

Grade Descriptors - Questions for governors to consider in preparation for an Ofsted school inspection

1. Look at the 'good' descriptors as a minimum for each area.
 - a. Are there any surprises?
 - b. How confident do you feel that you could make an accurate judgement about your school?
2. Consider the possible questions for governors.
 - a. How well would you be able to answer them at the moment?
 - b. What steps do you need to take to find out the necessary information and improve your level of understanding either on an individual basis or as a governing body?
3. Consider the characteristics of effective governing bodies:
 - a. How does your current practice compare against these?
 - b. What steps could you take to sharpen up practice?

The Ofsted handbook grade descriptors for 'good' and 'outstanding' schools

According to Ofsted's **School Inspection Handbook** (updated August 2016) - governors should:

- Be able to show that they are working with leaders to create and share a vision for the school and promote a culture of ambition.
- Understand the strengths and areas for development of the school, and use this information to support and challenge leaders.
- Be providing support for an 'effective Headteacher'.
- Have an understanding of how the school makes decisions about teachers' salary progression and performance, and performance manage the Headteacher rigorously.
- Understand how well teaching, learning and assessment promotes the progress of pupils currently in the school.
- Have enough assessment information about how well pupils are achieving to be able to question the leaders about pupils' outcomes.
- Check that the school's finances are being properly managed and know the impact of key sources of funding: pupil premium, Year 7 catch up funding, primary sports premium and SEND funding.
- Ensure that safeguarding is effective, including protecting pupils from the risks of abuse, extremism and sexual exploitation.
- Support leaders in promoting all forms of equality.
- Be open and transparent.
- Support the school in promoting fundamental British Values.
- Be committed to evaluating and improving their own effectiveness as governors.

Grade descriptors

Grade descriptors are not a checklist. Inspectors adopt a 'best fit' approach that relies on the professional judgement of the inspection team.

Grade descriptors for overall effectiveness

Outstanding

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding.
- All other key judgements are likely to be outstanding. In exceptional circumstances one of the key judgements may be good, as long as there is convincing evidence that the school is improving this area rapidly and securely towards outstanding.
- The school's thoughtful and wide-ranging promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their physical well-being enables pupils to thrive.
- Safeguarding is effective.

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is at least good.
- All other key judgements are likely to be good or outstanding. In exceptional circumstances, one of the key judgement areas may require improvement, as long as there is convincing evidence that the school is improving it rapidly and securely towards good.
- Deliberate and effective action is taken to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their physical well-being.
- Safeguarding is effective.

Grade descriptors for the effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leaders and governors have created a culture that enables pupils and staff to excel. They are committed unwaveringly to setting high expectations for the conduct of pupils and staff. Relationships between staff and pupils are exemplary.
- Leaders and governors focus on consistently improving outcomes for all pupils, but especially for disadvantaged pupils. They are uncompromising in their ambition.
- The school's actions have secured substantial improvement in progress for disadvantaged pupils. Progress is rising across the curriculum, including in English and mathematics.
- Governors systematically challenge senior leaders so that the effective deployment of staff and resources, including the pupil premium, the primary PE and sport premium, Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium and special educational needs funding, secures excellent outcomes for pupils. Governors do not shy away from challenging leaders about variations in outcomes for pupil groups and between disadvantaged and other pupils nationally.
- Leaders and governors have a deep, accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness informed by the views of pupils, parents and staff. They use this to keep the school improving by focusing on the impact of their actions in key areas.
- Leaders and governors use incisive performance management that leads to professional development that encourages, challenges and supports teachers' improvement. Teaching is highly effective across the school.
- Staff reflect on and debate the way they teach. They feel deeply involved in their own professional development. Leaders have created a climate in which teachers are motivated and trusted to take risks and innovate in ways that are right for their pupils.
- The broad and balanced curriculum inspires pupils to learn. The range of subjects and courses helps pupils acquire knowledge, understanding and skills in all aspects of their education, including the humanities and linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technical, social, physical and artistic learning.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and, within this, the promotion of fundamental British values, are at the heart of the school's work.
- Leaders promote equality of opportunity and diversity exceptionally well, for pupils and staff, so that the ethos and culture of the whole school prevents any form of direct or indirect discriminatory behaviour. Leaders, staff and pupils do not tolerate prejudiced behaviour.
- Safeguarding is effective. Leaders and managers have created a culture of vigilance where pupils' welfare is actively promoted. Pupils are listened to and feel safe. Staff are trained to identify when a pupil may be at risk of neglect, abuse or exploitation and they report their concerns. Leaders and staff work effectively with external partners to support pupils who are at risk or who are the subject of a multi-agency plan.
- Leaders' work to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism is exemplary. Leaders respond swiftly where pupils are vulnerable to these issues. High quality training develops staff's vigilance, confidence and competency to challenge pupils' views and encourage debate.

