

# Ofsted's new approach to school inspection from November 2025

## Summary of changes for governing boards

9 September 2025

Earlier this year Ofsted consulted on proposed changes to the way it inspects schools and other education providers. Following feedback from parents and the sector, Ofsted's reforms will take effect on 10 November 2025. Routine inspections will be introduced on or after 1 December following an initial focus on volunteer schools.

## What's new for 2025?

Changes to the inspection process are detailed in a new [Education Inspection Framework](#) (EIF) and accompanying [inspection toolkits](#).

### Report cards

Ofsted has moved away from single headline judgements. Instead, inspection outcomes will now be presented as a report card containing:

- a 5-point grading scale across a wider range of evaluation areas
- a short narrative explaining the rationale behind each grade
- contextual data about the school which aims to support more nuanced reporting

### Evaluation areas and grading

Schools will be assessed in 6-8 core areas of operation which include:

- Leadership and governance
- Curriculum and teaching
- Attendance and behaviour
- Achievement
- Personal development and wellbeing
- Inclusion

If applicable, your setting will also receive a judgement for:

- Early years setting within schools
- Post 16 provision

For each of the evaluation areas, schools will now be graded on a 5-point scale:

- **Exceptional:** evidenced through sustained practice (over time rather than a recent improvement) that has transformed the outcomes and experiences of disadvantaged children. Exceptional grading would also suggest that there are no significant areas of improvement identified that leaders have not already prioritised.
- **Strong standard:** evidenced through consistent, embedded and highly impactful practice.
- **Expected standard:** evidenced through a school following statutory, professional and non-statutory guidance.
- **Needs attention:** graded when the 'expected standard' for a given evaluation area is not achieved due to weaknesses or inconsistencies in practice that negatively affect pupils overall or specific groups.
- **Urgent improvement:** graded in the most serious cases when Ofsted evaluates an area to be failing overall or failing a significant group of pupils. An urgent improvement grading could also result from inspectors identifying a critical or systemic weakness.

Ofsted expects most schools will be awarded the 'expected standard', 'strong standard' or 'needs attention' grades, with 'urgent improvement' and 'exceptional' being used only in extreme cases.

To reflect this, the inspection toolkits are structured around the 'expected standard' (a school meeting its core duties).

**Safeguarding** will be exempt from the 5-point grading scale. Instead, schools can expect to receive a 'met' or 'not met' grade for this area.

## Inclusion

Raising the standards for disadvantaged groups is a key aim of Ofsted reform, through the addition of a new standalone 'Inclusion' area and as a prominent theme across other evaluation areas.

Inspectors will consider how schools are supporting:

- Socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils (those eligible for the pupil premium)
- Pupils with SEND (pupils receiving additional support and those with an EHC plan)
- Pupils who are known (or previously known) to children's social care
- Pupils who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, which may include pupils who share a protected characteristic

However, Ofsted recognises that barriers to learning may not always be a fixed or distinct category. Inspectors will look for evidence of schools accounting for the specific needs of pupils that may encounter obstacles in education.

In practice, schools should be able to show practical steps such as spotting needs early, adapting teaching so that every pupil can access learning, and implementing targeted support where required.

[NGA's 'widening the lens' collection](#) is designed to help governing boards explore what disadvantage means in their context and to identify pupil groups who may need additional support.

## Leadership and governance

Under the leadership and governance evaluation areas, inspectors will consider the extent to which governors/trustees:

- are knowledgeable about their statutory duties and carry them out effectively
- support and challenge the school's leaders effectively
- understand their role in considering and addressing leaders' workload and wellbeing
- assure themselves that leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's context and are prioritising the right actions for improvement
- ensure that systems for monitoring and quality assurance are fair, valid and constructive, and inform continuous improvement
- hold leaders to account for the impact of the school's professional learning programme for staff
- hold leaders to account for the school's support and provision for disadvantaged pupils who may face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing

## Types of inspection

Under the new framework, Ofsted will end ungraded inspections. This means that all routine inspections will be 'full inspections', continuing to be undertaken on the four-year inspection cycle.

However, under a new system aiming to support the improvement of areas graded as 'needs attention', schools can expect to receive more frequent monitoring inspections.

Urgent inspections will now be known as 'focused inspections' but will continue to take place under the existing qualifying criteria.

## New documents to support inspection

From November, the school inspection handbook will be replaced with three key documents:

- [The school inspection toolkit](#) shows schools and inspectors the evaluation areas that inspections will focus on and how Ofsted will evaluate and grade each area. The toolkit also outlines the criteria for the five-point grading scale
- [A school inspection operating guide](#) sets out expectations for inspectors carrying out routine school inspections. It includes the times inspectors may arrive on site and the suggested latest times they should be departing, to cap the length of inspection days.
- [Information about school inspections](#) designed for school staff and leaders, parents and the wider public to better understand the overall approach Ofsted takes.

## Other key changes

- **An additional inspector** will be included in full inspections.
- **A new commitment that each inspection will be led by an HMI** in order to achieve greater consistency between inspections.
- **The optional appointment of a nominee** – a senior member of staff who may support planning, communication and ongoing engagement throughout the inspection.
- **An increased focus on how schools support and promote the wellbeing of leaders and staff**, considered within the leadership and governance evaluation area.
- **A new online insights platform called, 'Ofsted - Explore an Area'**, which will give parents key information about the education and care services in their local area.