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Consultation outcome

Hearing feedback, accepting criticism and building a better Ofsted: the response to the Big Listen

Updated 3 September 2024

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Foreword: our mission – trust

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The Big Listen is the largest consultation in Ofsted's history. Its completion, and the significant actions we will now take, mark the beginning of a new chapter for the organisation. Thank you to the thousands who took part. Your voices have been heard and real change will now come as a result.

Just as with the many thousands of people I have encountered after 30 years of working in education, the staff at Ofsted are professionals who have dedicated their careers to delivering on our mission to raise standards and improve lives for children and young people. I am proud to lead them.

Similarly, I am proud to be a member of the Ofsted Board and work closely with the Chair of the Board. Alongside the Big Listen, Dame Christine Gilbert carried out an independent learning review, which rightly highlights the importance of good governance, and we are pleased to fully accept her recommendation. This starts now, with us acknowledging the Board's role in holding me to account for delivering all the changes we set out in this response and in setting my strategic priorities.

It is a great privilege to work at Ofsted. I recognise that a great deal of trust has been placed in us. We need to work in partnership with the system and not in opposition. There should be no 'sides', as we are all on the side of children. We need the trust of everyone we work with and everyone we work for. The process of earning back some of the trust that was lost began with listening, but now it is time for action.

This report, and its annexes, present a detailed summary of what you told us in the Big Listen, and it describes the decisive action we will take as a result. This is an

opportunity for us to reset our priorities, refine our practices and rebuild our relationships with the system, delivering higher standards for all. We want to retain the confidence of the people we work for – children and their parents and carers – and regain the confidence of the dedicated professionals who work with us to improve children’s life chances.

The case for change

Please allow me to start off by explaining why we undertook the consultation. The tragic death of Ruth Perry in 2023 was a catalyst for change, but the case for change has also been mounting for years. Leaders of education and care settings know and understand the importance of accountability, given their daily responsibilities. But, for many years, calls have been made to look again at the burdens created by this accountability, of which Ofsted is just one actor in a complex system.

In addition, the pandemic, lockdown measures and the resulting economic shock have profoundly affected society, especially the lives of children. Education and care have been stretched, sometimes to their limits. Childhood itself, for many, looks fundamentally different. The time, then, is right for reflection and renewal.

And so, each Chief Inspector faces the challenges of their time and responds to them the best they can.

Evolution not revolution

Before I go on to explain how we will deliver these changes, I want to take a moment to also explain what this is not.

This is not to set out that everything before now was bad. There is much great work that Ofsted has undertaken, often quietly and nearly always without fanfare, to protect children and keep them safe and to promote the good in our systems.

And this is not to throw out what works well and change for the sake of change. We will aim for higher standards still in the years to come. We will continue to insist on brilliant curricula in schools and high-quality language development in the early years. Most of all, we will continue to prioritise children’s safety above all else, whether in schools, children’s homes, childminders or any other provider we inspect or regulate.

However, we have also heard much criticism; criticism which was often difficult to hear. It was especially difficult to hear for our thousands of inspectors and regulators who have done – and continue to do – an excellent job day in and day out, raising standards and keeping children safe.

But hear we must, act we must, and act we will. Because we know that any inspection or regulatory visit that falls below our exacting standards sends waves of pressure and worry through the system, undermining the good that we do.

People are the most precious resource in the education, care and skills sectors. That is why many of the changes we are proposing are aimed at reducing unnecessary pressure. As well as changing what we do, we want to change how we do it. We are committed to the values of professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect across all our work.

Our aims

Ours is a difficult role. We aim to support and encourage the services of education, care and skills to deliver safe practice and high standards, promoting good and preventing harm as we go.

We are committed to reducing unnecessary pressure on the professionals we work with. But we also must continue to be honest about the state of the systems we inspect and call out poor practice, and unacceptably low standards for children and learners, without fear or favour.

This is the balance we must, and will, strike.

We want inspections that feel collaborative; that give all of those we inspect the chance to show what they can do, and the encouragement to continue to raise standards and improve the lives of the children and learners in their care.

We want to build a regulatory system for social care that puts lasting, loving relationships at its heart, while ensuring the safety of the most vulnerable children.

We know these aims are shared with the professionals we work with. But we will always call out where standards are unacceptably low – standards we would never accept for our own children – because children only get one chance.

In particular, we will put the children who are vulnerable or disadvantaged at the heart of what we do. If we get it right for them, we get it right for all.

