

Changes to Ofsted inspection fees for independent schools

Government consultation

Launch date 25 September 2025 Respond by 20 November 2025

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Introduction

This consultation seeks views on proposed increases to the fees, that His Majesty's Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (HMCI) charges, for inspections of certain independent schools¹ - referred to in this document as "private schools". These fees are currently set out in The Independent Educational Provision in England (Inspection Fees and Savings Provisions) Regulations 2019) and our proposal, which we are consulting on, is to have regulations, setting out new fees, to come into force no earlier than Autumn 2026.

Government policy on managing public money (<u>Managing public money - GOV.UK</u>) sets out that fees charged by government bodies for inspection should go as far as possible recover the full cost of those inspections.

The consultation seeks views on <u>if we should</u> move towards full cost recovery for certain inspections and if we do move towards full cost recovery <u>our preferred option</u> to do so over a period of 5 years

This consultation seeks views on proposals for:

- Annual increases, in each year over a five-year period, for standard inspections. Standard inspections are carried out under the Ofsted inspection framework to assess schools against the independent school standards (and Early Years Foundation Stage, if applicable). <u>Independent schools inspection</u> handbook - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
- Annual increases, in each year over a five-year period, from the current fees
 levied by HMCI for progress monitoring inspections made under s.109 of the
 2008 Act". Progress monitoring inspections are carried out when a school has
 previously been inspected and found to be not meeting the independent
 school standards (or the Early Years Foundation Stage when applicable) and
 an inspection is commissioned to consider current compliance.
- An increase from the current fees levied by HMCI for pre-registration inspections carried out under s.99 of the 2008 Act, with annual increases in each year over a five-year period. Two options are presented – one which is for a lower level of fees where pre-registration inspections are charged on the basis of one day of inspector time. The other is for a higher level of fees

¹ The term "independent school" is defined in s.463 of the Education Act 1996. However, the proposals in this document do not apply in relation to academies, city technology colleges or a city college for the technology of the arts. This is because the enabling powers, in section 111 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, to make regulations to set fees, do not extend to these institutions. We, therefore, use the term "private school" in this document to make it clear that the proposals do not affect all independent schools

- where pre-registration inspections are charged on the basis of two days of inspector time.
- Making the fee for a pre-registration inspection payable in advance of the inspection taking place, as opposed to the current position where the fee only becomes payable after the pre-registration inspection is completed.

The consultation will run for 8 weeks.

Who this is for

- Head teachers and proprietors of private schools.
- Organisations representing private schools.
- Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted).
- Parents and carers.
- Members of the public, including persons thinking of establishing a private school.

Issue date

The consultation was issued on 25 September 2025.

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the team by email on:

Fees.consultation@education.gov.uk

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the DfE Contact us page.

Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from <u>GOV.UK DfE</u> consultations.

The response

The results of the consultation and the department's response will be <u>published on GOV.UK</u> in February 2026.

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit <u>DfE consultations on GOV.UK</u> to submit your response.

Other ways to respond

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may request and complete a word document version of the form.

By email

• Fees.consultation@education.gov.uk

By post

Independent Education Unit
Department for Education
Bishopsgate House
Feethams
Darlington
DL1 5QE

Deadline

The consultation closes on 20 November 2025.

About this consultation

All non-state funded registered private schools are inspected at the direction of, or under arrangements with, the Secretary of State, who is the registration authority for such schools. Inspections are carried out to check a school's compliance (or likely compliance) against the independent school standards- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (legislation.gov.uk – either for the purposes of deciding whether to register it or in the case of a registered private school, to ensure compliance with these standards. The independent school standards are set out in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. In addition, inspections may also consider a school's compliance against the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage ("EYFS") where applicable Early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

Of the 2,311 registered private schools in England (Jan 2025), around 50% are currently inspected by HMCI. These are known as 'non-association' private schools. The remaining private schools are normally inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) (except in the case of pre-registration inspections), although, in certain circumstances HMCI can be commissioned by the department to inspect those schools. The proposed changes to the arrangements for fees in respect of inspections within this consultation document only apply to those inspections carried out by HMCI; they do not affect fees levied by ISI.

There is currently a significant disparity between full cost recovery and fees charged for inspections carried out by Ofsted: although the actual cost of non-association private school inspections by Ofsted is around £6.5 million per annum (2024), only around £2.2 million of this cost has been recovered from fee income. Government policy is that fees charged by government bodies for (chargeable) inspections should, so far as possible, recover the full cost of those inspections and reduce the need for Government subsidy – see Chapter 6 of Managing public money - GOV.UK.

