaders are managing safeguarding during the COVID-19 pandemic and in their local context.

Inspectors will discuss with leaders how they:

* identify pupils who may need early help and those who are at risk of harm or have been harmed
* secure the help that pupils need, and, if required, refer pupils in a timely way to those who have the expertise to help
* manage safe recruitment and allegations about adults who may be a risk to children, pupils, students and vulnerable adults

**Is there any further published guidance about what happens during these visits?**

There is no new ‘handbook’ for these visits, but OFSTED have published an operational note to explain how the visits will worked. The majority of information from this is included with this document.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/interim-phase-maintained-schools-and-academies>