As a nation, we are not doing that right now. We need a renewed focus on these children. The gap between the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils and non-disadvantaged pupils was already widening before the pandemic and it is now at a scandalous level. Ofsted will be unapologetic about putting these children at the heart of our work.

Thank you

Finally, I would like to thank all those who took part in the Big Listen.

We have had formal submissions from unions and representative groups speaking on behalf of tens of thousands of their members.

We have heard from professionals at the start of their careers, like trainee teachers and newly qualified care workers. We have heard from leaders with decades of experience at the top of local authorities, trusts and industry bodies. And we have heard from our own staff on how they think we can improve.

We have heard from parents and carers of children who attend every type of school, service or provider that we inspect.

And in particular, we made sure to hear directly from children and learners themselves. They told us about their schools, their homes, their care, their special educational needs support and every other service that affects their lives. We heard directly about the experiences of the most vulnerable children, including those in care and those in the criminal justice system who are too often let down.

It is our job now to turn all this valuable feedback into real and lasting improvements to our work.

You have spoken, we have listened, and now it is time to act.



Sir Martyn Oliver
His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI)
Ofsted

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What we inspect



Note: The number of providers is based on providers open on 31 March 2024. Numbers over 100 are rounded, except for local authority figures.

View [data in an accessible format](#).

What is the Big Listen?

The Big Listen was the largest consultation in Ofsted's history.



View [data in an accessible format](#).

How to read this response

This response is for multiple audiences, including children and learners, parents and carers, and professionals and policymakers. We have written it so that you can focus on the sections most relevant to you. You can find a [summary of actions](#) at the end.

You can also read the [annexes with the full write-up of the responses](#) we received.

Throughout this response, we refer collectively to those we inspect and regulate as 'providers' (of education, skills or care).

How we will change

Summarises the key actions we are taking across Ofsted. These include plans to remove single-word judgements for overall effectiveness, introduce new report cards, and make our inspections more collaborative and supportive. We recommend people read this section to see how we will set about improving our culture, so that we are more open and transparent. It includes the substantial changes we are making to our structures and ways of working to ensure greater consistency across our work and to transform the way we recruit and train inspectors.

Remit chapters

We set out what our response means for each of the areas (or 'remits') we inspect and/or regulate:

- [children's social care](#)
- [special education needs and disabilities and alternative provision](#)
- [early years](#)
- [schools](#)
- [further education and skills](#)
- [teacher professional development and education](#)

Annexes

Set out our findings from the different strands of research that made up the Big Listen. Here you will find: our public consultations, including the children's consultation, the independent research carried out by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and IFF Research, our internal Big Listen and the independent learning review by Dame Christine Gilbert into Ofsted's response to the tragic death of Ruth Perry, including Ofsted's response to this.

We hope this response shows that we have heard the feedback, have addressed criticism and will take action.

How we will change

We are the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills. We exist to improve the lives of children and learners by keeping them safe and raising standards in education and care, especially for those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable. Like the professionals we inspect, everyone who works at Ofsted puts children and learners first. We will never lose sight of this focus.

We want to make sure Ofsted is a modern, world-class inspectorate and regulator – fit for purpose and trusted by parents and carers, by children and learners, and by the sectors we work with. The intention of the Big Listen was to hear feedback and address criticism, so that we can change and improve. We are determined to be a learning organisation that is transparent about when we have not lived up to the high standards we set ourselves, and that is rigorous about improving what we do.

In January 2024, we made some significant and immediate changes. This included [responding to the Prevention of Future Deaths Report by HM Coroner](#). We accepted the coroner’s findings in full and announced a series of changes to our policies and practice, including commissioning [Dame Christine Gilbert’s review](#). One action we took was to launch the Big Listen, to hear from the professionals we work with and the parents, carers, children and learners we work for.

At the outset of the Big Listen, we made it clear that we were ready to hear feedback, to listen to criticism and to reform. Stakeholders told us they welcomed our changes to date, but that we have far more to do. We acknowledge what we heard. We accept that we need to change. And this response sets out 3 ambitions that will define our work for years to come.

We will:

Reset our relationship with those we regulate and inspect, working collaboratively with them to put children and learners first.

Foster a culture of integrity in which we always treat people with professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect.

Be a learning organisation that operates transparently, listens to challenge and takes action to change.

We have listened. We have heard. And we will improve what we do.