We, therefore, aim to get closer to full cost recovery in the level of fees charged for the inspections covered by this document, but we intend to take a gradual approach to achieving this in order to reduce the immediate impact.

The level of fees is currently set in the Independent Educational Provision in England (Inspection Fees and Savings Provisions) Regulations 2019. The fee levels can only be changed by making new regulations (for which the power is to be found in section 111 of the 2008 Act). The last fee increases were made in 2019, and shortly before that in 2018, but prior to that, fees had not been increased since 2009.

We are proposing making regulations that over a five-year period increase fees in each year during those five years. This will allow fees to move closer to full cost recovery over those five years whilst providing a reasonable transition period for non-association

private schools. Whilst this is how we propose to implement the proposed increases; consultation responses will be considered carefully. We will consider responses to determine if we should move closer to full cost. If minded to move closer to full cost recovery, we may consider other options than those presented, for example, extending the period over which the incremental increases are made to more than 5 years or making one off increases to fees.

As set out above, the proposed fee increases will require new regulations under section 111 of the 2008 Act. It is likely that The Independent Educational Provision in England (Inspection Fees and Savings Provisions) Regulations 2019 will be revoked and replaced with a new set of Regulations. The level of increases proposed is set out in detail below.

Standard Inspections

Standard inspections by HMCI are carried out under the Ofsted inspection framework against the independent school standards (and where applicable, the EYFS). All non-association private schools, which are the schools subject to standard inspections by HMCI, should have a 'standard inspection' within the period of three academic years starting from January 2023.

Standard inspections are routinely scheduled and do not include emergency inspections (inspections prompted by a complaint or allegation about the relevant institution), inspections commissioned in relation to an appeal to the First Tier Tribunal at the request of the Tribunal, or progress monitoring inspections (see pg. 13).

A standard inspection normally lasts no more than three days, during which time inspectors gather evidence, talk to pupils about their schoolwork, observe teaching in lessons and scrutinise school records and documentation. This evidence is used to inform judgements and to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards (and if applicable, the EYFS).

The existing 2019 Regulations are based on a three-year inspection cycle.

Proposed changes to fees for standard inspections

It is our intention to increase the level of fees charged by Ofsted for standard inspections. The cost of standard inspections varies in accordance with the size of the school. Table 1 sets out the new proposed costs, which continue to be dependent on school size, whilst moving towards full cost recovery.

The proposals, in order to move nearer to full cost recovery, will mean increasing the fees for standard inspections by more than the target rate of inflation (2%) each year. Fees have not increased in line with inflation since 2019 and as such have fallen further

and further behind full cost recovery. The proposed fees will continue to protect the smallest schools because they will have the lowest percentage increases in fees each year.

The current full cost of (as opposed to fees chargeable) split over the three-year charging period for standard inspections are:

- At least £2,500 per year over three years for the smallest schools.
- At least £3,300 per year over three years for schools with 100 to 399 pupils.
- At least £3,500 per year over a period of three years for schools with 400 to 599 pupils; and
- At least £4,300 per year over a period of three years for schools with 600 or more pupils.

Our aim is to move towards full cost recovery while continuing to provide a similar relative level of protection for smaller schools as is provided under the 2019 Regulations. This will help mitigate the risk that increased charges make it harder for such schools to operate. We will consider views on the appropriateness of that combined aim and how effectively the proposals will achieve it.

The proposed fee increases will mean that the cost to schools will move towards but not reach the actual costs of inspections over a five-year period. It is expected that actual costs will also increase over five years so Ofsted costs at the end of that period will still exceed fees charged. This means there is some doubt as to how close we will move towards full cost recovery; however, we are confident we will still be some way short of it.

Table 1 below illustrates fees currently charged and the new proposed annual fees (over a five-year period):

