

School Councils UK

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01 Involving the School Council in Ofsted Inspections

What is the new Ofsted Framework?

The 2005 Inspection Framework provides a radically different system for school inspections. The main differences are:

- Short inspections of no more than two days and smaller inspection teams
- Short notice (normally 2 days) of inspection to avoid unnecessary preparation
- Three years as the usual period between inspections
- Strong emphasis on self evaluation as the starting point for inspection
- Required input from pupils, parents and other stakeholders
- A common inspection framework for all schools and post-16 colleges.

What is being inspected?

Subject to legislation, inspectors must report on:

- the quality of the education provided in the school
- how far the education meets the needs of the range of pupils at the school
- the educational standards achieved in the school
- the quality of the leadership in and management of the school, including whether the financial resources made available to the school are managed efficiently
- the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils at the school, and
- the contribution made by the school to the well-being of those pupils.

What level of pupil participation are inspectors looking for?

Inspectors must evaluate the school according to the five 'Every Child Matters' criteria. These include 'The extent to which learners make a positive contribution' and inspectors are looking to see that:

- Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships
- Learners, individually and collectively, are consulted when key decisions affecting them have to be made and their views are listened to
- Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism

How can pupils help the school prepare for inspection?

Pupils can help assess levels of participation by looking at the criteria above and organising a survey.

Ofsted have provided some useful tools to evaluate participation. In the new self evaluation forms, school leaders are asked specific questions about how the views of learners are obtained. In addition, they are asked to give specific examples of how these views have affected decisions. It is suggested that the school development/improvement plan is communicated to students in a way they can understand and discuss.

Pupil questionnaires are also available which ask questions such as 'do teachers listen to your ideas?' (primary) and 'is this school interested in the views of its pupils?' (secondary).

School Councils UK also have tools available for assessing the effectiveness of a school council.

This information will be useful for inspectors and will in itself show the school is serious about listening to the views of learners.

How will pupils be involved in the inspection itself?

In addition to evidence above, inspectors will talk to pupils during their visit. Ofsted have suggested that inspectors meet with members of the school council. The council could do one of the following:

- Take the inspector on a tour of the school, explaining what the council has been doing

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Activity Guide

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- Do a presentation for the inspectors, explaining the structure and function of the council.
- Invite the inspectors to observe a school council meeting, and ask questions to council members
- Prepare a portfolio of evidence for inspectors such as minutes, letters, surveys and photos outlining the work of the council

How can the council be involved after the inspection?

One of the most interesting aspects of the new inspection framework is that inspectors will be writing a brief letter to pupils giving the main findings of the inspection. This will be addressed to the school council and written in a language that is accessible to the pupils. Ofsted expects schools to ensure that all pupils are made aware of the findings of the inspection.

The school council could be asked to present these findings to the rest of the pupils. This could be done in classes by representatives, or in an assembly or through a special newsletter.

Pupils may also wish to respond directly to the inspector on any aspects of the report that they feel are inaccurate.

The work then begins for pupils to help tackle some of the issues that inspectors have raised. Their views on the inspection judgement can help to form part of any improvement plan which the governors may produce.

It may be helpful for pupils to look at the five criteria within 'Every Child Matters' for schools and how things could be improved:

Being Healthy

- Are pupils encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise?
- Are pupils discouraged from smoking and substance abuse?
- Do pupils know about sexual health risks?
- Are pupils encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily?

Staying safe

- Are pupils taught about key risks and how to minimise them?
- Are there things in or around school which make pupils feel unsafe?

Enjoying and achieving

- Is support given to pupils with poor behaviour and attendance?
- Do pupils feel that their personal and academic development is monitored?
- Are pupils fully involved in planning and evaluating citizenship education?
- Is there a system whereby pupils can evaluate teaching and learning, and make suggestions in confidence about particular lessons?

Making a positive contribution

- Are pupils helped to develop stable, positive relationships?
- Are pupils, individually and collectively consulted when key decisions are made, through form councils, the school council or by other means?
- Does the council allow for pupils to give their views and for these to be taken into account?
- Has the school council reviewed school policies such as behaviour and attendance?

Achieve economic well-being

- Are pupils given opportunities to develop their enterprise and financial skills, and to work in teams?

Further Information

Copies of all Ofsted documents available at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>

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