What we heard

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Inspection and reporting

Through the public consultation, the biggest issue providers and professionals expressed frustration with was single-word judgements (which we currently give for a provider's overall effectiveness) and their consequences. Our independent research asked parents and professionals directly for their views on single-word judgements for overall effectiveness. It found that:

Only 3 in 10 professionals (29%) (IFF Research) and 4 in 10 parents (38%) (NatCen) support single-word judgements for overall effectiveness.

Half of professionals (53%) and 3 in 4 parents (76%) said that there should be separate judgements, grades or summaries for each inspection area.

Some consultation respondents supported us making judgements about providers but criticised the potential high-stakes consequences, such as the Department for Education (DfE) taking regulatory action in schools.

Only 1 in 8 (13%) respondents in the schools section of our consultation agreed that the number of good and outstanding providers was truly reflective of the overall quality of the sector. This rose to only 3 in 10 (29%) respondents in social care: the highest response across all areas.

Parents, carers and children responding to the Big Listen through our NatCen research, public consultation and children's survey told us they wanted more opportunity to feed in their views, both on inspection and all year round.

Professionals suggested that we should identify areas for improvement more clearly:

6 in 10 of all the professionals IFF Research surveyed (57%) said that Ofsted accurately identifies strengths and improvement areas.

6 in 10 of all the early years and further education (FE) and skills professionals IFF Research surveyed (59%) said that Ofsted is helpful in understanding how to improve the quality of provision; 3 in 4 children's social care professionals said the same (74%); only 1 in 3 school professionals agreed (33%).

Many of our own staff agreed with the public responses and independent research. In our internal Big Listen, many said single-word judgements for overall effectiveness were over-simplified. They thought that inspections could better focus on highlighting strengths and areas for improvement to raise standards.

Culture and impact

The most challenging feedback we heard through the Big Listen was about our culture. This included how our work affects those we inspect and regulate, the way we carry out inspections, and how, as an organisation, we can be more consistent and respond better to challenge.

Our independent research found that:

Half (49%) of parents agreed Ofsted could be trusted; around 1 in 4 (26%) disagreed (NatCen).

Less than half (41%) of professionals from providers we inspect said they trusted Ofsted; a similar number (43%) said they did not trust us (IFF Research).

Consultation responses suggested we are too defensive when concerns are raised. When we get complaints, respondents thought we lack transparency or accountability. IFF Research found that nearly half (47%) of professionals would be uncomfortable raising a concern during an inspection.

We heard mixed messages about the impact of our work from the professionals we work with. IFF Research found that:

About half (47%) of respondents said we were good at minimising stress for staff.

About half of respondents across the schools (48%) and early years sectors (56%) said that inspectors show empathy on inspection. This rose to about 6 in 10 for further education (FE) and skills (57%) and children's social care (64%).

About 2 in 3 respondents said that inspectors build positive relationships with leaders and staff: 58% in schools, 61% in early years, 68% in FE and skills, 77% in teacher development, and 70% in children's social care.

Around 3 in 4 provider representatives said that inspectors carry out their inspections with courtesy and respect: 66% in schools, 75% in early years, 77% in FE and skills, 84% in teacher development, and 79% in children's social care. Individual staff were less positive. Around 2 in 3 said Ofsted was professional. Just over half said Ofsted carries out its work in a courteous manner.

There have been signs of improvement over the course of the last academic year. Providers inspected more recently have been more satisfied with their experience. Schools inspected since September 2023 were more likely to rate Ofsted as empathetic (56% after compared with 45% before).

We also heard mixed views about the expertise of our workforce, our understanding of providers' context and the consistency of inspections. IFF Research found that:

Almost 7 in 10 (68%) said that inspectors have up-to-date knowledge and expertise, but 1 in 6 said inspectors' knowledge and expertise were poor (16%).

Half of all respondents (45%) thought that inspectors were good at taking into account the context of the local area.

Half of respondents from the schools sector (52%) said that Ofsted is good at ensuring that inspections are consistent with the framework. This rises to 7 in 10 for those from the FE and skills (67%) and children's social care (67%) sectors.

The 7 Cs

We have condensed what we heard in the Big Listen down to 7 core messages to help us respond to the challenges put to us – the 7 Cs.

1. Children and learners first – We heard from parents and carers that children and learners should come first, across all of our work. We agree. You will see from this response that everything we do is rooted in this commitment.

