

Ofsted pre-registration inspection

May 2021

**New
Schools
Network**

Ofsted pre-registration inspection

All free schools must have an Ofsted pre-registration inspection before they can open. This inspection checks whether the school is meeting the [Independent School Standards](#) and is required before the school can be publically registered on the independent schools register, also known as *Get information about schools*. The inspection happens in the later stages of pre-opening as certain tasks must be completed before the inspection can take place. For example, you will need to have developed some of your school's written policies. The only situation where you would not need to undergo an Ofsted pre-registration inspection would be if there's a 'material change' to your school. For example, if you move from a temporary to a permanent site, you would not need to undergo a second pre-registration inspection.

Independent School Standards

The Ofsted pre-registration inspection differs from the type of Ofsted inspection the school will have when it is open. The purpose of the pre-registration inspection is to evaluate whether a school is meeting the Independent School Standards and therefore fit to open – it does not provide any judgement of quality. Your education plans and policies are considered throughout the pre-opening phase, and in particular at the readiness to open meeting with the Department for Education. The areas covered in the pre-registration inspection are¹:

- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils;
- Welfare, health and safety of pupils;
- Suitability of the proprietor and staff;
- Premises and accommodation;
- Provision of information for parents, carers and others;
- Procedures for handling complaints;
- Leadership and management.

How to prepare for the inspection

Before the inspection can happen, the chair of trustees of your trust must hold a valid Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate which must be countersigned by the Department for Education (DfE). This is a minimum requirement but there is an expectation that if DBS certificates have not

¹ The Independent School Standards regulation also includes Quality of Education; however, for free schools, this is not included as your education plans will be assess throughout pre-opening by External Experts.

been obtained for all trustees and members, this should be well underway by the point of registration.

Your DfE Delivery Officer will advise you when your inspection will be and the Ofsted inspector will subsequently contact you to confirm the time and date. Although you do not choose your date, the schools that have made steady progress will be prioritised over those that would benefit by having more time to carry out pre-opening activities in preparation for the pre-registration inspection. Both options have advantages: having an earlier inspection will mean that you have time to implement feedback from the inspection, and having a later inspection gives you more time to prepare.

You will need to send your Delivery Officer certain documents two weeks ahead of your inspection date: as preparation for the pre-registration inspection:

- a completed [registration of free schools form](#);
- a plan showing the layout of the premises and accommodation of all buildings;
- a copy of the school's policies on:
 - preventing bullying;
 - safeguarding and promoting the welfare of pupils at the school (this should be compliant with the relevant health and safety law);
 - safeguarding and promoting the health and safety of pupils on activities outside of the school (which should be based on the DfE's guidance, '[Departmental Advice on Health and Safety for schools](#)');
 - student behaviour, which should include how good behaviour will be promoted and the protocol for bad behaviour;
- a copy of the school's complaints procedure;
- evidence that your school has appropriate methods to conduct DBS checks of staff and record the results. All schools should have a single central register to record this information and it is the trust's responsibility to keep it up to date.

It is the trust's responsibility to produce these policies and your Delivery Officer must receive these documents no later than two weeks before your inspection. You should strongly consider including the collation of these documents for your Delivery Officer on your project plan because if this deadline is missed then your inspection may be delayed.

Fire safety

The trust is responsible for ensuring that your school meets fire safety standards, namely the [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#). The trust should also inform your local Fire and Rescue Service that your school is opening.

Registration will not be agreed until confirmation of satisfactory fire precautions is received. You do not necessarily have to have an inspection by the fire service – Ofsted will consider alternative evidence, such as written confirmation from the Fire and Rescue Service that they have approved your fire risk assessment in principle. They will also consider one or more of the following:

- documentation/ certificate issued by an independent fire safety adviser;
- confirmation that you hold a fire risk assessment and are complying with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005;
- a completion certificate stating that the construction of your school site is in accordance with Building Control Regulations and compliant with fire standards.

The inspection

Before the Ofsted inspector can make a final decision about whether your school meets the requirements set out in the Independent School Standards, they will visit the site of your school. Only after assessing your submitted documents and inspecting the site, can the inspector decide whether your school can be registered.

The inspection usually lasts half a day. The inspector may also need access to office space in order to work. It is usually the principal designate and/or lead proposer who guides the Ofsted inspector, but it could instead be another member of the group who is able to discuss the school's policies and plans. The date of the inspection will not be rearranged simply because the principal designate is unavailable.

The inspector may request to see other policies on the day, in addition to the policies you have already submitted. If policies are not ready, the representative of the project on the day must be able to discuss the policy and plans for its completion. Equally, if work on the site is not completed, the representative should be prepared to talk through how the site will develop and what the plans are for completion. They must also describe how the 'premises and accommodation' section of the Independent Schools Standards is going to be met once the site has been handed over to the school for opening.

