

Ofsted Inspection Notes – December 2025

Brief notes from our inspection (2nd and 3rd Dec 2025)

Monday 9.30 call to say inspection happening

Set time for next phone call – (Asked what time would be best: apparently next Friday is not a suitable answer...)

90 minute call with a break mid way through.

It was Teams meeting Video - Had the team present and informed Inspector

Example of Questions asked during the call:

Demographics - explored English as an Additional Language reflections on local community – why ours was higher

Ask a lot of “Tell me more about that.”

What are your values

What are you most proud of

Tell me about your learning environment

What are you focusing on now and impact over time

What are your current priorities for improvement?

What has changed since the last inspection?

Any recent safeguarding concerns or issues?

Who is responsible for safeguarding and well-being in your setting?

How do you go about identifying disadvantaged students?

How do you support disadvantaged pupils, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities learners, and those known to social care?

Any community pressures or challenges affecting the school?

Tell me about your curriculum

How do you identify pupils with additional needs?

How you any part-time timetables, alternative provision, or SEN units?

How are these managed

What partnerships exist with external professionals?

As an academy in a trust -what is the delegation from exec head teacher to head/head of school AND from trustees to Local governors?

How do governors/trustees hold leaders to account?

How do leaders evaluate the school’s effectiveness

What is your self-evaluation against the Ofsted grading scale?

Attendance and behaviour Current trends and strategies.

Who to contact if concerned about the head (Chair of trustee/governors)

Checked breakfast clubs and after school clubs – not interested as run by external body

Pupil Premium strategy – was key

Initial Teacher Training – wanted to know but would not observe

Shared timetable – Attached

Asked about Wi-Fi We refused and told them to hotspot (fine with this)

Required a pupil list of disadvantaged – (we used spread sheet with all children)

Asked if we wanted to upload the Self-Evaluation Form. We did - it was never referenced.

Day 1 -

4 Inspectors (270 pupils) No observers

They chose 6 Pupil Premium children from list given –

Explained 1 Non verbal and 1 school refuser – they would NOT change.

Lead inspector focuses on the learning walk with Head on first am -contextual

It seemed he was asking himself -does this walk reflect the phone call – You said XXX show me...

Lead inspector asked 'Tell me more of the context (when in a class)'.

Inspector respectful that as executive head I would not know the minutiae of the classes

ISDR - leading the enquiry 3 year trends led open and honest conversation about the challenges. But could not change the achievement grade.

Prioritising Early Years – With 4 inspectors the 1 early years' class was visited 3 times in the morning and 1 in the afternoon, and then again on day 2. About 4 hours of visits in total

Make sure the team know the document 'Strong Foundation'...

Inspectors were everywhere – with 4 walking the school it was almost impossible to track them out at break and at lunch

Inclusion: what does the day look like for the child. If taught in other spaces, why? Is it appropriate, why not in the classroom, what is the impact. Does provision address barriers?

Mid morning feedback –

Discussed what had been seen, highlighted 'issues' that needed further enquiry,

Made judgments which then were justified as the day progressed e.g. "Strong foundations" not seen in yr1 which is the reason what capital letters were missing in the case study books – the 6 lowest Pupil Premium children!

EYFS looked at role of adults. Role of intentional learning for none adult led learning. How are children getting high quality language during child initiated activity?

Adult support because a focus –how are the adults directed, how are they supported, what training have they received to do the role.

Referenced the ISDR – while discussing the case sampling.

Met with groups of staff asked about training and support. (and the history/context – cross referencing the phone call)

End of day 1 meeting

When challenged over judgment made based on 1 child, or the sample of work ... "We can not unsee what we have seen- Nor unhear what we have heard" became a mantra!

Note – when challenged an inspector we offered to present evidence to support the challenged the following day. It was seen but not accepted as the inspector who made the judgment was not longer present. **"Can not unsee what has been seen"**

Back to ISDR to look at impact of actions. Focus for Day 2

Discussed attendance / behaviours – needed evidence of actions.

Day 2

2 inspectors

More focus on EYFS / Yr1 (Those who did not meet Good Level of Development how were they supported in yr 1)

Achievement & Behaviour discussed previous PEX and suspensions, did not ask for records, (but I know they could I had them ready)

All about pupil evidence, books, talking to children, then back to books, looking at minutes of Pupil progress meetings, then back into books, pulling at threads found by the two additional inspectors on day 1 and finding supporting evidence (**Can not unsee what has been seen**) PD (almost an afterthought) - celebrate what you do and why. Track clubs and activities for inclusion and disadvantaged

Mid morning feedback

Summary of grades- Asked what more is needed to change the Grade- very stubborn. Grade set.

