

The Inspection of British Schools Overseas

Background and Context

Overseas schools describing themselves as “British” are not currently subject to any system of formal endorsement recognised by the British government. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), together with the devolved governments for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, is therefore proposing to put in place arrangements for inspection against a common set of standards that British schools overseas can choose to adopt.

The intention is to inform parents of pupils in British schools overseas how the standards of British international schools measure up against the standards that apply to independent schools in the United Kingdom. Inspectorates authorised by the DCSF and quality assured by Ofsted will be available to inspect British schools overseas and produce inspection reports which will be made available to parents and prospective parents. This will inform parents and prospective parents about the quality of provision within the inspected school and its compatibility with independent schools in the United Kingdom. An essential element of the inspection is considering the extent to which the British character of the school is evident in its ethos, curriculum, teaching, care for pupils and pupils’ achievements. By achieving UK inspection based accreditation, participating schools will be able to demonstrate that they provide a British based education that has similar characteristics to an education in an independent school in the UK.

This document outlines the criteria for approving bodies for the inspection of British Schools overseas i.e. for the accredited inspectorates that will carry out the inspection work.



Independent Schools Partnerships and Strategy Team

Criteria for approving bodies for the inspection of British Schools overseas

Introduction

There are a number of different factors to take into account in deciding whether or not bodies should be approved to inspect British schools overseas.

Inspectorates must demonstrate that they are technically proficient and objective, using well qualified, trained and experienced inspectors. They should have good quality assurance procedures. They must be independent from the schools they inspect, through their constitution, staff appointment arrangements, and any other relationships between schools and the inspection body other than payment of an inspection fee. The managing board should have significant expertise, independent of the organisation concerned, to ensure that an external perspective is brought to bear on the management of the inspection body, including a knowledge of the strengths of both British and international education and inspection. The arrangements have to command public confidence and be publicly accountable because the public needs to perceive the inspection body as competent and independent, with an objective and wide-ranging perspective on school inspection and performance, gleaned from a diverse body of comparator schools. The inspectorate must provide evidence that it has both capacity and the financial security to inspect a minimum number of schools each year and that it can sustain its planning over the cycle of inspections in the future.

The revised criteria

The following criteria reflect the responses we have received to the consultation and takes on board many of the additional comments and observations made.

Technical proficiency, independence and objectivity

In order to ensure that an inspection service is technically proficient, the following criteria will be used to assess an application for approval.

An inspection service wishing to be approved to inspect British international schools should be able to demonstrate that it:

- is independent of each commissioning school or commissioning organisation;
- has relevant expertise and experience of independent school inspection in the UK and/or British curriculum schools overseas;
- has an inspector body with appropriate knowledge and understanding of international schools;
- has an inspector body with appropriate knowledge and understanding of independent schools in the UK and their curriculum approaches;
- has an inspector body that can demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the regulatory requirements for independent schools in the UK and the published standards for British schools overseas;
- will organise inspection teams that will be well matched against the particular needs of the inspected institutions;

- has appropriate systems for recruiting and training Inspectors;
- will work to a Code of Conduct consistent with that used by national and approved inspectorates in the UK;
- will provide inspectors with appropriate initial training and keep them up-to-date with educational developments and requirements in the UK;
- can demonstrate strong arrangements for assuring the quality of their inspections and reports; and
- can demonstrate effective liaison and working arrangements with other inspectorates and public bodies in the UK and overseas.

Each inspection service should propose an inspection framework that describes to the DCSF's satisfaction:

- the structure and length of the inspection process from planning and notification through to report publication;
- the composition of the inspection team;
- the inspection schedules to be used, including a demonstration of how the published standards are to be met;
- the format of feedback to be provided; and
- the format of inspection reports and the arrangements for publication.

Each Inspection service should explain how the inspections are to be managed including:

- the programme of inspections;
- the staffing and general organisation of inspections;
- the support systems;
- contingency arrangements; and
- ensuring that inspections and all associated activities are self-financing.

Each Inspection service should explain how inspections are to be quality assured including:

- the operation of internal quality assurance procedures;
- the provision of support and guidance for inspectors;
- assuring the quality of written reports; and
- holding and maintaining records in accordance with English law, which would be available for scrutiny by the monitoring body where appropriate.

