Ofsted pre-registration inspection

July 2018
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 are:

- 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 been obtained for all trustees and members, this should be well underway by the point of registration.
Your DfE lead contact 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 lead contact 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 lead contact must receive these documents no later than two weeks before your inspection. You should strongly consider including the collation of these documents for your lead contact 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 lead contact: 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 lead contact 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 lead contact 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 lead contact) 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 lead contact will confirm when this status change takes place.

Once your status has updated, you will need to obtain your log-in details by completing the Secure Access service request form. Secure Access is the department’s portal for systems such as COLLECT, School to School, Key to Success, ESFA Information Exchange and Get information about schools. A guide for using the system can be found here.
Once registration is complete, it is important that someone at the school takes responsibility for keeping your Get information about schools record up-to-date – the DfE will not do it for you. You will need to confirm your school information on Get information about schools is correct every 90 days.

Checklist

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<td>Ensure your chair of trustees holds a DBS certificate</td>
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<td>Ensure all members and trustees hold DBS certificates</td>
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<td>Send all policies and documentation to lead contact at least two weeks prior to the inspection date.</td>
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<td>Ensure someone from your project team is available on the day of the inspection to answer challenging questions on the details of policies and plans with the Ofsted inspector.</td>
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<td>Inform the Fire and Rescue Service of your intention to open and obtain suitable certification.</td>
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<td>Resolve any conditions of registration identified on your checklist and provide evidence to your lead contact.</td>
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<td>Obtain Get information about schools registration form and email to <a href="mailto:GIAS.Freeschools@education.gov.uk">GIAS.Freeschools@education.gov.uk</a> 5-7 months prior to opening.</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obtain login details for Get information about schools using Secure Access service request form.</td>
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Support for schools in pre-opening
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 meticulously designed to address the challenges of the rigorous pre-opening process. Whilst proposer groups may have a wealth of skills and expertise, the NSN Delivery Programme will fill gaps in capacity and/or capability, providing a range of support options to prepare schools for a successful opening.

Our exclusive packages of advice, support and project management have been developed to comply with Department for Education (DfE), and Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) guidance and focuses on the areas that our experience shows will provide free schools with the most value in pre-opening.

**NSN Delivery Programme**

**Foundation Advisory Service**
All approved projects have access to our core advisory service, which is free of charge. This foundational offer includes:

- An invitation to our annual launch event, delivered in partnership with the DfE
- A telephone and email service
- Key pre-opening resources
- Invitations to our Spotlight events at open free schools
- An invitation to our events focusing on the final stages of pre-opening

**Site Advisory Service**
Relevant to both sequential and concurrent groups, the NSN Site Advisory Service helps groups to navigate the complex process of securing a site and suitable free school building. Developed to complement the support provided by LocatED and ESFA, the service includes:
Essentials Advisory Service

Developed to support the project management and delivery of the non-site related challenges you will tackle in pre-opening, the NSN Essentials Advisory Service focuses on areas such as pupil recruitment and admissions, the section 10 consultation, finance, governance, education planning and staffing. The NSN Essentials Advisory Service provides:

- A named NSN Project Manager
- Access to a range of NSN Associates
- Bespoke and exclusive networking opportunities with existing free schools
- In-depth meetings with NSN Project Managers and Associates
- Detailed feedback from support meetings
- Comprehensive and exclusive suite of guidance resources about all aspects of pre-opening
- Spokesperson training for principal designates

Project Management Partnership Service

Based on our vast experience, and developed with the DfE’s Pre-Opening Guidance in mind, the NSN Project Management Partnership is for groups planning to outsource some or all of the project management of their free school in pre-opening.

Split into two phases, the NSN Project Management Partnership takes into account the volume, complexity and timing of tasks in different phases of pre-opening. With additional bolt-on services available to buy, the NSN Project Management Partnership is the most bespoke service offered as part of the NSN Delivery Programme.