After the inspection

The inspector will write an advice note for the Secretary of State and a checklist for your project. You will receive the checklist from your Delivery Officer: you must address any issues identified (known as 'conditions of registration' and you must take action to resolve these issues before your school can open. Your Delivery Officer will need evidence that these tasks have been completed as it is the DfE which decides whether these conditions have been met, not Ofsted.

If the result of your Ofsted pre-registration inspection is that your school should not be registered, then your Delivery Officer will work with you to resolve the highlighted problem areas and arrange for your school to be re-inspected if necessary. A second advisory letter and checklist will then be produced.

Ofsted now publishes the advice note and the checklist – you can see examples of previous advice notes [here](#). Think carefully about how you communicate the outcome of your inspection to your stakeholders – remember that the inspection is about whether or not the school is fit to open, not a judgement of quality.

Registering on Get information about schools

Get information about schools is the formal DfE database of all schools in England and Wales. Registering on it will get your school its DfE number and unique reference number.

You will need to complete the Get information about schools form (provided by your Delivery Officer) and send it to GIAS.FreeSchools@education.gov.uk. This can be done at any point of the pre-opening process but the Department advises that you should do this at least 5-7 months before the school opens (at the end of phase 3 at the latest). You will need a landline to register your school, but if you do not have the telephones for the school set up when you complete the form you can use an alternative number - remember to change it to the landline number of the school when this is set up.

Your school will be registered as 'pending approval' once your form has been processed and your school will be given a unique reference number, but it will be hidden from public searches. Your status will not change to 'proposed to open' and become searchable until:

- you have a funding agreement;
- any pre-opening ROM actions are addressed; and
- you have successfully completed your Ofsted pre-registration inspection. Your Delivery Officer will confirm when this status change takes place.

DfE Sign-in

DfE Sign-in is the portal through which schools, the DfE and local authorities access DfE systems, including GIAS.

Around 2 months before your free school is due to open, your lead contact will be in touch with you to obtain the details of the person you want to be given the initial access to DfE Sign-In. Initial approver access will be given to the person you nominate. They will receive their DfE Sign-in details once your free school's status has been changed to 'proposed to open' on GIAS.

Academies (including free schools) and trust accounts can have up to 20 user accounts and 2 approver accounts per organisation.

The approver can create accounts for other members of staff and add services to accounts such as COLLECT. They also archive accounts when they are no longer in use. It is their responsibility and decision as to who they add to the account.

Once registration is complete, it is important that someone at the school takes responsibility for keeping your GIAS record accurate and up-to-date –the DfE will not do this for you. If you do not confirm your school information on GIAS is correct every 60 days, you will get a reminder that you need to review and update your details. This will continue to be issued weekly until you review and confirm details.

Checklist

Task	
Ensure your chair of trustees holds a DBS certificate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure all members and trustees hold DBS certificates	<input type="checkbox"/>
Send all policies and documentation to lead contact at least two weeks prior to the inspection date. Ensure that these are all collated in one folder, for ease of access.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure someone from your project team/principal designate is available on the day	<input type="checkbox"/>

of the inspection to discuss policies and plans with the Ofsted inspector.	
Inform the Fire and Rescue Service of your intention to open and obtain suitable certification.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Resolve any conditions of registration identified on your checklist and provide evidence to your lead contact.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Obtain Get information about schools registration form, 5-7 months prior to opening.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Obtain login details for Get information about schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nominate a team member to be responsible for keeping Get information about schools up to date.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure that the builders on the school's site are aware that the visit is taking place so they can give you space for the day.	<input type="checkbox"/>

New Schools Network Delivery Programme

New Schools Network (NSN) has supported free school groups in pre-opening since 2014. NSN's unrivalled knowledge and experience has been informed by our work with over 70% of open and approved free school groups throughout the application and pre-opening phases.

The NSN Delivery Programme has been designed to address the challenges of the rigorous pre-opening process. The NSN Delivery Programme fills gaps in capacity and/or capability, providing a range of support options to prepare schools for a successful opening. We provide tailored support whether you are newly approved to open a free school or if you are already deep into the pre-opening phase, and to all phases and types of free school.

[Delivery Programme services offer support for each key milestone across pre-opening:](#)

Services following your approval into pre-opening

- Project Set-Up
- Project Development Grant
- Governance (Advisory or Plan Delivery)
- Site and Buildings
- Pupil Recruitment and Marketing
- Section 10 Consultation

Services for your final year of pre-opening

- Site and Buildings
- Funding and Finance
- Education Brief
- Media Training
- Readiness to Open Meeting

You can [download our brochure](#) for more information on each service. If you are interested in one or more of NSN's pre-opening services, please contact us at helpdesk@newschoolsnetwork.org or call 020 7537 9208. We would be happy to discuss how we can support your free school project and send you a price list of our services.

[Click here to provide feedback](#)