	Current annual fees		Proposed annual fee instalment 2026/27		Proposed annual fee instalment 2027/28		Proposed annual fee instalment 2028/29		Proposed annual fee instalment 2029/30		Proposed annual fee instalment 2030/31	
Pupils on roll of school	Fixed Charge element of Fee paid per year	Variable Fee Charged per Pupil per year	Fixed Charge element of Fee paid per year	Variable Fee Charged per Pupil per year	Fixed Charge element of Fee paid per year	Variable Fee Charged per Pupil per year	Fixed Charge element of Fee paid per year	Variable Fee Charged per Pupil per year	Fixed Charge element of Fee paid per year	Variable Fee Charged per Pupil per year	Fixed Charge element of Fee paid per year	Variable Fee Charged per Pupil per year
Fewer than 100	£400	£16	£405	£17	£410	£18	£415	£19	£420	£20	£420	£21
100 or more but no more than 120	£2,200	Not applicable	£2,420	Not applicable	£2,640	Not applicable	£2,860	Not applicable	£3,080	Not applicable	£3,300	Not applicable
121 or more but no more than 149	£2,200	£10	£2,420	£8	£2,640	£6	£2,860	£4	£3,080	£2	£3,300	Not applicable
150 or more but no more than 399	£2,500	Not applicable	£2,660	Not applicable	£2,820	Not applicable	£2,980	Not applicable	£3,140	Not applicable	£3,300	Not applicable
400 or more but no more than -599	£2,750	Not applicable	£2.900	Not applicable	£3,050	Not applicable	£3,200	Not applicable	£3,350	Not applicable	£3,500	Not applicable
600 or more	£2,750	Not applicable	£3,060	Not applicable	£3,370	Not applicable	£3,680	Not applicable	£3,990	Not applicable	£4,300	Not applicable

Question 1. (on online form): Do you agree that standard inspection fees should increase for the first time since 2019 so that private schools move closer to full cost recovery? [Yes/No]

Question 2. (on online form): Do you agree that regulations should set out fee increases for standard inspections over a five-year period? [Yes/No]

Question 3. (on online form): Do you agree that small schools should pay a lower proportion of the cost of their inspections)? [Yes/No]

Question 4. (on online form): Do you have any comments on the proposals to increase fees for standard inspections over the next five years?

Other categories of fee

There are two other types of inspection for which fees are currently charged under the 2019 Regulations. These are:

- Pre-registration inspections.
- Progress monitoring inspections.

To further support the full cost recovery policy, we propose to increase the fees charged for these two categories of inspection. For other inspection types (including emergency inspections and material change inspections), there will continue to be no charge made by HMCI.

Pre-registration inspections

Proprietors wishing to open a new private school must apply, under s. 98 of the 2008 Act, to the Secretary of State for registration of the school. When the Secretary of State has received a complete application to register a new school, HMCI (having been notified) must conduct a pre-registration inspection of the school in accordance with s.99 of the 2008 Act. The purpose of the inspection is for HMCI to report to the Secretary of State whether the school is likely to meet all of the applicable independent school standards (and EYFS where applicable) once it becomes registered.

In 2019 a fixed charge of £2,500 was introduced for the pre-registration inspection of private schools. This fee covers approximately 50% of the actual cost at 2024 levels (the actual cost was £4,900).

If a proposed school fails the first pre-registration inspection and requires a second preregistration inspection then the fee must be paid again. It is important that schools which open are safe and provide a good quality of education. In recent years, a small number of schools have been found to be unsafe at their first standard inspection after opening. The first inspection ordinarily takes places within a year of the school opening. We can reduce this risk with more robust pre-registration inspections which have additional resources committed allowing inspectors to focus more on leadership capacity and capability at the pre-registration stage.

We are therefore considering two options in increasing fees for pre-registration inspections. The two options are set out below. Both options move closer to full cost recover over 5 years. It is expected that actual costs will also increase over five years so Ofsted costs at the end of that period will still exceed fees charged.

- The first option is to increase the fee substantially this year to reduce the level of government subsidy, with subsequent smaller annual increases over the next four years moving closer to the current actual cost of £4,600. However, this option does not allow for additional resources to be committed to these inspections so there will continue to be a risk that they do not adequately pick up on capacity and capability issues that may lead to problems after a school opens.
- The second option would be to increase fees more substantially overall to allow Ofsted to increase the resources committed to these inspections. We propose to roughly double the inspector time committed to these inspections, although support from back-office staff would not necessarily need to double in conjunction with inspector time doubling therefore the actual cost would be £6,900. As with the first option, we propose a substantial increase this year and smaller annual increases over the next five years.

Table 2 below illustrates fees currently charged and the new proposed annual fees (in each year over a five-year period) for the two options:

	Current Fee	Indicative Proposed Fee 2026/27	Indicative Proposed Fee 2027/28	Indicative Proposed Fee 2028/29	Indicative Proposed Fee 2029/30	Indicative Proposed Fee 2030/31
Pre- registration inspection (option 1 maintain existing tariff)	£2,500	£4,000	£4,150	£4,300	£4,450	£4,600
Pre- registration inspection (option 2 – increase tariff & resource)	£2,500	£6,000	£6,225	£6,450	£6,675	£6,900

Currently, fees for pre-registration inspections are only payable once an inspection has taken place. We are proposing to change this to move to a model where the fee is payable in advance. We want settings to be ready for opening before they apply for registration and payment of fees up front will motivate settings to ensure their readiness. It will also allow HMCI to ensure that payment is received in advance of resource being allocated for inspections and that Ofsted are not left in a position where, when a setting fails to demonstrate likelihood of meeting the independent schools' standards following an inspection, it is required to absorb the cost if a setting does not make the payment, as is currently the case.

