

Six things I do before coming to your school – by an Ofsted inspector

I have been an OFSTED inspector now for 3 years and as a Senior Leader, for over 18 years prior to this, I would have valued a concise overview of the various stages of the process – so, here goes and I hope you find it useful! More to follow and I hope that they will give you clear ideas about how to prepare for your next visit.

So here's the first 6 things I personally do, once the school's inspection schedule is released:

1. Firstly, I look at the inspection portal for the school, which includes a section with information about safeguarding issues or complaints made since the last inspection. If any are noted I read them and then tick that I have done so (this is an Ofsted requirement). Safeguarding of children is central to the work we do and a clear and very important focus during the inspection.

2. The school web-site is the next area I look at. I have to produce an Evidence Form for this and grade it under Leadership and Management. There are certain basic expectations:

Are there contact details? Admission arrangements? Is there a link to the last OFSTED report? Are the most recent KS2/KS4 results shown and is there a link to the performance tables on www.education.gov.uk?

Is the school curriculum information on each year group by subject, including phonics, reading schemes, KS4 courses and qualifications? What is the behaviour policy, pupil premium allocation, use and impact on attainment, SEN policy, charging and remissions policy?

Finally I try to pick up from the website the school's ethos and values prior to my visit.

3. I personally also look on the web-site for other details which will help me during the inspection: the names of staff, school day timetable and the names of Governors. I read the Newsletters and look at the picture galleries because these give me a real feel for the school and are really helpful for information relating to the Social, Spiritual, Cultural and Moral education taking place. It also enables me to engage in meaningful dialogue with the headteacher, staff, governors and pupils who, I find, appreciate the fact that I know so much about the school already and value what they are doing. I also do an internet search for any recent newspaper articles published about the school, in order to gain a flavour of how the school is regarded within its local community.

4. I look at the Previous Inspection Report and make a note of the Key Issues which were raised and the areas which needed improvement. During the forthcoming inspection I will be gathering evidence from the school about the ways in which they have made progress against these key areas. Headteachers will normally have included these issues in their School Development Plans, showing any impact they have made. Some schools may well have had Interim visits or inspections in certain subject areas. If this is the case I would also note the Key Issues arising from these interim visits prior to the Inspection.
5. The last two Raise on Lines (ROL) provide an analysis of school and pupil performance data and are included on the Ofsted Inspection portal for me. I conduct a full analysis of the data and performance outcomes with a clear focus on the achievement of all pupils but also of specific groups. I then produce a detailed Pre-inspection Evidence Form and evaluate and grade the findings under Leadership and Management and Achievement. I will also generate some possible evidence trails which I will follow during the inspection. I will share these trails with the Headteacher early on in the inspection to give the school opportunities to provide the inspection team with evidence and engage in detailed dialogue about these findings.
6. If an Ofsted Data Dashboard is available for the school, then I will provide an Evidence Form for this too, under the same headings as above: Leadership and Management and Achievement. Again I will discuss this with the Headteacher and other Senior Leaders but also refer to it in my discussion with the school's Governors, as it is an expectation that they know and understand what the data is showing them about their school.

The 6 step process I've detailed above takes time but it is an essential and worthwhile process as it provides me with a really good context. I am impressed by the growing quality of the web-sites I see. In many cases the web-site is the first port of call for parents, and time invested in a good web-site pays real dividends.

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