2. Care and well-being – We heard that inspectors should have more care and concern for the well-being of the leaders and staff we inspect. We have taken this on board. We will put it into practice through all the changes we are setting out here, from improving inspector training (including mental-health training) to reforming how we inspect.

3. Consistency of our inspections – We heard criticisms that many believe our inspections are carried out inconsistently. We also heard that our inspectors do not always have the necessary expertise or experience in the specific types of provision they inspect, or do not quite understand the context the provider is working in. This response will show how changes to inspector recruitment and training will help.

4. Content of our frameworks – We heard that our inspection frameworks do not always work as well as they could for some types of provider. This response will set out how we will tailor our frameworks to better suit different types of provider.

5. Complaints – We heard criticism of how we handle complaints, and about a lack of openness. This response will set out how we will improve our transparency and our complaints-handling processes.

6. Constructive feedback and reporting – We heard that inspection feedback should be more constructive, and that reports should have recommendations for improvement. We also heard that parents, carers and professionals all want more nuance in our reports, while still giving a clear assessment of quality. We agree. This response will explain how we will change our reporting to do this.

7. Consequences of our judgements – We heard frustrations from many of the professionals we inspect about the consequences of single-word judgements for overall effectiveness, and the anxiety they cause. This response will set out how we will work with the government to change this.

What we will do

We will reset our relationship with those we regulate and inspect, working collaboratively with them to put children and learners first

We will reform our inspection framework.

- We will consult on creating a reformed inspection framework for schools, early years and FE and skills. We will take the best of the current approach, such as the curriculum focus, but learn lessons from what we have heard. This will include transforming the process of inspection, and – as far as possible – reducing the anxiety we heard some people feel about it.
- This will mean:
 - providers remain accountable for protecting children and learners from harm

- providers maintain high standards of education and care, especially for the most disadvantaged children
- parents, carers, learners and professionals are better informed about the quality of education, care and skills in England
- inspection and regulation are more collaborative processes, taking better account of providers' contexts and focusing on identifying areas for improvement
- our frameworks are tailored to the types of providers we inspect
- We want to reform the education inspection framework to respond to what many parents, professionals and organisations told us in the Big Listen. To do this, we will:
 - **base our assessment of quality on the development, experiences and outcomes of pupils and learners**, especially those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable
 - **introduce rubrics that offer clear criteria for inspections** and can support leaders to self-evaluate their practice. This will help empower providers to improve
 - **make the inspection process more collaborative**, using those detailed rubrics to guide conversations between inspectors and providers about their strengths and areas for improvement
 - **make clearer what providers should improve**, but **not** tell them how to improve. We will recognise leaders' independence and expertise, while not compromising our role as the inspectorate
 - **tailor the inspection process and criteria** to the education provider phase and type, where appropriate. This will make sure that inspections focus on what really matters for children and learners in that setting
 - **better account for the context** that a provider is working in. We will do this by drawing on area insights (see below) to recognise where providers are achieving in particularly difficult circumstances
- We will assess the development and implementation of the framework against:
 - its effect on leaders, teachers and practitioners' workloads
 - equality, diversity and inclusion and the Public Sector Equality Duty
 - its effect on the mental health and well-being of those we inspect
- Later this academic year, we will consult on making these changes for the education sectors we inspect. As part of that consultation, we will set out more detail of how this would apply to each sector: schools (including non-association independent schools), early years providers, and FE and skills providers.

We will introduce report cards.

- With the government's agreement, we will remove the current 'overall effectiveness' grade. We will replace it with a set of assessment criteria for all education sectors. We will do this by introducing report cards or a similar tool.
 - **We will be clear that the outcomes children and learners achieve sit at**

the heart of an inspection and our risk assessment of providers. This includes both academic and non-academic outcomes.

- **We will increase our focus and scrutiny on how providers are meeting the needs of children and young people with vulnerabilities such as socio-economic disadvantage and special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).** We will introduce a new inspection criterion for inclusion.
- **We will develop an area insights service to visualise local area data.** We will use our unique position of having oversight of all the areas we inspect and regulate. The area insights will be on an online portal that captures the complexity of providers' quality and performance. This will give parents and carers, professionals and learners much richer information about the context providers are working in.
- We will work with the DfE, and experts from across the education, skills and care sectors, on what the report card or similar tool should include. We will consult on making these changes later in the academic year.

We will strengthen the regulation and inspection of children's social care, in partnership with the government and the sector.