Question 5. (on online form): Do you agree that pre-registration inspection fees should increase for the first time since 2019 so that settings pay a greater proportion of the cost of pre-registration inspections? [Yes/No]

Question 6. (on online form): Do you agree that regulations should set out fee increases for pre-registration inspections over a five-year period? [Yes/No]

Question 7. (on online form): Do you agree that HMCI should increase the tariff for pre-registration inspections [Yes/No]

Question 8. (on online form): If HMCI were to increase the tariff for preregistration inspections, would you prefer option 1 or option 2?

Question 9. (on online form): Should HMCI charge for pre-registration inspections in advance of the inspection? [Yes/No]

Question 10. (on online form): Do you have any comments on the proposals regarding fees for pre-registration inspections?

Progress monitoring inspections

If an inspection shows that there are unmet independent school standards (or EYFS) at a non-association² school inspection by HMCI, the department will normally direct HMCI to carry out a further inspection known as a progress monitoring inspection (PMI). A PMI is conducted by HMCI to assess the progress a school has made towards meeting the standards. Fees are currently chargeable for such inspections but second and subsequent PMIs are chargeable at a higher rate than that for a first PMI and we do not intend to change this. Our view is that if a school is repeatedly failing to meet the independent school standards and therefore requires more frequent inspections to monitor progress, the fee for those inspections should remain higher in order to motivate the improvement required at the school. Once the school meets all of the requisite standards, there will no longer be a need for it to have PMIs and therefore it is within the school's control to avoid continuing to pay the higher fees for PMIs.

The current (2024) actual cost of conducting a PMI inspection is £6,300, which is significantly more than the fees charged.

The current rates for fees and proposed increases (in each year over a five-year period) are shown in tables 3 and 4 below:

Table 3: First PMI's

Numbers on roll at school	Current Fee	Indicative Proposed Fee 2026/27	Indicative Proposed Fee 2027/28	Indicative Proposed Fee 2028/29	Indicative Proposed Fee 2029/30	Indicative Proposed Fee 2030/31
0-150 pupils	£300 plus additional £9 per pupil	£376 plus additional £11 per pupil	£452 plus additional £13 per pupil	£528 plus additional £15 per pupil	£604 plus additional £17 per pupil	£680 plus additional £19 per pupil
151+ pupils	£2,000	£2,440	£2,880	£3,320	£3,760	£4,200

Other private school may have PMIs carried out by HMCI. To date this has

² Other private school may have PMIs carried out by HMCI. To date this has been exceptionally, but any private school that has a PMI will need to pay the fee for this – i.e. whether or not it is a non-association school

Table 4: Second & Subsequent PMI's

Numbers on roll at school	Current Fee	Indicative Proposed Fee 2026/27	Indicative Proposed Fee 2027/28	Indicative Proposed Fee 2028/29	Indicative Proposed Fee 2029/30	Indicative Proposed Fee 2030/31
0-150 pupils	£400 plus additional £15 per pupil	£500 plus additional £19 per pupil	£600 plus additional £23 per pupil	£700 plus additional £26 per pupil	£800 plus additional £30 per pupil	£900 plus additional £34 per pupil
151+ pupils	£3,000	£3,660	£4,320	£4,980	£5,640	£6,300

Question 11. (on online form): Do you agree that progress monitoring inspection fees should increase for the first time since 2019 so that private schools pay a greater proportion of the cost of their inspections and therefore move closer to full cost recovery? [Yes/No]

Question 12. (on online form): Do you agree that regulations should set out fee increases for progress monitoring inspections over a five-year period? [Yes/No]

Question 13. (on online form): Do you have any comments on the proposals to increase fees for progress monitoring inspections over the next five years?

Next steps

Following the consultation, responses will be considered, and a government response will be published setting out final decisions on the proposals set out in this document.

Equalities impact

In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, Ministers must have "due regard", when making decisions, to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations, in relation to protected characteristics. The department has been taking this requirement into account in developing these proposals and will use findings from this consultation to develop a full assessment.

The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Question on equalities

14. Could any of the proposals have an impact – positive or negative – on people with any of the following protected characteristics?

