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**334A Academy and School News and Resources Update Supplement**

**Ofsted report card proposals, September 2025**

**Ofsted has issued these key documents** **in relation to introduction of new-look report cards**

* **Education inspection framework: for use from November 10 2025**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework/education-inspection-framework-for-use-from-november-2025> The education inspection framework (‘the framework’) sets out how Ofsted inspects registered early years settings, maintained schools, academies, non-association independent schools and further education and skills provision in. It includes the principles that apply to inspection, and the main evaluations that inspectors make. The framework applies to its inspections of different early years, education and skills settings. It supports consistency across the different areas of its work (or ‘remits’) and enables comparisons between them.
* **School inspection: toolkit, operating guide and information**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-toolkit-operating-guide-and-information> This comprises:
* school inspection toolkit – what inspectors and schools use to discuss the quality of provision on inspection
* school inspection operating guide – a step-by-step guide for inspectors on how to inspect a school
* information about school inspections – for school staff and leaders, parents and carers and the wider public
* **Early years inspection: toolkit, operating guide and information**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-inspection-toolkit-operating-guide-and-information> This comprises:
  + early years inspection toolkit – what inspectors and early years providers use to discuss the quality of provision on inspection
  + early years inspection operating guide – a step-by-step guide for inspectors on how to inspect a registered early years setting
  + information about early years inspections – for staff and leaders, parents and carers and the wider public
* **Further education and skills inspection: toolkit, operating guide and information**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-and-skills-inspection-toolkit-operating-guide-and-information> This comprises:
  + FE and skills inspection toolkit – what inspectors and providers use to discuss the quality of provision on inspection
  + FE and skills inspection operating guide – a step-by-step guide for inspectors on how to inspect an FE and skills provider
  + information about FE and skills inspections – for provider staff and leaders, parents and carers and the wider public
* **Independent school inspection: toolkit, operating guide and information**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-school-inspection-toolkit-operating-guide-and-information> This comprises:
  + non-association independent school inspection toolkit – what inspectors and schools use to discuss the quality of provision on inspection
  + non-association independent school inspection operating guide – a step-by-step guide for inspectors on how to inspect a school
  + information about non-association independent school inspections – for school staff and leaders, parents and carers and the wider public
* **Initial teacher education (ITE) inspection: toolkit, operating guide and framework**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-education-ite-inspection-toolkit-operating-guide-and-framework> This comprises:
  + ITE inspection toolkit – what inspectors and ITE providers use to discuss the quality of provision on inspection
  + ITE inspection framework – the principles of ITE inspection
  + ITE inspection operating guide – a step-by-step guide for inspectors on how to inspect ITE provision
  + information about ITE inspections – for staff and leaders, parents and carers and the wider public
* **A glossary of terms used across Ofsted’s education inspection information and guidance**, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/glossary-education-inspection-terminology>

**Ofsted has given information on how it has reached these decisions**

* **Information about the evidence Ofsted used to inform its consultation response on its proposals to improve education inspections,** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-the-way-ofsted-inspects-education-methods-statement> This document explains the different types of evidence Ofsted used to inform its response to the consultation. It includes details about:
  + how the data was collected
  + how it was analysed
  + how many people responded
  + how ethical issues were considered
* **Statutory and non-statutory guidance, professional standards and relevant research that Ofsted reviewed to inform and develop the renewed education inspection framework and toolkits,** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/renewed-education-inspection-framework-supporting-evidence-base>
* **Details on the consultation and its outcome,** <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/improving-the-way-ofsted-inspects-education>
* **Improving the way Ofsted inspects education: report on the responses to the consultation**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/improving-the-way-ofsted-inspects-education/outcome/improving-the-way-ofsted-inspects-education-report-on-the-responses-to-the-consultation>
* **Improving the way Ofsted inspects education: equality impact assessment - response to the consultation**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/improving-the-way-ofsted-inspects-education/outcome/improving-the-way-ofsted-inspects-education-equality-impact-assessment-response-to-the-consultation>
* **Alongside the consultation, Ofsted commissioned an independent review of well-being by Sinéad McBrearty, Chief Executive of Education Support,** <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68b8762fcc8356c3c882aa4c/Independent_wellbeing_impact_assessment_of_the_revised_Ofsted_framework.pdf>