- We will better capture the voices and views of children and care-experienced young people to improve our regulation and inspection. We will use focus groups further, as well as engaging more widely with the children and young people. This will help us to design and develop our inspection frameworks and regulatory approaches.
- We will continue to reform our regulatory and inspection approach to complement and keep pace with the government's children's social care reform agenda.
- We want children to experience stability. We will look at how children's homes stick with children and work in partnership with local authorities when things are not working well.
- We will also do our utmost to make sure inspections of local authority children's services (ILACS) focus more on stability. We will look more at how services support family networks and aim to keep children with their families, whenever it is possible and safe to do so.

We will foster a culture of integrity in which we always treat people with professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect

We have introduced training and policies to make sure our inspectors deal sensitively and consistently with well-being concerns.

- In January 2024, we delayed schools and FE and skills inspections for the first

few weeks. This was so that we could run mental health awareness training for all inspectors, which will help them to respond to signs of stress and anxiety.

- We committed to giving that training to our entire inspection workforce by the end of March 2024. We have done that.
- We worked closely with Mental Health First Aid England to make a bespoke induction package on mental health. This now forms part of our general induction for all inspectors.
- Our training will build inspectors' mental health awareness and make sure they know how to embed this in inspection practice.
- We will evaluate the impact of this training and update it as required. We will make sure inspectors receive updates throughout their careers.
- We also introduced a new policy and clear process to allow inspectors to pause an inspection. This includes where they had concerns about the well-being of a leader or staff member and needed support from the body responsible for that person.
- We introduced a provider contact helpline. Providers can use this to speak to a senior person in Ofsted during or immediately after an inspection, if they have concerns.
- We have set up a national team for our inspectors and providers to help with any well-being concerns during inspection.
- We have set up an 'inspection welfare, support and guidance hub'. This offers our inspectors and providers information and other support during inspection.
 - The hub gives real-time oversight of decisions on inspection. It brings together information from our inspections to help inform our training, framework development and policy on supporting the well-being of leaders and their staff.
 - It helps us understand why things occasionally go wrong on inspection. The wider organisation can learn and continuously improve from this.

We will launch the Ofsted Academy.

- We will launch the Ofsted Academy this autumn. This will invest in our highly skilled inspector and non-inspector staff by drawing together induction, training, learning, professional development and good practice in one place.
- It will enable us to:
 - recruit inspectors and staff from all the sectors we inspect. This will help us to have a wider pool of inspectors with different specialisms
 - improve consistency across inspections. We can make sure we use inspectors with the right expertise in different settings and different types of providers
 - build a positive culture, embedding Ofsted's values and reinforcing our professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect
 - share excellent practice from the sectors we inspect and regulate
 - be transparent about what we do by sharing our training, where appropriate, and making our processes visible
 -

embed cultural sensitivity into our training to make sure that no provider is disadvantaged because of their religious or cultural context

- As part of the Academy, we will introduce secondments for inspectors to spend time working in providers. This will make sure their practice remains current, especially focusing on working across groups of providers.

We have updated our code of conduct.

- We have updated and published our [code of conduct](#). It sets out the professionalism and sensitivity that providers can expect from Ofsted staff, and the integrity and cooperation that we expect from providers as the basis for a collaborative working relationship.

We will track whether perceptions of our culture are improving over time.

- We will commission regular independent polling to ask professionals across all the sectors we work with for their views on Ofsted's culture. This will include our openness, our organisational integrity, and whether inspectors are demonstrating our values of professional, empathy, courtesy and respect. The Ofsted Board will scrutinise the data we gather to help us constantly refine and improve our performance.

We will be a learning organisation that operates transparently, listens to challenge and takes action to change

We commissioned an independent learning review into our response to Ruth Perry's death.

- In April, in response to the coroner's Prevention of Future Deaths report, we commissioned an independent learning review into Ofsted's response to Ruth Perry's death, led by Dame Christine Gilbert. This review looked at the actions we took in response to hearing about Mrs Perry's death, our communication and engagement with stakeholders, and the support we offered internally to staff.
- We have published the [findings of Dame Christine Gilbert's review](#) and [our response](#). We will take immediate action on the findings to improve our policies and practice.

We will improve how we engage parents, carers and providers through our inspections of education settings, and all year round.

