

Online Alternative Provision and Ofsted:

A complete guide



Academy 21
The Online Alternative Provision Experts

Online Alternative Provision and Ofsted:

A complete guide

As an education provider, our goal is always to provide the highest standard of education to all our students, and to support them in their learning and future pathways.

Ofsted inspections play a central role in assessing this high standard for any school across the UK, ensuring accountability, and driving continuous improvement.

In this guide, you will find some of the most common queries the Academy21 team receives from schools regarding their Ofsted inspections; how we can support, and the latest Online Education Accreditation Scheme (OEAS) for online education providers.

Academy21 can support schools across the UK during their Ofsted inspection in several ways:

1. Answering questions directly from client schools in advance of inspection to prepare for questions about their use of online AP;
2. Partnering on quality assurance exercises in advance of placements of expected visits;
3. Providing clarification during inspection (e.g. on our safeguarding practices and records); and
4. Taking calls direct from Ofsted inspectors to gather information on our systems, the use of those systems, and our AP more generally.



Is there a registration/ accreditation scheme for online education providers?

Yes. Online education can now be accredited by the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE has introduced the *online education accreditation scheme* (OEAS) to reassure children, parents and local authorities of the quality of education and safeguarding arrangements offered by online providers. The DfE encourages all eligible providers to apply for accreditation and recommends that commissioners of full-time online education for school-age pupils in England should only use accredited providers.

The online education accreditation scheme has been developed to incentivise online education providers to meet high standards of education and safeguarding arrangements for their students and, through public reporting, to share best practices across the sector.

Providers seeking to be registered as an online provider and be entered onto the Get Information About Schools website must be accredited ([Get Information about Schools: Frequently asked questions - GOV.UK](#))

Successfully accredited providers receive a DfE number. Academy21's DfE number is 000/1004.

Information referenced from:

- [Gov.uk - How online education accreditation scheme works](#)
- [Gov.uk - Accreditation for online education providers](#)
- [Academy21 GIAS page](#)

How are online providers accredited, and what is the role of Ofsted?

After an application, providers need to agree to the terms and conditions for the scheme and to be inspected by Ofsted, the quality assurance body for the online education accreditation scheme.

Following the completion of the quality assurance process, the DfE will decide whether a provider should be accredited. The standard term for which a provider is accredited is three years.

Ofsted's role in the scheme is to:

- Carry out suitability checks on the proprietors of providers that apply for accreditation to establish that they are suitable to manage a service offering full-time education to school-age children in England;
- Visit providers over two days to assess whether they meet the online education standards set out by the Department;
- Publish a report that sets out which of the standards a provider met and which it failed to meet at the time of the visit;

More details on Academy21's report on the Ofsted website can be found [here](#).

You can also view the official online education standards [here](#).

Takeaways

Are you using an accredited online education provider?

What do Ofsted typically ask Academy21 when schools are inspected?

We regularly receive calls from Ofsted during a client school's inspection to examine the use of online AP by that school.

The questions vary depending on the inspection but here are some examples:

- Do you know which students you have from this school?
- What type of education does Academy21 provide?
- Can you tell me about your provision?
- How do mentors know whether their students are attending classes? Do the mentors in this school use your systems to check attendance?
- What happens if a student does not attend one of their lessons? Do the school use this information you provide to monitor attendance?
- Do mentors use the information provided on student engagement?
- How does this school check the provision is right for a child? How do they pass this information onto you?

- What information did the school share at the point of enrolment?
- How can the school monitor what the student is learning and how well they are engaging?
- Does this school regularly communicate with you about their students' progress?
- What safeguarding procedures do you have in place? How do the schools ensure they safeguard the student when online?
- Does the school make plans to support the student's transition back to school or onwards?

In all cases, Academy21 supplies all necessary information on its easy-to-use portal and throughout the enrolment process. If a school ever has any questions, we are just a message or phone call away.



What questions should schools keep in mind when commissioning online alternative provision?

- Are you using an accredited online provider and have you accessed their report on the Ofsted website?
- How can you help a parent/carer buy into the plan? Is it worth trying either in school or at home?
- How can the placement be set up for success and eventual transition?
- Does the online provider use a secure platform to share student information and enable monitoring?
- Does the online provider have clear safeguarding arrangements? How do you know?
- Do you have access to regular, secure updates on attendance, engagement, and/or progress?
- Is the teaching delivered live and are teaching approaches adaptive?
- Are there options to use recordings to supplement live learning?

For more tips on how to use alternative provision, check out:

[Flexibility built in - 7 ways to implement Academy21 to support your students.](#)

[Six tips to make a success of online provision](#)

[8 Top Tips for Getting the Most Out of Online Alternative Provision.](#)

[Latest updates to the Mentor and Student Portals.](#)

Takeaways

Does your online provider provide tools to track attendance, engagement, learning and does it flag any safeguarding issues promptly?

Are you using these tools to monitor student engagement, and is your provider responsive in its communications?



How does Ofsted monitor the use of alternative provision by schools?

The Ofsted Handbook details the approach taken to evaluating a school's use of AP. This can be viewed [here](#).