Good

- Leaders set high expectations of pupils and staff. They lead by example to create a culture of respect and tolerance. The positive relationships between leaders, staff and pupils support the progress of all pupils at the school.

- Leaders and governors are ambitious for all pupils and promote improvement effectively. The school's actions secure improvement in disadvantaged pupils' progress, which is rising, including in English and mathematics.
- Leaders and governors have an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the quality of education at the school. This helps them plan, monitor and refine actions to improve all key aspects of the school's work.
- Leaders and governors use performance management effectively to improve teaching. They use accurate monitoring to identify and spread good practice across the school.
- Teachers value the continuing professional development provided by the school. It is having a positive impact on their teaching and pupils' learning. Teaching is consistently strong across the school or, where it is not, it is improving rapidly.
- Governors hold senior leaders stringently to account for all aspects of the school's performance, including the use of pupil premium, the primary PE and sport premium, Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium and special educational needs funding, ensuring that the skilful deployment of staff and resources delivers good or improving outcomes for pupils.
- The broad and balanced curriculum provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to learn. The range of subjects and courses helps pupils acquire knowledge, understanding and skills in all aspects of their education, including the humanities and linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technical, social, physical and artistic learning. This supports pupils' good progress. The curriculum also contributes well to pupils' behaviour and welfare, including their physical, mental and personal well-being, safety and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Leaders consistently promote fundamental British values and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Leaders promote equality of opportunity and diversity, resulting in a positive school culture. Staff and pupils work together to prevent any form of direct or indirect discriminatory behaviour. Leaders, staff and pupils do not tolerate prejudiced behaviour.
- Safeguarding is effective. Leaders and staff take appropriate action to identify pupils who may be at risk of neglect, abuse or sexual exploitation, reporting concerns and supporting the needs of those pupils.
- Leaders protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism. Staff are trained and are increasingly vigilant, confident and competent to encourage open discussion with pupils.

Grade descriptors for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teachers demonstrate deep knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach. They use questioning highly effectively and demonstrate understanding of the ways pupils think about subject content. They identify pupils' common misconceptions and act to ensure they are corrected.
- Teachers plan lessons very effectively, making maximum use of lesson time and coordinating lesson resources well. They manage pupils' behaviour highly effectively with clear rules that are consistently enforced.
- Teachers provide adequate time for practice to embed the pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills securely. They introduce subject content progressively and constantly demand more of pupils. Teachers identify and support any pupil who is falling behind, and enable almost all to catch up.
- Teachers check pupils' understanding systematically and effectively in lessons, offering clearly directed and timely support.
- Teachers provide pupils with incisive feedback, in line with the school's assessment policy, about what pupils can do to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills. The pupils use this feedback effectively.
- Teachers set challenging homework, in line with the school's policy and as appropriate for the age and stage of pupils, that consolidates learning, deepens understanding and prepares pupils very well for work to come.
- Teachers embed reading, writing and communication and, where appropriate, mathematics exceptionally well across the curriculum, equipping all pupils with the necessary skills to make progress. For younger children in particular, phonics teaching is highly effective in enabling them to tackle unfamiliar words.
- Teachers are determined that pupils achieve well. They encourage pupils to try hard, recognise their efforts and ensure that pupils take pride in all aspects of their work. Teachers have consistently high expectations of all pupils' attitudes to learning.
- Pupils love the challenge of learning and are resilient to failure. They are curious, interested learners who seek out and use new information to develop, consolidate and deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills. They thrive in lessons and also regularly take up opportunities to learn through extra-curricular activities.
- Pupils are eager to know how to improve their learning. They capitalise on opportunities to use feedback, written or oral, to improve.
- Parents are provided with clear and timely information on how well their child is progressing and how well their child is doing in relation to the standards expected. Parents are given guidance about how to support their child to improve.
- Teachers are quick to challenge stereotypes and the use of derogatory language in lessons and around the school. Resources and teaching strategies reflect and value the diversity of pupils' experiences and provide pupils with a comprehensive understanding of people and communities beyond their immediate experience.