[Drop down for each characteristic: Yes / No / Unsure. If yes, please explain.]

- Age
- Disability
- · Gender reassignment
- · Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- · Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- 15. What action could help reduce any negative impacts you identified in Q1? [Free text box]
- 16. Are there any other equality-related impacts you think we should consider? [Free text]

Annex A: Questions about the respondent

Section 1: About you (all respondents)

17. What is your name?

[Free text]

18. What is your email address?

[Free text]

19. Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, your answers will be treated as the organisation's official response. You should only select that you are responding on behalf of an organisation if you are submitting the cleared and approved official response from the organisation. [Individual / organisation]

20. Are you happy to be contacted directly about your response?

[Yes / No]

21. Would you like your responses to be kept confidential?

The government may need to share information about your response to meet legal duties. See the confidentiality and privacy notice (Annex B) for more details. [Yes / No]. [If yes, please explain why you consider it to be confidential]

Section 2: About your role

For individuals

22. Which option best describes how you are taking part in this consultation?

[Select one. If no options fit, choose 'Other' and explain your interest.]

- I'm the proprietor of an independent school
- I'm a senior leader in an independent school (for example, a headteacher
- I'm in a school support staff role
- I represent an employer or a business representative group or association
- I work or volunteer for a charity, membership body, or other organisation with an interest in education or employment
- Other (please specify)

For organisations

23. Which type of organisation do you represent?

[Select one. If no options fit, choose 'Other' and explain the type of organisation you are responding on behalf of.]

- An independent school (e.g. headteacher, proprietor, representative of the proprietary body
- An inspectorate
- A membership body or professional association for independent schools
- A charity or voluntary organisation working in education
- A public body
- Another stakeholder or representative organisation
- Other (please specify)

Section 3: Additional questions based on role

For independent school employers

24. How many permanent or fixed term support staff does your organisation employ?

(If you are responding on behalf of an organisation employing across multiple independent schools, please give the total number.)
[Number]

Section 4: Equalities monitoring (individuals only)

These questions are optional and help us understand the impact of our proposals on different groups.

25. What is your age?

- Aged under 25
- Aged 25-29
- Aged 30-39
- Aged 40-49
- Aged 50-59
- · Aged 60 and over
- Prefer not to say

26. Which of the following best describes your gender?

- Male
- Female
- I identify in another way
- Prefer not to say

27. What is your ethnicity?

Please choose the option that best describes your ethnic group or background. [Select one.]

White

- English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British
- Irish Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Roma
- Any other White background

Mixed or multiple ethnic groups

- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other Mixed or Multiple ethnic background

Asian or Asian British

- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Indian
- Pakistani
- · Any other Asian background

Black, Black British, Caribbean or African

- Caribbean
- African
- Any other Black, Black British, Caribbean or African background

Other Ethnic Groups

- Arab
- Other Ethnic Group

Prefer not to say

28. Which of the following descriptions do you identify with?

[Tick all boxes that apply]

- Disabled
- Neurodivergent
- Having one or more physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more
- None of the above
- Other
- Prefer not to say

29. Do you identify as having conditions or illnesses that affect you in any of the following areas?

[Tick all boxes that apply]

- Vision (for example blindness or partial sight)
- Hearing (for example deafness or partial hearing)
- Mobility (for example walking short distances or climbing stairs)
- Dexterity (for example lifting and carrying objects, using a keyboard)
- Learning or understanding or concentrating
- Memory
- Mental health (for example depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder)
- · Stamina or breathing or fatigue
- Socially or behaviourally (for example autism, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD))
- Other
- None of the above
- Prefer not to say

Annex B: Privacy notice

Privacy notice

For the purposes of your response, other than where we may request, on a voluntary basis, contact details for the purpose of clarification, or demographic information about yourself for the purposes of equality impact assessment, we do not seek provision of personal data from which you or others can be identified. Your responses, including any personal data, may be shared with a third-party provider, or other government department or organisation acting on behalf of the Department for Education under contract or an equivalent agreement, for the purpose of analysis and summarising responses for us and may use technology, such as artificial intelligence. An anonymised version of responses in a list or summary of responses received, and in any subsequent review reports may be published. We may also share your personal data where required to by law. You can leave out personal information from your response entirely if you would prefer to do so. For further information on how DfE processes personal data, please see: Personal information charter - Department for Education - GOV.UK

Confidentiality

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal data, may be subject to publication or disclosure e.g. under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018, or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. If you want all, or any part, of a response to be treated as confidential please explain why you consider it to be confidential. If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it confidential will be considered, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, in and of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department for Education.



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