



Getting ready for Ofsted: A short guide for leaders and governors

With little sign of a major re-write of Ofsted's inspection framework appearing in the very near future, and questions remaining over the final 'report card', how can leaders and governors ensure that they are as prepared as they can be for the 'phone call'? With only a day's notice, good preparation can make the difference between control and consternation.

Get prepared

1. Know the difference: section 5 or section 8?
2. Protect your headteacher.
3. Recognise strengths and be honest about weaknesses.
4. Tell a clear story.
5. Assemble a grab file.
6. Form a governors Ofsted working party.

1. Section 5 and section 8: what's the difference?

- Although both are HMI led inspections, **section 5 inspections are graded** while **section 8 inspections are ungraded**.
- All schools are eligible for a section 5 graded inspection; however, most good or outstanding schools receive an inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 instead.
- Now it looks as if a good or outstanding school is likely to have a full, section 5 inspection if they have not received one for several years, or if performance data suggests a possible change of grade.
- Schools that are not good will receive a section 5, because only a section 5 inspection can change the grade.
- Section 8 focuses on the quality of education, whereas a section 5 inspection looks at and grades all four key judgements.

2. Protect your headteacher

The Ruth Perry tragedy highlighted the fact that headteachers frequently experience isolation due to the unique demands of their role. It is important that heads recognise that, however much their role involves making difficult decisions and carries significant responsibility, they do not have to do so alone.

Relax, share the load with your senior colleagues, talk to people. Senior leaders, share the load. Governors, be alert to your headteacher's wellbeing. Always.



3. Recognise strengths and be honest about weaknesses

Ofsted's findings and reports can act as a catalyst for improvement, prompting providers to take action to address areas of weakness and build on their strengths. It really does help if leaders and governors recognise what the school does well and are honest about what needs to be fixed. Ofsted will interrogate leaders and governors on this point. Be honest and tell the same story.

4. Tell a clear story

Some leaders and governors may have been part of your last inspection but many or most will not. Meet to discuss the school's journey since Ofsted last visited.

- Have the areas for improvement been addressed?
- How successfully? When?
- How has the school developed since then?

Review your school development or improvement plan and your self-evaluation form, if you have one. Does the data stack up with your conclusions? Compare with any external reviews by the trust or local authority. Openness and honesty are key.

5. Assemble a grab file

Assemble a grab-file that can be quickly accessed so that everything is to hand when the phone call arrives. Most authorities list the contents as:

- Section 1 - Self evaluation
- Section 2 - School improvement plan
- Section 3 - Inspection preparation checklist for headteachers
- Section 4 - Essential inspection documentation and information
- Section 5 - Notification of inspection (arrives on the eve of the inspection)
- Section 6 - Safeguarding and attendance
- Section 7 - Governor SEF and three-year strategic plan.

Ofsted will take a range of evidence into account when making judgements, including published performance data. It will help to include the school's in-year performance information in the file.

6. Form a governors Ofsted working party

The lead inspector will want to meet governors, face-to-face if possible, virtually if not. Prepare for this by assembling a representative working party. Including the Chair is a given and you will need governors who can talk about SEND, safeguarding and curriculum. A working party of three is manageable and efficient.

The grab file is useful for reference. In addition, add the following documents:

- The [inspection data summary report](#) from the DfE. This lays out the information which Ofsted will use for the inspection.
- The [NGA guide to Ofsted inspection](#).
- A list of questions Ofsted may ask about safeguarding.
- A list of questions Ofsted may ask about SEND.



- A checklist for the chair of governors.

(You can find example lists via [The Key](#), or you may have access to alternatives.)

Create a list of questions that Ofsted might ask related to each of the inspection areas.

Divide it into three columns. In column 1 list the question(s); in column 2 list the evidence you can refer to, and in column 3 write your commentary.

Question	Evidence	Notes

Meet with the senior leadership team to agree it and use the list in your own discussions.

If possible, the working party should meet on the morning of the inspection to review their deliberations so that they are refreshed and ready to meet the inspection team. They would also form the core of the governors to be at the end of inspection feedback.

Questions for reflection and action

1. Experience shows that staff at all levels experience stress during an inspection. Are all your leaders, teachers, support and clerical staff briefed on the inspection and sure of their roles? Do they know how to get help if they are feeling the pressure?
2. Has consideration been given to the likely areas for a deep dive? Subject leaders will need to be aware and as prepared as possible. Look at a set of possible deep dive questions.
3. Safeguarding and child protection are of central importance. Have you reviewed your policy recently? Is your safeguarding training up to date and current for all staff? Have your governors monitored safeguarding recently?
4. Ensure parents are aware that there is an inspection occurring; reinforce that outcomes are confidential until the report is published. Have you got a mechanism for this?

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