Good

- Teachers use effective planning to help pupils learn well. Time in lessons is used productively. Pupils focus well on their learning because teachers reinforce expectations for conduct and set clear tasks that challenge pupils.
- In lessons, teachers develop, consolidate and deepen pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. They give sufficient time for pupils to review what they are learning and to develop further. Teachers identify and support effectively those pupils who start to fall behind and intervene quickly to help them to improve their learning.
- Teachers use their secure subject knowledge to plan learning that sustains pupils' interest and challenges their thinking. They use questioning skilfully to probe pupils' responses and they reshape tasks and explanations so that pupils better understand new concepts. Teachers tackle misconceptions and build on pupils' strengths.
- Teachers give pupils feedback in line with the school's assessment policy. Pupils use this feedback well and they know what they need to do to improve.
- Teachers set homework, in line with the school's policy and as appropriate for the age and stage of pupils, that consolidates learning and prepares pupils well for work to come.
- Teachers develop pupils' reading, writing and communication, and where appropriate mathematics, well across the curriculum. For younger children in particular, the teaching of phonics is effective in enabling them to tackle unfamiliar words.
- Teachers expect and encourage all pupils to work with positive attitudes so that they can apply themselves and make strong progress.
- Pupils develop the capacity to learn from mistakes and they become keen learners who want to find out more. Most are willing to find out new information to develop, consolidate and deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills, both in lessons and in extra-curricular activities.
- Most pupils commit to improving their work. They are given time to apply their knowledge and understanding in new ways that stretches their thinking in a wide range of subjects, and to practise key skills.
- The school gives parents accurate information about how well their child is progressing, how well their child is doing in relation to the standards expected, and what their child needs to do to improve.
- Teachers challenge stereotypes and the use of derogatory language in lessons and around the school. Teachers promote equality of opportunity and diversity in teaching and learning.

Grade descriptors for personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

- Pupils are confident, self-assured learners. Their excellent attitudes to learning have a strong, positive impact on their progress. They are proud of their achievements and of their school.
- Pupils discuss and debate issues in a considered way, showing respect for others' ideas and points of view.
- In secondary schools, high quality, impartial careers guidance helps pupils to make informed choices about which courses suit their academic needs and aspirations. They are prepared for the next stage of their education, employment, self-employment or training.
- Pupils understand how their education equips them with the behaviours and attitudes necessary for success in their next stage of education, training or employment and for their adult life.
- Pupils value their education and rarely miss a day at school. No groups of pupils are disadvantaged by low attendance. The attendance of pupils who have previously had exceptionally high rates of absence is rising quickly towards the national average.
- Pupils' impeccable conduct reflects the school's effective strategies to promote high standards of behaviour. Pupils are self-disciplined. Incidences of low-level disruption are extremely rare.
- For individuals or groups with particular needs, there is sustained improvement in pupils' behaviour. Where standards of behaviour were already excellent, they have been maintained.
- Pupils work hard with the school to prevent all forms of bullying, including online bullying and prejudice-based bullying.
- Staff and pupils deal effectively with the very rare instances of bullying behaviour and/or use of derogatory or aggressive language.
- The school's open culture actively promotes all aspects of pupils' welfare. Pupils are safe and feel safe at all times. They understand how to keep themselves and others safe in different situations and settings. They trust leaders to take rapid and appropriate action to resolve any concerns they have.
- Pupils can explain accurately and confidently how to keep themselves healthy. They make informed choices about healthy eating, fitness and their emotional and mental well-being. They have an age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships and are confident in staying safe from abuse and exploitation.
- Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe online and of the dangers of inappropriate use of mobile technology and social networking sites.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development equips them to be thoughtful, caring and active citizens in school and in wider society.

Good

- Pupils are confident and self-assured. They take pride in their work, their school and their appearance.
- Pupils' attitudes to all aspects of their learning are consistently positive. These positive attitudes have a good impact on the progress they make.
- Pupils show respect for others' ideas and views.
- In secondary schools, pupils use impartial careers guidance to make choices about the next stage of their education, employment, self-employment or training.

- Pupils are punctual and prepared for lessons. They bring the right equipment and are ready to learn.
- Pupils value their education. Few are absent or persistently absent. No groups of pupils are disadvantaged by low attendance. The attendance of pupils who have previously had exceptionally high rates of absence is showing marked and sustained improvement.
- Pupils conduct themselves well throughout the day, including at lunchtimes.
- The school is an orderly environment. Pupils respond quickly to instructions and requests from staff, allowing lessons to flow smoothly and without interruption. Low-level disruption is rare.
- Pupils' good conduct reflects the school's efforts to promote high standards. There are marked improvements in behaviour for individuals or groups with particular behavioural needs.
- Parents, staff and pupils have no well-founded concerns about personal development, behaviour and welfare.
- Teachers and other adults are quick to tackle the rare use of derogatory or aggressive language and always challenge stereotyping.
- Teachers and other adults promote clear messages about the impact of bullying and prejudiced behaviour on pupils' well-being. Pupils work well with the school to tackle and prevent the rare occurrences of bullying.
- The school's open culture promotes all aspects of pupils' welfare. Pupils are safe and feel safe. They have opportunities to learn how to keep themselves safe. They enjoy learning about how to stay healthy and about emotional and mental health, safe and positive relationships and how to prevent misuse of technology.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development ensures that they are prepared to be reflective about and responsible for their actions as good citizens.

