

FAQ – Academies and OFSTED inspections

When will a new academy be inspected?

The first inspection of all new schools, including academies, and academy converters will usually take place within three years of opening. In most instances, OFSTED will not select new schools for a first inspection until they are in their third year of operation. Ofsted may conduct a section 8 monitoring inspection of any new school at any time, including within three years of opening, where information we hold or receive causes sufficient concern.

Do new academies keep their previous OFSTED judgement?

The school inspection handbook explains that when a school becomes an academy, the predecessor school is closed and a new school is established. The academy is legally a new school.

Ofsted confirm that previous judgements do not carry over when schools become academies. However, the school will still be exempt from routine inspection, as set out below, and it will be linked to its predecessor school on its Ofsted inspection page.

Certain types of schools judged outstanding before conversion to academy status are exempt from routine inspection unless there are concerns about their performance. Outstanding special schools and pupil referral units that convert to academy status are not exempt from routine inspection, but will be eligible for a short inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. Regulations provide that new mainstream academies, whose predecessor schools were most recently judged good, are also eligible for a short inspection under section 8 of the Act. In line with other good schools and outstanding special schools and pupil referral units, the short inspections of converter academies will be carried out approximately every three years.

Where a school that was judged good at its last inspection subsequently undergoes significant change, for example through merging with another school, or by adding a new phase or a key stage, it will normally have a section 5 inspection instead of a short inspection. Thereafter, if the school is judged good, it will be eligible for a short inspection.

When will schools that join the PLT be inspected?

Ofsted state that this will depend on the school's current status.

If the school joins a MAT as part of its conversion to academy status, it will be subject to the same inspection guidelines as any other new academy (see question, above). This is because when a maintained school converts to academy status it becomes a new school. However, if the school is already an academy when it joins a MAT, the timing of its next inspection will not be affected. This is because the existing academy will not become a new school and therefore it "will not have the inspection cycle reset".

Can a school applying to convert to academy status be inspected?

OFSTED state that applying to convert to academy status does not normally affect the scheduling of inspections. However, if a school has a serious reason to believe that the timing of a planned inspection may interfere with the conversion process, it can raise this issue with Ofsted.

To do this, the school could either write to Ofsted or explain during the phone call notifying the school of the inspection. The lead inspector may then take the school's circumstances into account when scheduling its next inspection.

Ofsted emphasise that this would be decided on a case-by-case basis. There is no guarantee that the process of converting to academy status will delay a school's inspection.

How will OFSTED inspect attainment and progress in a new academy?

The school inspection handbook says when inspecting a new academy, inspectors must be careful not to give “undue consideration” to the progress and attainment in the predecessor school (see pages 68-69). However, it also states:

... information or data relating to a predecessor school may be used to inform the evidence base that is gathered during the inspection of the academy to enhance inspectors' understanding about its performance.

For example, inspectors may consider if the academy, "since its establishment, has improved, consolidated or is responsible for a decline in pupils' performance, using the predecessor school's performance as baseline".

The handbook adds:

Inspectors should make clear to academies the extent to which they can take account of the performance data from predecessor schools.

Can new academies with only one year of data be rated outstanding?

Inspectors largely state that having three years of progress and attainment data is not a prerequisite for an 'outstanding' rating. Inspectors will base their judgements of a new academy on any internal data that is available and will take into account relevant data from the predecessor school.

For inspectors to have enough information to make a positive judgement about pupils' progress and attainment, the academy needs to be able to demonstrate that it is stretching and challenging all pupils. Recent internal assessment data could be benchmarked against data gathered when the academy first opened to show that pupils are progressing.