- Ofsted's [Parent View](#) gives parents and carers of school pupils the chance to fill in a multiple-choice online survey to tell us what they think of their child's school, all year round. We only gather parents and carers' comments through free-text boxes during the short period that the school is being inspected.
- We will explore how we can capture the views of parents and carers in early years and childcare settings, as well as parents, carers and learners in FE and skills providers.
- We want to give parents, carers and providers better opportunities to be heard. We will also make our online surveys more accessible.
- We will always balance the views of parents and carers and staff with the other evidence we collect during inspections.

We will hear from children about their experiences of education and care.

- We heard worrying feedback from care-experienced children and young people. It suggested that some children are removed from schools and settings during inspections, which means that inspectors do not always see typical provision.
- We want to improve how we engage with children and learners during inspections. We want to hear children's voices and see typicality on inspection.
- We are determined to put an end to the harmful practice of certain children being absent during inspection. We hope annual reviews of safeguarding, attendance and off-rolling will help to stop this.

We will establish 6 national hubs to improve consistency across all our work.

- We recognise that our regional model has created inconsistency in the way we carry out some of our work. That is why we are setting up 6 national hubs that will specialise in specific parts of our work, led by experienced regional directors.
- These hubs will improve consistency across Ofsted by taking a centralised approach to different aspects of our work, such as complaints investigations; requests for pauses to inspection or deferrals; quality assurance of reports; and the information and support we give inspectors during inspection.
- The hubs will also free up our regional teams to focus on improving inspection quality and building relationships with stakeholders.
- The hubs will gather insights from across our work and feed into our training through the Ofsted Academy. This will help us to continue to improve our culture

and be a learning organisation.

- The 6 hubs are:
 - **complaints about Ofsted** – this will centralise complaints. All complaints will be investigated independently of their region. Inspectors assessing complaints will always be from a different region to the one from which the complaint originated. We believe this will lead to a more consistent approach
 - **inspection welfare, support and guidance** – this will be one national point of contact offering support and guidance to inspectors and to those being inspected. It will make sure advice and guidance are consistent across the country. It will also help us identify emerging issues so we can improve our guidance, frameworks and training
 - **quality assurance and professional standards** – this will set high national standards for quality assurance work. A team of expert inspectors will work centrally to sign off inspection reports. They will make sure the evaluations we make in our reports meet nationally set standards. If standards are not met, senior inspectors will oversee a review of the evidence and reporting. They will then take action, for example arranging for inspectors to get additional evidence
 - **enhanced consistency and moderation** – this will give additional scrutiny to the reports on providers causing us the greatest concern, independently of the original inspection team. The hub will carefully review the inspection reports and comments from providers. It will also carry out full evidence base reviews
 - **regulation and delivery prioritisation** – this will oversee the delivery of our inspection and regulatory work in early years and children’s social care. It will monitor the time it takes for regions to complete work such as registrations of new providers. This will make sure our resource is allocated to manage peaks in demand in different parts of the country, so that we work in the most effective way and in the best interests of children
 - **provider intelligence and area insights** – this will bring together experts centrally to consider information from parents about a setting and explain to providers how we will use that information. It will also support our area insights work to better recognise where providers do great work in challenging circumstances, and to point out how local and national decision-makers can address local challenges.

We are changing how we handle complaints.

- As well as introducing a ‘complaints against Ofsted’ hub, we have made several changes to our process for dealing with complaints against Ofsted. These are already making a big difference to leaders’ experiences of inspection, and have enhanced leaders’ dialogue with Ofsted.
- Changes to the process included:
 - setting up a new provider contact helpline so that leaders can speak to a senior inspector at any time during an inspection, or afterwards
 - introducing the opportunity for complainants to talk to the investigating officer so that the investigating officer fully understands the concerns being raised

- providing an earlier opportunity for complainants to appeal to the Independent Complaints Adjudication Service for Ofsted (ICASO) when they are dissatisfied with our complaints investigation
- We heard that our complaints process often felt like we were ‘marking our own homework’. As a result, we have piloted complaints panels for the schools and early years sectors. These panels include external sector representatives. They review whether we have handled a sample of complaints fairly and in line with our policy. We will make this a permanent feature of our complaints processes across all areas.

We will become more transparent.