Grade descriptors for outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Throughout each year group and across the curriculum, including in English and mathematics, current pupils make substantial and sustained progress, developing excellent knowledge, understanding and skills, considering their different starting points.
- The progress across the curriculum of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities currently on roll matches or is improving towards that of other pupils with the same starting points.
- Pupils are typically able to articulate their knowledge and understanding clearly in an age-appropriate way. They can hold thoughtful conversations about them with each other and adults.
- Pupils read widely and often across subjects to a high standard, with fluency and comprehension appropriate to their age. Pupils in Year 1 achieve highly in the national phonics check.
- For pupils generally, and specifically for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, progress is above average across nearly all subject areas.
- From different starting points, the progress in English and in mathematics is high compared with national figures. The progress of disadvantaged pupils from different starting points matches or is improving towards that of other pupils nationally.
- The attainment of almost all groups of pupils is broadly in line with national averages, if below these, it is improving rapidly.
- Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment and have attained relevant qualifications. Compared with the national average for all pupils, higher proportions of pupils and of disadvantaged pupils, progress on to a range of higher and further education establishments, apprenticeships, employment or training. These destinations strongly support their career plans.

Good

- Across almost all year groups and in a wide range of subjects, including in English and mathematics, current pupils make consistently strong progress, developing secure knowledge, understanding and skills, considering their different starting points.
- In a wide range of subjects, the progress of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities currently on roll is close to or is improving towards that of other pupils with the same starting points.
- Pupils read widely and often, with fluency and comprehension appropriate to their age. A very large majority of pupils in Year 1 achieve the expected standard in the national phonics check.
- Pupils' progress is above average or improving across most subject areas. Progress of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average or improving across most subject areas.
- From different starting points, progress in English and in mathematics is close to or above national figures. The progress from different starting points of the very large majority of disadvantaged pupils is similar to or improving in relation to other pupils nationally.
- Where attainment overall is low, it shows consistent improvement.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment and have attained relevant qualifications. The proportion of pupils progressing to higher and further education establishments, apprenticeships, employment or training is close to or above average. These pupils do so at a level suitable to meet appropriate career plans.

Grade descriptors for the effectiveness of the early years provision

Outstanding

- The pursuit of excellence by leaders and managers is shown by an uncompromising, highly successful drive to improve outcomes or maintain the highest levels of outcomes, for all children over a sustained period.
- Incisive evaluation of the impact of staff's practice leads to rigorous performance management and supervision. Highly focused professional development improves the quality of teaching.
- Safeguarding is effective.
- There are no breaches of statutory welfare requirements.⁶⁵
- Children's health, safety and well-being are greatly enhanced by the vigilant and consistent implementation of robust policies and procedures.
- Leaders use highly successful strategies to engage parents and carers, including those from different groups, in their children's learning in school and at home.
- A highly stimulating environment and exceptional organisation of the curriculum provides rich, varied and imaginative experiences.
- Teaching is consistently of a very high quality, inspirational and worthy of dissemination to others; it is highly responsive to children's needs.
- Assessment is accurate and based on high quality observations. It includes all those involved in the child's learning and development. Provision across all areas of learning is planned meticulously. It is based on rigorous and sharply focused assessments of children's achievement so that every child undertakes highly challenging activities.
- Children are highly motivated and very eager to join in. They consistently demonstrate curiosity, imagination and concentration. They are highly responsive to adults and each other. They do not distract others or become distracted easily themselves.
- Children are developing a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and manage risks. They demonstrate exceptionally positive behaviour and high levels of self-control, cooperation and respect for others.
- Children make consistently high rates of progress in relation to their starting points and are extremely well prepared academically, socially and emotionally for the next stage of their education. As a result, almost all children, including children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged children and the most able, are making substantial and sustained progress.
- Gaps between the attainment of groups of children and all children nationally, including disadvantaged children, have closed or are closing rapidly. Any gaps between areas of learning are closing.

Good

- Leaders and managers have an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision as a result of effective self-evaluation. The impact of concerted and effective action to improve provision, including the training and development of staff, can be seen in children's achievement.
- Leaders ensure that children's needs are identified and give children the support they need, including through effective partnerships with external agencies and other providers.
- Safeguarding is effective.