The online education accreditation process, for which Ofsted is the quality assurance body, is useful for schools to refer to as evidence of using providers that provide the highest standards of education, welfare and safeguarding. Schools are advised to use accredited providers. The following sections are highlighted from the Ofsted Handbook:

Evaluating the use of off-site alternative provision

292. "Where pupils, including those in PRUs and other alternative providers, attend off-site alternative provision, inspectors will evaluate the extent to which these placements are safe and effective in promoting pupils' progress. Inspectors will normally visit a sample of the alternative providers used and, if required, may speak to local authorities, other agencies and parents/carers to gather evidence. Inspectors will want to understand how providers ensure that pupils who attend multiple settings or part time are kept safe when they are not on site for the whole school day."

Evaluating schools' use of alternative provision on graded inspections

398. "Inspectors will evaluate how well a school continues to take responsibility for its pupils who attend alternative or off-site provision. Inspectors need to be assured that leaders have ensured that the alternative provision is a suitable and safe placement that will meet pupils' academic/vocational/technical needs, pastoral needs and, if appropriate, SEND needs. Inspectors will speak to a selection of pupils who attend off-site provision, where possible, potentially through video or telephone calls."

403. "Inspectors will consider:

- The reasons why leaders considered off-site provision to be the best option for the pupils concerned, and whether leaders have kept that under review;
- Whether leaders have made the appropriate checks on the registration status of the provision and how that has influenced their decision to use that provider;
- What safeguarding checks leaders have made and continue to make to ensure that the provision is a safe place for their pupils to attend;
- The extent to which leaders ensure that pupils benefit from a well-planned and sequenced, well-taught, broad and balanced curriculum;
- The attendance and behaviour of the pupils who attend the provision;
- How well the provision promotes pupils' personal development."

"I needed a place where I could concentrate in lessons, not feel intimidated by classmates, and teachers that I could communicate with – all of which I received with Academy21... I feel I have the confidence to go [to school] in person now."

Lilia

Former Academy21 student

How can choosing Academy21 help schools to monitor progress?

Subject teacher evaluation

Regardless of the enrolment information, initial sessions are used to establish the understanding of each student's current working ability. Subject teachers under the leadership of the Headteacher and Heads of Subject, utilise qualification frameworks, mark schemes, model answers and assessment principles to make judgements about student performance. Moderation and standardisation activities are used to align judgements on performance.

Inspired AI, powered by Century

Inspired AI, powered by Century AI is a platform of micro lessons and diagnostic assessments that are curated and chosen by the teacher. With this platform, teachers can give students recall practice and, importantly, use diagnostic data for lesson planning and follow-ups. InspiredAI powered by Century is planned into lessons for precision and customised assessment as students tackle 'nuggets' (micro lessons) using the platform and independently follow their 'pathway'. This pathway is generated as they answer questions to give them specific feedback based on skills and further content and practise to plug their specific gaps. Teachers will often use Century as a form of baseline assessment early in the term.

Class summative assessments

As confidence develops, students are encouraged to attempt 'reviews', which are summative assessments that assess knowledge and skills more broadly after each topic studied. They are embedded into SOWs in a planned sequence and spiral back over content to ensure they assess knowledge and skills in a reliable, appropriate manner, which can yield valid inferences for the teacher. There is a 'feedback loop' following all assessments, where teachers provide individual marks and feedback to students. The outcomes are then used in subsequent lessons as teachers become more aware of skills gaps in student learning and the further practice they need. The curriculum design is aligned with the range of assessment tasks needed to prepare students for exams and report on student progress via the mentor portal.

Class assignments

Teachers set assignments after every lesson to extend and develop student skills. This builds on the teacher's AfL in class and is set via our learning platform. Students get customised feedback on assignments, which is extremely useful in helping them progress and informing the teacher for future teaching or intervention (e.g. further work, break out room conversations, etc).

Monitoring and assessment

Our teachers monitor their teaching groups through AfL and assessment. They are able to review marks over the academic year via the canvas 'markbook' in order to inform planning and support. Similarly, subject leaders are able to review each class in their area through the markbook. They do so also as part of our Quality Assurance (QA) processes to monitor student performance across the subject, review the effectiveness of teaching material and approaches and advise their teams on areas of focus and development. QA also includes sampling student work and the feedback from teachers to ensure consistency and quality.

Baseline assessment

At Academy21, we make use of multiple data sources to ensure students are in the correct group. Firstly, by asking about needs, additional context and prior academic performance at enrolment, we form an initial baseline of a student's ability to inform our teaching and the student's grouping. We then make use of early assessment for learning in the first lessons through quizzes, class tasks, homework and student responses to further inform our understanding of the student's working level. Teachers will also use the assessment tools on InspiredAI to validate and support the understanding from enrolment and AfL in the first lessons.

Assessment for Learning (AfL)

Once students begin lessons, teachers will conduct low-stakes, formative assessments to double-check groupings and gain initial data on each child. This includes classroom quizzing, monitoring of student-led tasks, questioning and other forms of AfL, which then form part of the baseline to assess students, check they are grouped correctly, and to make lessons engaging. This formative, low stakes approach ensures Academy21 students gradually build confidence around assessment via non-threatening, engaging assessment tasks. It is, in essence, adaptive and inclusive.