Over view: Inspectors stuck to the handbook – Started at Expected and worked up and down - each point of challenged (grade descriptor) needed clear evidence. Generally / typically were not used as variables. Generally (for our inspection) meant nearly all the time... and if 'weakness' was seen they it did not reflect Generally/Typically

Needs attention	Expected Standard	Strong Standard
Only recently... Inconsistencies... Limited positive impact... Weaknesses	Generally... Typically... On the whole... Accurately	Consistently.. Rigorously... Sustained difference... Astute

Great emphasis on the impact of pupil premium / disadvantaged.

Strategic use of spending the money to close the disadvantage gap have you diagnosed your pupils' needs? How did you drill down into the challenges / barriers for your pupils? What was the impact of the actions - w do you know this has impacted on children's confidence- wanted hard data. How effective is this expenditure – based on evidence? How to demonstrate impact (We challenged due to difficult in evidence base – would not have it. i.e. would need control sample that did not receive support thus not supporting 1 group)

Need to demonstrate - the strongest, research-based recommendations from EEF is the need to 'start early with high-quality provision for under-fives? Is this reflected in your Pupil Premium Strategy?

Despite Sir Martyn Oliver's online assurance that the previous data does not determine the judgment – It absolutely did - due to low outcomes at the end of KS2, we were very much told there is no possibility of being "at expected" – despite demonstrating the recent impact of the work undertaken.

I found the following also helpful AND it matched my experience From Stuart Gardner CEO at Thinking Schools Academy Trust

First inspection under the new framework, initial reflections and lessons learned:

Summary - no surprises, but the bar has definitely risen.

Plus:

- Inspectors very much followed the handbook - so you know what to expect - there were no surprises.
- There were more opportunities for discussion and reflection through the course of the inspection.
- The nominee role worked well - better if it is someone who knows the school but isn't part of it as you'll need the capacity on the ground.

Minus:

- The bar has been raised - again. They follow the handbook so you'll need to evidence every criteria to be delivering the Expected Standard - there is no wriggle room. Our sense was the Expected Standard was some where in the upper half of the old "Good" range.
- There are a lot of inspectors to manage and they are "out and about" a lot so the school's SLT will be stretched doing all the learning walks etc. My sense is this will negatively impact stand alone schools and small schools. MATs will inevitably use resource to provide additional capacity during the inspections.
- Even within the HMI team there was variation in approach and interpretation of evidence.
- Get the sense that national averages will become a sticking point for schools serving more deprived / lower attaining cohorts - not sure how much context was really taken into account.

Interesting:

- I was left wondering what the breadth of Attention Needed grades will look like given the higher bar and exacting nature of meeting the Expected Standard - time will tell!
- I am not sure how the way the Expected Standard is being assessed / judged correlates to Sir Martyn Oliver's vision of schools delivering what they can be reasonably expected to do.

Lessons learned:

- Consider carefully which groups you flag up to inspectors, as these (refuge, English as an Additional Language) formed part of the case sampling.
- Impact is everything, from the phone call right through the inspection.
- Inclusion is already a central part, even on the phone call
- ISDR was reviewed, but the lead inspector pulled out the overarching themes rather than going line by line. However, be prepared to explain any single data point.
- They are looking to validate the SIP/Self-Evaluation Form; narrate how what you are seeing fits into the school's context
- Inspectors asked 'is this typical'? Be prepared to break this down
- Case sampling/inclusion learning walks:

- What happens in class needs to match the planned provision (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities folders/EHCPs/class provision map)
- Staff leading this need to really know the pupils
- Guide inspectors towards the pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, otherwise they will gravitate to those with visible adaptations/needs
- Curriculum – asked to see some medium term planning. Have this ready just in case.

Please ensure that school documents set out here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-toolkit-operating-guide-and-information/inspection-information-for-state-funded-schools-for-use-from-november-2025#documents-that-schools-must-provide> are ready and available to the inspection team by 08.00 on arrival. Thank you for your help with this.

Case sampling: please have ready by 08.00 day 1, a list of all pupils across the school who: are disadvantaged, have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, are known (or were previously known) to children's social care, face other barriers to their learning and/or well-being.