**This has many criticisms of the proposals, (see below)**

**Summary of what is proposed**

* **The evaluation scale for each evaluation area, other than safeguarding**, is:
  + **Exceptiona**l (highest quality provision): an evaluation area can be graded ‘exceptional’ when all the strong standards have been met and if it meets all the additional standards in the ‘exceptional’ section of the toolkit.
  + **Strong standard**: an evaluation area can be graded ‘strong standard’ when all the expected standards and all the strong standards have been met.
  + **Expected standard**: an evaluation area can be graded ‘expected standard’ when all the strong standards are met – this includes meeting the legal requirements and the expectations set out in statutory guidance, as well as the professional standards required of the particular type of provision, where these apply. In a change from the initial proposals, providers will not be asked to submit case studies for approval. Instead, inspectors will evaluate ‘exceptional’ practice by applying the toolkit, subject to the usual quality assurance and consistency checking. Exceptional’ practice needs to be “sustained” and “evident over time rather than a recent improvement” and “needs to have a transformational impact” on the outcomes of disadvantaged youngsters.
  + **Needs attention:** an evaluation area can be graded ‘needs attention’ when the ‘expected standard’ has not been met because some aspects of provision are inconsistent, limited in scope or impact and/or not fully meeting the legal requirements.
  + **Urgent improvement** (lowest quality provision): an evaluation area can be graded ‘urgent improvement’ when it needs urgent action to provide a suitable standard of education and/or care for children and learners
* **Evaluation areas**

The evaluation areas for registered **early years providers** it inspects are:

* + safeguarding
  + inclusion
  + curriculum and teaching
  + achievement
  + behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines
  + children’s welfare and well-being
  + leadership and governance

The evaluation areas for **all schools** it inspects, including non-association independent schools, are:

* + safeguarding
  + inclusion
  + curriculum and teaching
  + achievement
  + attendance and behaviour
  + personal development and well-being
  + early years in schools (where applicable)
  + sixth form in schools (where applicable)
  + leadership and governance

The evaluation areas for the range of **further education and skills providers** it inspects are:

* For the provider as a whole:
  + safeguarding
  + inclusion
  + leadership and governance
* for the provider as a whole, but only in colleges, further education colleges, sixth-form colleges or designated institutions (including specialist designated institutions):
  + contribution to meeting skills needs
* for each type of provision offered (for example, education programmes for young people, provision for learners with high needs, apprenticeships and adult learning programmes):
  + curriculum, teaching and training
  + achievement
  + participation and development
* Safeguarding will be judged ‘met’ or ‘not met’.
* Ofsted has also said that it is moving from a “best fit” approach to a “secure fit” model. This means that each standard within a grade must be met before that grade can be awarded.
* In the early years, Ofsted will increase the frequency of inspections from every 6 years to every 4. It will stay as 4 years for schools
* Every education inspection will focus on provision for disadvantaged children, those with a special educational need or disability (SEND), and those who are known to social care – through a specific grade for ‘inclusion’.
* There is also a stronger emphasis on leadership as a driver of sustained improvement
* The report card is said to provide more nuance for parents and providers, combining at-a-glance grades with narrative summaries of strengths and areas for improvement and alongside each grade, there will be a narrative explaining inspectors’ justification for awarding it.; the report card has been redesigned to make it more accessible, particularly on mobile devices.
* A sample report card distributed by the watchdog shows that at the top of the page, visitors will see a colour-coded summary of how many inspection areas have met each grade. Below that, visitors will be able to click on each judgment area to see several paragraphs of narrative verdict. The report cards will also show contextual information about a school, such as whether its pupil numbers, prevalence of SEND and deprivation are above or below average.
* Under the report card system, inspectors will base their judgements on “toolkits” that set out how to grade schools. There are new inspection toolkits for grading providers. In response to feedback, the definitions of grades have been tightened to more clearly differentiate between them. The standards covered in the toolkits have also been slimmed down to provide greater clarity on the evidence inspectors will assess. Inspectors will start by gathering evidence to see if schools are meeting the “expected standard” grade.
* New operating guides set out the times at which inspectors can arrive on site and the suggested latest times they should be departing, to cap the length of inspection days.
* Evaluation of providers’ work to support and promote leader and staff well-being. This will be considered as part of the leadership and governance evaluation area.
* Inspection findings to be grounded in a clear understanding of each provider’s unique circumstances.
* There will be a new online insights platform - ‘Ofsted – Explore an Area’, giving parents key information about the education and care services in their local area.
* Ofsted has also started to develop a “similar schools” comparison measure to help inspectors and schools “understand how schools compare with those in a similar context”.
* Inspections will be led by HMIs. In addition, Ofsted will introduce a programme of work to assess consistency in school inspections, including having a senior inspector shadow a sample of live inspections to guide and advise the inspection team. Post inspection, any initial differences between the senior inspector and the team will be analysed.
* There will be Increased resource and training for inspection teams
* An additional school inspector will add capacity to the team, allowing the lead inspector to spend more time with leaders (including any nominee), as well as overseeing and quality assuring the inspection. The size of the inspection team depends on the number of pupils on roll and the type of school.
* Schools are invited to nominate a senior member of staff to support planning, communication and engagement throughout the inspection
* There will be no routine inspections of state-maintained schools and FE and skills providers in the first half of the autumn term.
* When inspections of state-funded schools begin in November, Ofsted will prioritise schools that volunteer for inspection. Routine inspections will be introduced on or after 1 December, depending on the number of schools that volunteer; they will be pushed back to the new year if there are enough schools volunteering for inspection. There will be no routine inspections during the week before Christmas, to allow for inspector training. For ITE and non-association independent schools, inspections will commence under the renewed framework from January 2026.
* All inspections will be full inspections; monitoring inspections are only where Ofsted has identified a need for improvement. Full inspections normally last 2 days.
* Ofsted has said it does not have any quotas for how many of each of the new grades it expects schools to receive.

