

What is Ofsted?

[Ofsted](#) is an abbreviation of the Office for Standards in Education. It's an independent, non-ministerial government department which reports directly to Parliament and its job is to inspect and rate schools.

Ofsted employs more than 1,500 inspectors to monitor the educational performance of schools, plus centres of further education and skills provision.

Ofsted reports also assess childcare, adoption and fostering agencies, as well as early years and children's social care services, to ensure they are suitable for children and potentially vulnerable young people.

It was established in 1992. Before it came in, schools were inspected by inspectors employed by local education authorities - until it was decided that standards were too inconsistent across the country.

What are the Ofsted Ratings Given to Schools?

Ofsted inspectors give an overall rating in their report and outline the steps schools and other educational centres must take to improve their standards before the next inspection is carried out.

There are five ratings given, which are:

1. **Outstanding** - Highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment
2. **Good** - Effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment
3. **Requires Improvement** - Not yet a good school but not inadequate. Such schools get a full inspection within two years from this Ofsted rating
4. **Inadequate** - Has serious weaknesses, is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be grade 3 (requires improvement) or better. Ofsted inspectors will regularly monitor these schools
5. **Special Measures** - Failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement. Ofsted inspectors will monitor it regularly

Why Should Parents Check the Ofsted Rating of a School?

In simple terms, an Ofsted report gives a snapshot of a particular school or childcare establishment. It's a very useful tool for parents when it comes to choosing a school or an early years' centre for their child. Reports give an insight into standards under four main headings – achievement, quality of teaching, behaviour and safety, and leadership. You may prioritise one or two of these when it comes to your son or daughter's education so the observations can help sway your decision.

Ofsted reports also contain useful information such as the number of children who attend, which is also an indicator of its popularity with other parents as well as giving a pointer on class sizes there.

Look out also for the section which describes the school, including the socio-economic mix of pupils, how many children are entitled to free school meals and the proportion for whom English is a second language.

Many parents welcome the opportunity to send a child to a school which has pupils from a range of social backgrounds and which is culturally diverse and Ofsted can provide this relevant information.

What Should I Look For in an Ofsted Inspection Report?

It's important to look beyond the mere rating for a school. This is because it may be doing many positive things, which will be flagged up by the inspector, as well as failing in other areas. Read the report carefully since it may well explain that staff are already taking steps to address those issues which have caused it to be given a disappointing Ofsted score.

It may well also be the case that the report was compiled 18 months or two years before and so the circumstances could have changed in how children are taught there. If it has been some time since the last Ofsted, the head teacher might also have changed and, with it, the entire culture of the school.

Is the Ofsted Report the Best Way to Choose a School for my Child?

Experts say the Ofsted report should form an important part of any decision on choosing a school. But they also advise parents to visit prospective schools during a normal term time day. Looking at how happy and engaged pupils are will give you a sense of whether it is right for your child. Have a look at the displays on the wall to get an idea of the kind of work staff are doing with the students.

It might also be a good idea to volunteer as a parent helper at the school or make an appointment to talk to teachers and members of the parent teacher association. Make a note of the extra-curriculum activities and after-school clubs they run to see if they are suitable for your children.

Check out the website to get a further insight into what goes on after the bell sounds at the start of the day.