Each inspection service applying for approval must be able to show that:

- it is not connected with the institutions it inspects in any way that might impair, or be seen to impair, objectivity. This would include engaging in advisory work both before and after inspection, and business or other links;
- inspectors are not connected with the institutions they inspect in any way that might impair, or be seen to impair, their objectivity. Factors that could lead to impaired

objectivity include family ties, business or social links to the proprietor or any member of any organisation named as proprietor, and connections with staff or pupils. Inspectors should not have worked at an inspected school, nor given advice to it, for a period of at least 6 years;

- inspectors are not biased in any way in favour or against any particular institutions;
- inspectors make consistent and objective judgements;
- all lead inspectors have experience of inspecting a wide range of schools. Any other inspectors, not in a lead role, should have relevant experience and expertise and hold QTS or other equivalent qualifications;
- the inspection service is legally independent from the schools it serves and has independent expertise on its managing board that will ensure that it is aware of best practice and remains up to date with emerging regulatory changes in the UK;
- the managing board, or equivalent, that controls the inspection service has a minimum of two independent members who are experts in relevant fields and have no connections with inspected schools that could impair objectivity;
- no other Board members should have connections with inspected schools that could impair objectivity and there are arrangements in place to manage conflicts of interest along the lines of best corporate and charitable practice in the UK;
- the appointment terms of the Chief Inspector or equivalent allow him/her to exercise full professional independence and the appointment process ensures that the he/she has no prior association with the schools inspected that could impair his/her objectivity;
- the Chief Inspector or equivalent is required to notify the DCSF of any attempts by schools, associations or other school representatives, to influence the management of the inspection service; and
- the terms of appointment of all other inspectors will allow them to exercise professional independence and prevent them from inspecting schools that they have engaged with in an advisory capacity.

Each inspection service will need to demonstrate that the composition of the pool of inspectors meets the standards below.

Inspectors must:

- have at least five years' teaching experience;
- have held at least one post of significant whole-school responsibility in a British curriculum school, either in the UK or overseas;
- have undergone a CRB or equivalent check within the last three years and appropriate appointment checks (references, medical declaration and check of qualifications). From November 2010, inspectors will be required to register with the Independent Safeguarding Authority in the UK;
- have undertaken appropriate training from the inspection service, which includes recent experience inspecting in the UK or in British curriculum schools overseas;

- be able to demonstrate an up to date knowledge of educational standards in British schools. This would include experience of teaching or inspecting in the UK within the last three years; and
- not have been a headteacher or deputy, proprietor or governor of a UK maintained school placed in special measures, or requiring significant improvement, or of an independent school which has been judged inadequate in substantial aspects of its provision (unless there are mitigating circumstances such as having been drafted in specifically to help to improve the school).

Lead inspectors must satisfy all the criteria above and in addition:

- have held a senior post of responsibility in a British maintained or independent school in the UK for at least three years and/or worked successfully as an inspector for a national or approved inspectorate in the UK;
- have undertaken training to be a lead inspector overseas and been assessed as fit to lead inspection overseas by the relevant inspection service;
- have no conflicting interest in any of the schools they inspect, other than their personal salary from the inspection service.

The Chief Inspector or equivalent of an inspection service must satisfy all the criteria above and in addition:

- demonstrate substantial knowledge of the service's remit;
- have substantial experience of inspection work, including at least five years experience as a lead inspector in the UK;
- be able to demonstrate integrity, impartiality and independence from the schools in the service's remit and have no connection with any member of the board of directors of the inspection service that could impair or be seen to impair that independence.

Each Inspection service should demonstrate that they can deploy inspectors experienced and well qualified to cover:

- a range of different sized schools;
- early years, primary and secondary age range schools;
- day and boarding schools;
- a range of approaches to the British curriculum, including a diverse range of qualifications used for entry into British educational institutions (e.g. A Level/GCSE, iGCSE, IB, Highers, diplomas and vocational qualifications);
- schools serving different geographic areas, and pupils from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

The inspection service will need to demonstrate that they have an internal review process to handle complaints fairly, objectively, within a specified timeframe, and involving members of the inspection service who were not involved in the original inspection. Each inspection service will be required to have a procedure for independent adjudication of complaints.

