

Deferral of school inspections

Information for schools

This document sets out Ofsted's approach to the deferral, cancellation and re-scheduling of inspections, under sections 5 and 8 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended), of maintained schools and several other types of school in England.

Reference to ISPs in this document refers to Ofsted's inspection service provider partners, who administer and conduct inspections on behalf of Ofsted.

Deferral of school inspections¹

There are a limited number of circumstances in which a decision can be taken that an inspection should not go ahead on the planned dates. The purpose of this policy is to set out Ofsted's approach to the deferral, cancellation and re-scheduling of inspections. The policy does not apply to decisions to re-schedule the start date of an inspection within five working days.

Ofsted's policy is that deferral or cancellation should only be granted if:

- The headteacher or the appropriate authority or a member of the school's senior management team is subject to a current police investigation which would be compromised by an inspection of the school.
- The school has experienced a recent major incident, such as a fatal accident to a pupil or member of staff.
- The school is due to close and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) has decided, in accordance with sections 5 and 8 of the Education Act 2005 that no useful purpose will be served in inspecting it. This should normally only apply when:
 - having followed the required statutory process, the proposed closure has been formally approved by a decision of the local authority (LA) or the Schools Adjudicator, as appropriate, under the school organisation statutory local decision making regime
 - the date of closure is within six months of the inspection.
- HMCI agrees that the inspection is likely to cause significant disruption to the provision of education or distress to many pupils within the school.
- The school is closed to all pupils – for example, owing to a staff training day or adverse weather conditions – for at least half of the period for which the inspection has been scheduled.
- At least three quarters of the pupils will not be at school – for example, owing to a school trip or a religious festival – for at least half of the period for which the inspection has been scheduled.
- The school has very recently converted to become an academy school – in such circumstances HMCI reserves the right to schedule the academy's first inspection at a later date.
- Other exceptional circumstances which, in the judgement of Ofsted's Regional Director (RD), justify deferral or cancellation of the inspection.

The nature of such circumstances should be recorded fully.

¹ Under sections 5 and 8 of the Education Act 2005

Applications to defer a planned inspection on the grounds that the headteacher is out of school will not be accepted as pupils at the school are still receiving education. However, in the case of a section 8 monitoring inspection for a school judged as 'requires improvement', Ofsted considers that the contribution of the headteacher is key in ascertaining the likely pattern of future support and challenge for the school. Ofsted may, therefore, defer the section 8 monitoring inspection if the headteacher is out of school, unless the headteacher is absent for a prolonged period of time, for example, due to ill-health.

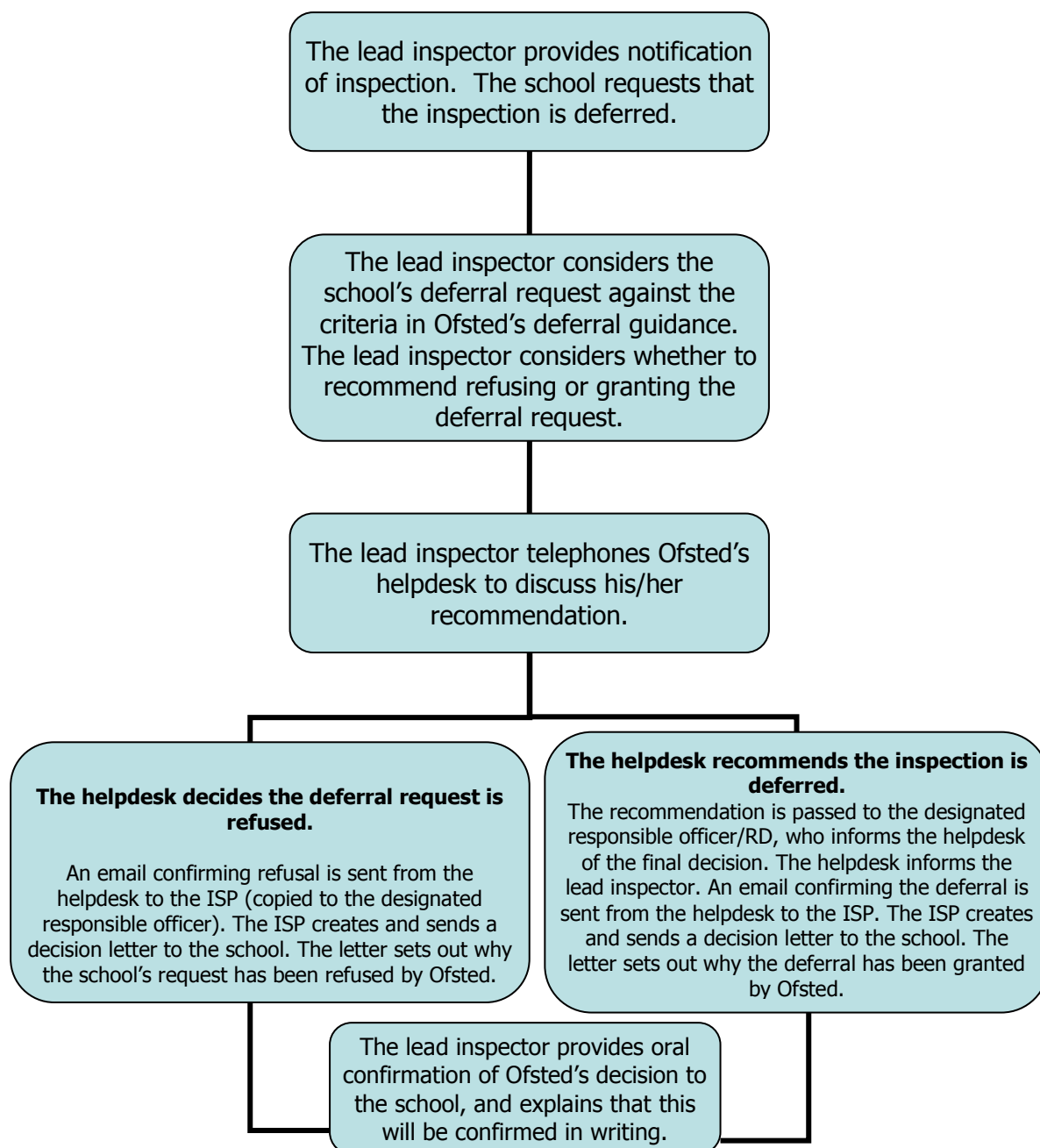
In the case of illness or death of the headteacher, the RD will determine whether the inspection will take place.

Building work will not be a reason for deferral if pupils are in the school.

Subject to the discretion of the RD, the criteria for deferral and cancellation will also be applied to decisions to re-schedule or to accept scheduling requests.

Deferral Process

The chart below is the process followed by lead inspectors.



If a school cannot be contacted by the lead inspector

In exceptional circumstances, it may prove difficult for the lead inspector to make contact with the school. If the lead inspector has not managed to make contact by 2pm of the working day prior to the inspection s/he will contact Ofsted's helpdesk to discuss the situation. Normally, the helpdesk will advise that the inspection will continue and will advise that the ISP should continue to try and make contact with the school. If no contact can be made by the close of the working day prior to the inspection, the inspection will be undertaken as an unannounced inspection.