



Ofsted Registration

Ofsted registration allows a riding school to operate as a legally recognised school or alternative provision provider, enabling them to deliver full-time education to pupils (including those with EHCPs or looked-after children) and to be commissioned directly by Local Authorities. It provides credibility, compliance, and access to funding streams that unregistered providers cannot tap into.

What Ofsted Registration Means

- **Legal Status:** A riding school becomes registered as either an independent school or an alternative provision free school. This means it is recognised by the Department for Education (DfE) and subject to Ofsted inspection.
- **Mandatory Registration:** Registration is required if the school provides **full-time** education for:
 - 5 or more pupils of compulsory school age,
 - even 1 pupil with an EHCP, or
 - 1 looked-after child.
- **Compliance:** Operating without registration when these thresholds are met is illegal and can result in fines or prosecution.

Value of Being Ofsted Registered

- **Direct Commissioning by Local Authorities:** LAs can place children directly with registered providers, including those permanently excluded or medically unable to attend mainstream school.
- **Access to Funding:** Registration opens access to high-needs funding streams and formal contracts with schools/LAs, rather than ad-hoc or short-term arrangements.
- **Credibility & Trust:** Ofsted oversight reassures parents, schools, and councils that safeguarding, curriculum, and welfare standards are met.
- **Inspection Readiness:** Providers can demonstrate measurable outcomes, safeguarding compliance, and curriculum delivery during Ofsted inspections.
- **Broader Scope of Provision:** Registered providers can deliver full-time education packages, not just part-time therapeutic or enrichment programmes.

What Non-Registered Riding Schools Can Do

- They may still offer part-time, therapeutic, or enrichment programmes commissioned by schools or LAs.
- They cannot legally provide full-time education for pupils who meet the registration thresholds.
- Their placements are more likely to be short-term or supplementary, rather than core educational provision.

Full-Time vs Part-Time Provision

• Full-Time Education

- **Definition (DfE/Ofsted):** Full-time education is generally considered to be 18–25 hours per week, depending on the child’s age.
- **Primary-aged pupils:** around 21–23 hours per week.
- **Secondary-aged pupils:** around 25 hours per week.
- **Implication for Riding Schools:**
 - If you provide this level of education to five or more pupils, or even one pupil with an EHCP or one looked-after child, you must register with Ofsted as an independent school or alternative provision provider.
 - Registration allows you to legally deliver the child’s entire education package, not just enrichment or therapeutic sessions.

• Part-Time Education

- **Definition:** Provision that is less than the full-time threshold (e.g., 1–2 days per week, or a few hours weekly).
- **Implication for Riding Schools:**
 - Schools can commission part-time equine programmes without the riding school being Ofsted registered, because the commissioning school retains overall responsibility for the child’s education.
 - This is the most common route for riding schools — offering SEMH support, therapeutic input, or alternative learning alongside mainstream schooling.
 - Local Authorities may also commission part-time placements as part of a broader package, but the riding school is not legally delivering “full-time education.”

- **Why the Distinction Matters**

- **Legal Compliance:** Delivering full-time education without Ofsted registration is unlawful.
- **Funding & Commissioning:**
 - Part-time → easier entry point, quicker referrals, no registration required.
 - Full-time → requires registration, but opens access to direct LA commissioning, EHCP Section F placements, and long-term funding streams.
- **Inspection Readiness:** Ofsted-registered providers must demonstrate curriculum breadth, safeguarding, welfare, and measurable outcomes equivalent to a school.

Extra Services Enabled by Ofsted Registration

1. Holiday Provision / Alternative Education Camps

- Registered providers can deliver full-time education packages during holidays for pupils whose EHCPs or care plans require year-round provision.
- Local Authorities may commission holiday placements to ensure continuity of education for children who cannot attend mainstream school.
- This can include structured equine learning, therapeutic programmes, and SEMH support aligned to EHCP outcomes.

2. Respite and Short-Break Services

- Being registered strengthens your credibility to offer respite placements for looked-after children or those with complex SEND.
- LAs and fostering agencies often seek safe, educational environments during holiday periods — Ofsted registration reassures them about safeguarding and welfare standards.

3. Extended Day / Wraparound Care

- You can legally provide extended hours (before/after school, holiday clubs) as part of a child's educational package.
- This is particularly valuable for children with EHCPs who need structured, supervised environments beyond the standard school day.

4. Direct LA Commissioning for Holiday Programmes

- Without registration, holiday activities are usually treated as enrichment or leisure.
- With registration, they can be commissioned as formal education provision, funded through high-needs budgets.
- This opens access to secure contracts rather than ad-hoc arrangements.

5. Curriculum-Linked Holiday Learning

- Ofsted registration allows you to deliver curriculum-aligned programmes (e.g., literacy through equine themes, science via animal care, PSHE through teamwork).
- These can be formally recognised as part of a child's education, not just therapeutic activity.

Why This Matters

- **Unregistered providers:** Can run holiday clubs or camps, but only as enrichment/leisure. They cannot deliver full-time education or be commissioned for statutory provision.
- **Registered providers:** Can deliver legally recognised education during holidays, commissioned and funded by LAs, with safeguarding and curriculum oversight.

Steps to Registration

1. Determine Scope of Provision

- Decide whether you will operate as an independent special school (for SEND learners) or an independent alternative provision school.
- Clarify whether you intend to deliver full-time education or remain part-time (commissioned programmes only).

2. Prepare Policies and Documentation - Ofsted requires evidence of:

- Safeguarding and child protection policies (including LADO referral routes).
- Curriculum plans demonstrating breadth, balance, and alignment to statutory guidance.
- SEND provision and reasonable adjustments.
- Health & safety, risk assessments, and equine welfare compliance.
- Governance arrangements, staffing structure, and staff qualifications.

3. Submit Application to the DfE

- Applications are made via the Department for Education (DfE) portal.
- You must provide detailed information about premises, staffing, curriculum, and safeguarding.
- A registration fee is payable.

4. Ofsted Pre-Registration Inspection

- Ofsted will visit your premises to assess readiness.

- Inspectors will review safeguarding, curriculum, welfare, and leadership arrangements.
- They will check compliance with the Independent School Standards.

5. Decision and Registration

- If successful, your riding school will be added to the register of independent schools.
- You will then be subject to routine Ofsted inspections, typically every 3 years, or sooner if concerns arise.

Summary

Being Ofsted registered elevates a riding school from a therapeutic/alternative activity provider to a legally recognised education provider. It allows them to deliver full-time education, be commissioned directly by Local Authorities, and access secure funding streams. Without registration, provision is limited to part-time or supplementary programmes, with less stability and fewer commissioning opportunities.