Public and host government confidence

The principal purpose of an inspection report for a British independent school is to report to parents, prospective parents, the school, the UK governments, host nation governments and the wider community, whether the standards expected of independent schools are met. Reports will be published on the internet and will be available from the schools and the inspectorate.

UK approved inspectorates have a broad view and are able to call on appropriate expertise where necessary and have high quality internal control procedures in place to ensure that standards do not significantly vary geographically or across time. For this reason we would propose that a minimum number of inspections be set for each international inspectorate to carry out per year.

Transitional arrangements

The proposals so far apply to future inspection and accreditation of British Curriculum schools in an international context. However, we are aware that some schools will already have been inspected with reference to British regulatory standards by an approved inspectorate. In addition, some schools may have completed other accreditation procedures. We believe that it could be reasonable to take account of recent inspections that demonstrate similar rigour, reliability, and reporting requirements to those required for independent school inspections in the UK, for example when they have been undertaken by one of the newly accredited inspectorates over the past 3 years, using an inspection framework similar to the one deployed under the new arrangements.

This would allow the British Council to include these schools on a 'provisional' basis on its list of schools that have undergone inspection as 'British' schools.

Quality Assurance and Monitoring

Inspectorates in the UK are subject to rigorous DCSF quality assurance procedures, which in England include the monitoring of inspections and reports by Ofsted. We propose that similar arrangements are put in place for inspectorates of British schools overseas.

Ofsted will monitor a cross section of each of the inspectorates' work when they are inspecting in British schools overseas, in order to ensure that inspectors are conducting the inspections fairly and in accordance with an agreed Framework and Code of Conduct, and reaching judgements which are consistent with those made by all other inspectorates operating in independent schools in the UK and overseas.

Ofsted will monitor a sample of inspections and reports, based on an approach which is proportionate to risk. This will also include some monitoring visits as well as the scrutiny of a sample of 'records of evidence' or 'inspectors' workbooks'. Inspected schools may also be contacted by telephone and this is intended to reduce the number of monitoring visits made to inspections. Ofsted will also take account of the inspectorates' own arrangements for assuring the consistent quality of inspection and reporting procedures. Monitoring visits may take a view on the training, professional development, guidance and on-going support provided for inspectors.

The selection of inspections, reports, evidence bases and visits for monitoring purposes will be undertaken according to the model of inspection used by the inspectorate concerned and in proportion to risk. However, HMCI may direct more extensive or additional monitoring where this is deemed appropriate, for example with a new inspectorate. Monitoring will cover all types of school inspection.

The monitoring work will be undertaken by HMI who will focus on:

- whether inspections establish that schools meet the prescribed standards for accreditation as a British school, as agreed by the DCSF;
- the extent to which the inspectors' judgements of the school's compliance with those standards are accurate; and
- whether the inspection meets the agreed Code of Conduct and complies with the criteria set out by the DCSF for the approval of inspectorates.

Where they do not visit the school inspection, HMI may also scrutinise the evidence base from the inspection to establish whether there is sufficient evidence to justify the judgements made in the inspection report. The school's view of the inspection may be established by telephone or email.

In monitoring a sample of school inspection reports, HMI will make judgements on whether:

- the reports are fit for purpose in establishing clearly and accurately that schools meet the prescribed standards for recognition as a British school, as agreed by the DCSF; and
- the overall quality of the report is appropriate for its intended readership and complies with the criteria set out by the DCSF for the approval of inspectorates.

Any other monitoring activity by Ofsted will be agreed in advance with the Chief Inspector, or an appropriate nominee for each inspectorate. This could, for example, include an examination of the inspectorate's own quality assurance procedures and records, and may also include monitoring the training of inspectors for British schools abroad.

Ofsted will provide both verbal and written evaluation of its monitoring work to the inspectors and inspectorates concerned. This feedback will be summarised in a report to the DCSF, if required. The costs associated with Ofsted monitoring activity will be met by the international inspectorate.