

Free guide: The New Ofsted Framework: A Guide To Being Outstanding

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Changes to the Ofsted framework

This September's new Ofsted framework saw one significant change to how schools will be judged. Basically, the idea of what is 'outstanding' and what isn't has shifted, it's now all about the long term development of individuals rather than demonstrating a single great, well-thought-out lesson.

In other words, schools will no longer be able to 'plan' for an Ofsted visit; instead, they'll have to demonstrate how they've been 'outstanding' day-in, day-out. When inspectors visit your school they'll be looking at the quality of teaching over time, and how you can show evidence of this.

To help you adapt to these changes, we've taken a look at the four areas of real change within Ofsted's guidelines, what they mean to you, and offer a solution that will help you deliver a better education to your class, and higher standards for your school.

Personalised Learning

Rather than an actual lesson plan, inspectors will instead look at evidence of a well-planned lesson that takes into account the different needs of each child. They want to make sure that every child has the opportunity to progress whatever level they're at, and that they meet the needs of each individual.

This personalised learning will need to be evident over time, rather than something that just happens in a lesson that the inspector judges. Develop objectives for every child; where they're at and where they need to be. It needs to be realistic though. To that end, each child will effectively have their own personalised curriculum; albeit one that meets the minimum requirements set out in the national curriculum.

Introducing personalised learning to your class may sound like an arduous task; however, creating a learning log would vastly help this process. It could be supported by the use of technology - for example, our Learner Journey e-portfolio - so that the child can document themselves the milestones in their learning. This also helps you to show how they're progressing and how close they are to achieving their goals.

Ofsted Inspectors will take into account evidence of a pupil's learning and progress over time, so the more you can demonstrate that they're on the way to where they should be, and their development is supported every school day, the better.

Literacy/Numeracy

Ofsted want to see literacy and numeracy evident across the board: whatever the lesson and whatever the teacher's area of expertise. The framework emphasises the importance of creating opportunities to practice literacy and numeracy skills within all areas of the curriculum. When you think about it, it makes sense: at the heart of everything is literacy and/or numeracy, and they're essential for helping an individual to succeed in life.

Working to a zero tolerance policy - i.e. making sure that, whatever the lesson, children are spelling words properly and using punctuation correctly, for example, means they'll learn the two core subjects much faster. If these two skills are embedded into all areas of the curriculum, their indispensability to learning and development will be reinforced to your pupils.

Homework

Ofsted say that homework should only be set if it's appropriate to the needs of the children. The new framework highlights the importance of setting appropriate homework that has clear and relevant objectives, and which develops children's learning.

If teachers want to maximise the potential for learning through effective homework practice and also personalise the children's learning in a safe environment, learning platforms with opportunities to create 'homework chatrooms' are an excellent way of meeting Ofsted's recommendations.

US-based Northwest Educational Technology Consortium (www.netc.org) has examples of how teachers have 'focused on effectiveness' - and particularly interesting is an article called *Revolutionizing Chat*.

The article discusses how one teacher is making use of technological advances and learning platforms to improve the way children learn history. He adds relevant reading material online and encourages students to debate subjects such as the French Revolution in chat forums. The teacher "envisioned using the Web to provide parents with information that will facilitate appropriate student support at home, and hopes that better communication will improve success with homework and practice."

In this instance the teacher was able to use technology to accomplish two important goals. First, he created a highlight box on his class website to communicate directly with parents. Here, he answered questions and kept parents informed about reasonable expectations for students.

Secondly, he used a chat room where students could ask specific questions regarding their reading and homework. In his European History class, some resources that students had to write about involved primary-source documents that could be challenging to read and understand. By using a chat forum on his learning platform he was able to facilitate a continued discussion and was able to provide more focused practice sessions.

He guided and incorporated the homework practice and review sessions by using an Internet Relay Chat (IRC). His goals were to promote new areas of discussion for his students, and facilitate a learning community that would extend the school day in an engaging way.

He set up particular times when the chat room would be open and controlled access to the forum. He chose twice weekly sessions to open the chat room; one was for 90 minutes after school when he knew students would be online (in the library, other classrooms, or at home) and the other was a specific evening each week for about an hour. In this way, students would have more opportunities to log in, enter the chat room and ask questions.

He reassured parents that it was beneficial for the students to spend homework time in an online chat forum. The teacher was able to maximise the learning potential of the homework, without adding additional pressure for his students. This resulted in children being able to turn to the teacher online instead of asking parents to provide any needed help.

This model of working and delivering both content and homework via a personalised learning platform resulted in those students who accessed the chat room asking more questions and being more engaged in their work. Subsequently, the teacher reported fewer students turning in late homework or missing assignments. Most importantly this exercise helped focus students on writing. The IRC provides an engaging option to extend the opportunities for learning, creating additional time to discuss and review document analysis.

Providing homework only when it's necessary to the pupil could be as simple as researching a subject for the following week's lesson, so that when children arrive for the next lesson they understand a particular subject you're focusing on. Furthermore, using a learning platform makes the homework set completely visible to Ofsted inspectors.

Self-Judgement

Schools will have to provide their own records of observations, to make sure their judgements are in line with the inspector's. These will need to be accurate, and will give a good account of whether the teacher has been realistic in assessing the success of a lesson.

Your school will need systems and procedures in place to support staff and develop them so that accurate assessments of lessons can be made. Remember, this is regardless of grading and pupils' abilities.

A learning platform makes this planning and assessment much more visible to Ofsted, and additionally helps teachers in assessing a lesson and what a child has learnt and gained from it. If teachers are able to be honest and critical if they feel a particular lesson wasn't as good as it could be, and know where improvements could be made in the future, it'll work in their favour.

After the Ofsted inspection has taken place, when the inspector feeds back on lesson observations, they may also ask teachers for their own thoughts and experience of lesson observations, their CPD and their appraisal. Again, honesty is the best policy here - and because the 'judgement over time' rule now applies, it will also influence the outcome of the inspection. If a teacher can see where a lesson can be improved, and where theirs and pupils' development can be improved, it'll make for a more honest and more promising picture of the school for Ofsted.

Overall, while these changes mean more work for the teacher, they do ultimately mean a better educational experience for the child. Adapting to the changes can be easily supported with the use of technology: You can show the development of a child and how they've progressed over time. You can demonstrate appropriate homework that's been set and children that have become more engaged with work after school hours. And as long your school can show it has developed students, met their needs and supported teachers over three, six, twelve months and beyond, it stands a much greater chance of being an 'outstanding' school.

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As a provider of websites, learning platforms, design services and e-learning content, we're also recognised by leading organisations. We're an approved supplier to the UK Government Procurement Service a Mahara partner and a Google Apps Authorised Reseller.

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