

School Leaders – Ofsted Interim School Visits

Introduction

This briefing provides information about Ofsted interim visits to schools. It also provides advice to school leaders on the approach to school visits, including inviting Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) to speak to teachers and other school staff, and providing feedback on Government policy in relation to education and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overview of the school visit process

Ofsted will be undertaking visits to a sample of schools in the Autumn term. The visits will be conducted by HMIs. HMIs will gather information about what is happening in order to:

1. inform parents whose children attend an individual school about what is happening to get their children back on track with their education; and
2. provide evidence to the Government about how schools are getting back on track with their education.

Visits will focus on:

1. the curriculum, including remote education; and
2. behaviour, attendance, safeguarding and the needs of particular groups, e.g. pupils who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Visits will examine these issues in the context of COVID-19 only. They will not use the education inspection framework and schedule. Ofsted states that visits are about HMIs having collaborative conversations with school leaders. HMIs will not evaluate the evidence provided or make a judgement about the school.

Following the visit, HMIs will prepare a brief letter that will be agreed with the school. The letter will be published on Ofsted's website.

Ofsted will use evidence from visits to prepare and publish insight papers and reports on particular themes. These are intended to provide a national picture of how schools are managing the full return to education, including particular issues and barriers, as well as examples of effective practice. These reports are intended to inform national policy-making.

Ofsted stresses that they will not use evidence collected during visits of individual schools in future inspections of the school. Information collected as part of a visit will be held on a separate portal with special access permission only. This means that the evidence can only be used for survey and research purposes.

If during the course of a visit, HMIs have very significant and specific concerns about safeguarding, or that leadership and management in the school has broken down, the visit would cease and the school would be prioritised for inspection. However, Ofsted stresses that this is likely to be extremely rare.

NASUWT position and advice to school leader members on school visits

The NASUWT welcomes the intention to collect evidence about how schools are managing the return to full opening, including the issues and challenges that schools are facing. However, the Union is concerned that the approach being adopted means that HMIs will not collect evidence on the range of issues that

teachers and school leaders are facing. Ofsted will have discussions with the headteacher and senior leaders. It will be for the headteacher to determine whether HMIs speak to other staff. This means that Ofsted is likely to overlook some of the challenges that teachers are facing, particularly in relation to remote education, the curriculum and workload. Therefore, the NASUWT strongly recommends that headteachers encourage HMIs to speak to teachers as well as school leaders during the visit.

The NASUWT is concerned that Ofsted may focus on evidence about what has worked, e.g. schools that have managed to juggle remote and face-to-face teaching. While examples of effective practice are welcome, they may only be workable in particular contexts. There is also a significant risk that some approaches can only be implemented through practices that require teachers and leaders to take on additional workload or adopt inappropriate working practices.

Ofsted has advised HMIs to record all of the concerns being raised by school leaders and other staff spoken to during the course of the visit, including concerns about Government policy. The NASUWT advises school leader members to have frank and honest conversations with HMIs about the barriers and challenges that they are facing, including issues that are arising because of/lack of Government policy. The Union also advises school leader members to encourage and enable HMIs to speak to teachers and other staff so that they can gain a full understanding of the issues and challenges that the school is facing.

Further information and advice

Further information about Ofsted visits can be found at: <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/advice/in-the-classroom/inspection-and-accountability/inspection-in-england/ofsted-inspection.html>.

Further information from Ofsted about education visits, including school visits, college visits and special educational needs area visits, can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/education-plans-from-september-2020>.

Schools leaders and teachers who have concerns about the way in which a visit in their school is conducted should contact the NASUWT for advice at: advice@mail.nasuwt.org.uk or phone 03330 145550.



NASUWT

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