**Monitoring of issued grades**

* Schools graded as “urgent improvement” in an evaluation area will receive a monitoring inspection each term following the publication of the report card.
* Schools deemed to require significant improvement - judged as “urgent improvement” in any evaluation area or “not met” in safeguarding - will receive up to five extra inspections within 18 months.
* Schools that are judged to require special measures - graded as “urgent improvement” in leadership and governance or “not met” in safeguarding, and given the lowest grade in at least one other evaluation area - will receive up to six inspections within 24 months.
* Ofsted will also monitor schools that receive a “needs attention” grade in any of the evaluation areas.
* A monitoring inspection can move a grade up to at least “expected standard”. When this happens, the report card will be updated.
* Once a school is graded “expected standard” or above in all areas, the monitoring programme will end.
* Ofsted will recommend what needs to improve
* Report cards will make recommendations, or set actions, on what schools need to improve.
* Schools with an area graded as “needs attention” will receive at least one recommendation describing “what needs to improve” - but they will not be told “how to do it”, Ofsted said.

**Reaction**

* **Education unions** say there are still too many inspection areas and that they have “grave concerns” about staff wellbeing. The final plans will “make things much worse”, with a group of leaders also demanding education secretary Bridget Phillipson intervene to delay the roll-out of “extremely worrying” new inspections. Without meaningful reform, this new system will continue to drive excessive pressure, ill-health and stress for the profession, with the very real risk of causing further, preventable deaths,
  + **ASCL** will now poll members on withdrawing their services as Ofsted inspectors, which it had previously warned it would do without major changes. The rollout of the new inspections - which will start from November, but be on a voluntary basis until 1 December - was “far too rushed”, it said. We are gravely concerned about the welfare of leaders and teachers as well as the impact on recruitment and retention.” It will not be possible” for inspectors to reliably apply a five-point grading scale” in a single two-day inspection, even with fewer evaluation areas
  + **NAHT** said that Ofsted’s new approach to inspection “poses a direct risk to the health and wellbeing of school leaders”. “By not only persisting with grading but extending it across a larger number of areas, Ofsted is perpetuating a high-stakes punitive regime that risks serious harm to school leaders and teachers with career-defining consequences.” NAHT will not be asking headteachers if they will step down as inspectors. Ofsted’s plan to push ahead regardless “speaks of an inspectorate that has completely lost the trust of the profession, that has failed to properly listen to teachers and leaders”
  + **NEU** said that concern was “widespread across the profession”. Minor improvements “do not go far enough” and that the “punitive and high-stakes consequences remain”. Replacing headline grades with grades across multiple areas will make things “much worse”, bringing “more pressure” for teachers, “more ranking and competition”.
  + **NAHT** said that Ofsted’s plans were “dangerously low on clarity” and questioned who would be responsible for defining “inclusion” and how inspectors would judge a school’s approach.
* As mentioned above, Ofsted commissioned **an independent review of well-being by Sinéad McBrearty, Chief Executive of Education Support**. In her appraisal of the revised framework, Ms Mc Brearty warned that Ofsted’s plans do not “reduce the pressure on leaders to achieve a desirable outcome”. New Ofsted report cards will create more anxiety on leaders with already “concerningly high” stress levels. She called on Ofsted to implement changes to reduce the “isolation and individual responsibility felt by headteachers and principals”. She also suggested that Ofsted invests significantly in the wellbeing and professional development of its HMI workforce. Leader anxiety and stress will “in many (though not all) cases, spillover and increase pressure on staff teams to perform well in inspection”. The revised framework “will require leaders to evidence impact across a larger number of evaluation areas, which may drive new forms of bureaucracy and data collection in schools and colleges”. For a useful summary of her report, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/ofsted-report-cards-will-ramp-up-leader-anxiety-independent-review-says/>

In response, Ofsted said it has introduced an optional “nominee” role for schools to ease the inspection process and help reduce the demands placed on providers, and it will add an extra inspector on the first day of school inspections, to boost capacity and support inspection teams.

* **Support for the changes**
  + Independent polling from YouGov showed strong parental support for the new approach to grading. Almost 7 out of 10 of parents surveyed said they prefer the new-look report cards to Ofsted’s current inspection reports. Just 15% said they preferred the old system. And nearly 9 out of 10 parents said the report cards are easy to understand**.**
  + Ofsted said it has taken wellbeing concerns “extremely seriously” and nothing in its plans “should add to a provider’s workload”.
  + Ofsted said there had been criticism of its proposals, but said this was down to “a small but vocal minority [who] are calling for reduced accountability or removing grading altogether”.
  + Parentkind and the NGA support the changes