- There are no breaches of statutory welfare requirements.
- Child protection policies and procedures are implemented consistently; practice is reviewed regularly and clearly evaluated.
- The curriculum provides a broad range of interesting and demanding experiences that meet children's needs and help them make progress towards the early learning goals.
- The quality of teaching is good.
- All adults have high expectations of children based on accurate assessment of children's skills, knowledge and understanding when they join the school. Practitioners use regular and precise assessments of children's learning and development to plan activities that are suitably challenging for all children.
- Parents and carers contribute to initial assessments of children's starting points and are kept well informed about their children's progress. Parents are encouraged to support their children's learning and development at home.
- Children are motivated and interested in a broad range of activities and are keen learners. They listen carefully to adults and each other.
- Children's behaviour is good and shows that they feel safe. They gain an understanding of risk through activities that encourage them to explore their environment. Children are learning to respect and celebrate each other's differences and to build their understanding of diversity beyond their immediate experience through a range of activities that teach them effectively about people in the wider world.
- Children make at least typical progress and most children make progress that is better than this from their starting points. This includes children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged children and the most able. Children develop the key skills needed to make a positive start to the next stage of their education.
- Where children's starting points are below those of other children of their age, assessment shows they are catching up quickly. Any gaps between the attainment of groups, including those for whom the school receives additional funding and all children nationally, are closing.

Grade descriptors: the effectiveness of the 16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- Leaders pursue excellence. They improve provision and outcomes rapidly and reduce achievement gaps between groups by monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment as well as learners' retention, progress and skill development.
- Leaders plan, manage and evaluate study programmes so that learners undertake highly individualised and challenging learning that builds on their prior attainment, meets all the requirements of 16 to 19 provision and prepares them very well for future employment.
- Learners without GCSE grades A* to C in either English or mathematics follow appropriately tailored courses in English and/or mathematics. The considerable majority make substantial and sustained progress towards grade C or above.
- High quality impartial careers guidance ensures that learners follow study programmes that build on their prior attainment and enable them to develop clear, ambitious and realistic plans for their future. Learners understand the options available and are informed about local and national skills needs.
- Teaching, learning and assessment support and challenge learners to make sustained and substantial progress in all aspects of their study programme. Teaching enables learners who fall behind to catch up swiftly and the most able to excel.
- Learners are confident and conduct themselves well. They are punctual. They have excellent personal, social and employability skills and undertake high quality non-qualification activities and work experience that matches their needs. Attendance rates are high.
- Learners are safe and feel safe. They are thoughtful, caring and respectful citizens. They take responsibility for keeping themselves safe and healthy and contribute to wider society and life in Britain.
- Throughout the time spent on their study programmes, learners and groups of learners make substantial and sustained progress from their starting points. Rates of retention are high for almost all groups of learners. Any gaps in the progress or retention of groups with similar starting points are closing.
- Almost all learners progress swiftly to higher levels during their study programme. Almost all learners complete their study programmes, achieve qualifications relevant to their career aims and move on to sustained education, employment, training or an apprenticeship.
- Progress on level 3 qualifications in terms of value added is above average across nearly all subjects.

Good

- Leaders have high expectations. They improve provision and reduce achievement gaps between groups by monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and learners' retention, progress and skill development.
- Leaders plan and manage individualised study programmes that build on learners' prior attainment, meet all the requirements of 16 to 19 provision and prepare them well for future employment.
- Learners without GCSE grades A* to C in either English or mathematics follow relevant courses in English and/or mathematics. Many make progress towards grade C.

- Impartial careers guidance ensures that learners undertake study programmes that build on their prior attainment and enables them to develop clear and realistic plans for their future.
- Teaching, learning and assessment support and challenge learners so that they make strong progress across all aspects of their study programmes. Learners who fall behind are helped to catch up and the most able are stretched.
- Learners develop personal, social and employability skills, including through high quality non-qualification activities and work experience relevant to their needs. They are punctual and attendance is high.
- Learners are safe and feel safe. They behave well, respect others and understand how to keep themselves safe and healthy and to contribute to wider society and life in Britain.
- The great majority of learners and groups of learners make strong progress from their starting points. Gaps in the progress or retention of groups with similar starting points are closing.
- The great majority of learners progress to higher levels during and after their study programme. They complete their study programmes, achieve qualifications relevant to their career aims and move on to sustained education, employment, training or an apprenticeship.
- Progress on level 3 qualifications in terms of value added is above average or improving across most subjects.

Access to the full School Inspection Handbook (August 2016) can be found in the link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-from-september-2015>