Enrolment

At enrolment we ask for key information so that we can ensure the programme of subjects, level of class and our teaching approaches will match student need. The conversation between commissioning schools and Academy21 is a key aspect of deciding what are the most appropriate courses for a student to be enrolled on. We have multiple options for students within each year group to ensure they are placed in the correct class and to challenge them relative to the ability they have demonstrated. For example, we have our entry-level programme, functional skills, rescue GCSE and GCSE classes. Teachers review these placements once the student is in class and use this to inform any moves needed to support students.

How do we safeguard effectively?

Academy21, as a leading online educational institution, places a high priority on safeguarding its students, ensuring a safe, secure, and supportive learning environment for all.

Firstly, Academy21 utilises advanced technology to create a secure online learning environment. This includes the use of encrypted communication channels, secure login protocols, and sophisticated monitoring tools to prevent unauthorised access and to ensure that interactions within the platform are appropriate and safe. The technology also enables the institution to quickly identify and address any potential cyberbullying, harassment, or other forms of inappropriate behaviour.

Secondly, Academy21 has developed and implemented robust safeguarding policies and procedures that are in line with the latest legal requirements and best practices. These policies are regularly reviewed and updated to respond to new challenges and to ensure they remain effective. The institution also

provides comprehensive training for all staff on safeguarding issues, ensuring they are equipped to identify and respond to concerns about a student's welfare.

Academy21 makes use of MyConcern to log all concerns immediately, alerting our DSL and safeguarding team who will contact the commissioning school or LA immediately with concerns either via email or on the phone. Of course, where required, we will make referrals direct to relevant services when we feel a child is at risk. Furthermore, Academy21 promotes a culture of openness and support, encouraging students to speak up about any concerns or issues they may encounter. Dedicated safeguarding staff are available, addressing any welfare concerns promptly and effectively.

In summary, Academy21 safeguards students through a multi-faceted approach that combines advanced technology, comprehensive policies, dedicated staff, and collaboration with parents and external agencies. This ensures a safe and supportive online learning environment where students can thrive academically and personally.

How do we support you to monitor attendance?

In order to enable commissioning school mentors to monitor attendance, we surface all relevant details in real time to our mentor portal – the one-stop location for all necessary monitoring activity whilst a student is enrolled with Academy21.

Mentors can look at each of their students' attendance records by clicking on their student pages on their portal dashboard.

Mentors can view breakdowns of:

- Any week's attendance to check if the student is accessing lessons;
- The EUI grades for every lesson, which indicate student participation in class beyond logging in;
- Record and monitor absences and request 121 tutorials or view current work due.

Attendance alerts

Our mentor homepage is set up to allow commissioning schools to monitor every placed student quickly and easily. The Student List displays the names of the student(s) and the 'Student Pages' menu provides quick access to an individual's weekly report, attendance report and timetable.

Effort, Understanding, and Interaction (EUI)

As well as attendance in class, after every session each student receives an EUI judgement uploaded to the platform for students and mentors to view. This assesses the student's engagement in each session. There are also weekly graphs on the mentor portal so that schools can monitor EUI and respond to any changes in performance appropriately. This allows an additional layer of reporting beyond presence in the online classroom that can inform the school's follow-up.

Attendance registers

Registers are taken automatically as the student enters the virtual classroom and updated at 5 and 10 minutes into lessons to capture accurate attendance data. The mentor portal is updated to show the mentor if the child is present or if they were late to class. Equally, after lessons, a final update captures all attendance after the start of the lesson. This allows mentors in school to check if the student has attended and action follow-up from school. The register view on the mentor portal gives day-to-day, week-by-week, half-termly and termly reports.

Tutorial sessions

Mentors can periodically book sessions for their students to discuss engagement with their teachers in a more detailed format. These are on offer several times over the academic year and students can also use these to go over study approaches to assist them in overcoming barriers to learning.

"Leaders have established a culture of high ambition and high expectations. There is a driven focus on providing the best online provision possible for the pupils they serve. This extends to all aspects of Academy21's work, including the quality of teaching and safeguarding."

Ofsted Report 2024



Making a difference, together.

About Academy21

We are the UK's leading online alternative provision specialist. We work in partnership with schools and local authorities to provide students who have additional needs or challenging circumstances with access to the high-quality education they need and deserve.

We combine unparalleled expertise and knowledge with a deep understanding of the needs of students and schools from 20 years leading the online education sector. Together with our fully qualified teaching staff, focus on welfare, safeguarding and renowned customer support, we've created the most comprehensive online alternative provision available today.

We know that what we do makes a profound difference to the lives of young students, both now and as they make their way into adulthood. We're here to support them, their schools and families and provide the best possible path through their education and towards the lives ahead of them.

Get in touch

If you are interested in finding out more about Academy21 or how we can support your Ofsted inspection, please reach out to our team.

+44 (0) 800 208 8210
contact@academy21.co.uk

Academy 21
The Online Alternative Provision Experts