- We will improve transparency across all aspects of our work and become more open to challenge. We will look at how we could:
 - publish relevant training materials through the Ofsted Academy
 - make activity on our inspections more transparent. For example, in schools we will do user research to look at recording and transcribing the final feedback meetings and sharing these with leaders
 - better share the evidence that underpins our reports directly with leaders. This will help them to understand how we reach our conclusions. We aim to do this as part of our reforms to the inspection framework, which we will consult on later in the academic year
 - develop an ‘evidence required/to be considered’ grid on the back of each rubric as part of our education inspections to help show what is and is not needed for inspection. This should help reduce the workload burden that inspection is causing for leaders
- With this response, we are publishing 3 sets of data tables from the Big Listen (public consultation, IFF Research study with providers and professionals, and NatCen research with parents, carers and the public). We are also looking at the best way to share the raw data from the Big Listen public consultation with the research community, so that other researchers can do further analysis.

We will do more to share our insights and data, and ground our work in evidence.

- We will make sure our frameworks and inspection practice are grounded in the best available evidence. We will evaluate the changes we make to them so that we understand the impact of these changes on children, learners and the providers we inspect and regulate. We will follow government social research standards, and guidance from the [Evaluation Task Force](#) and the [‘Magenta book’](#).
- We will define what vulnerability means in our inspection and regulation context. This will help direct attention and resources to those with the highest need

- We will review our statistics releases, making sure they present information in the right way to best support those who use them and continue to align with the [‘Code of practice for statistics’](#)
- Through the Ofsted Academy, we will develop an ‘insights library’. This will share exemplary practice in the sectors we inspect and regulate. It will build on engagement and discussions with providers and professionals
- We will publish our own [Areas of research interest](#) so that others can help us fill evidence gaps, and help us improve

We are increasing our engagement and consultation with stakeholders.

- We have set up [7 external reference groups](#). They will give us independent advice and challenge from leading experts across the full breadth of our work. They will share ideas and give us feedback, including examining our frameworks, looking at training and inspection design and making recommendations for improvement.
- Our 7 groups are:
 - curriculum, teaching and assessment
 - behaviour and attendance
 - inclusion
 - well-being of leaders and staff
 - early years regulation and social care
 - insights and evidence (education)
 - insights and evidence (social care)

Children’s social care

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How we will change

Children's outcomes, alongside their safety, should be the focus of our work. There were 403,000 children in need in England in March 2023.[\[footnote 1\]](#) That is an average of more than 1 in every classroom. Pupils identified as in need are half as likely as their peers to reach expected standards in reading, writing and maths at the end of primary school. This attainment gap widens further into secondary school. Longer-term outcomes are worse still. In 2022, 4 in 10 young adults (below the age of 25) who received custodial sentences in the justice system were children in need.[\[footnote 2\]](#)

This is why we are so firm about holding the providers and organisations that protect, care for and educate vulnerable children to account. This is at the heart of what we do. We must protect the rights of children, whether they are in the care of loving foster carers, in children's homes, or in the secure estate. Many children in need are supported to have fulfilling, happy lives. But too many are not.

There are structural challenges that worsen this. Under 8% of children live in the North West region, yet around a quarter of all children's homes and places are there.[\[footnote 3\]](#) This imbalance results too often in vulnerable children being moved from home to home, far from family connections. They are left unable to build a bond with a social worker, a loving adult, a school or even a location because of the instability they suffer.

This is why we will continue to revise and reform our children's social care

inspection frameworks, in line with government changes and new legislation, to raise standards across the sector. The [DfE's 'National framework'](#) and the government's reform programme act as the current guides for the sector. We know that most children are better served by remaining safely within their family, surrounded by love. This is why we want our inspections to recognise the value of early help and prevention. If those children cannot stay with their families, the children's social care system should better enable them to live with people who are known to them and love them. This is set out in the [kinship care strategy](#). The government reforms are taking a 'test and learn' approach, using pilots to identify good practice. **We will take the findings from good practice into our children's social care inspections.**

The scandal at the Hesley Group showed that every part of the accountability system needs to play its part to the best of its ability and work more collaboratively in order for children to be safe and well cared for. Ofsted did not act quickly enough to identify abuse at Hesley. We know we can and should be better. We must play our part to make sure the right people are doing the right thing, at the right time, with the right tools, and in the best interests of children.

We should use our unique role overlooking the education, early years, skills and children's social care systems to improve standards for vulnerable children in all parts of their lives. Respondents to the Big Listen told us we can do more to advocate for vulnerable children and bring about change. **We will share our insights more systematically with the sector, partners and the government to inform deep and transformative reform.**

We also know that too many vulnerable children are living in unregistered children's homes. They are put there illegally and outside the scope of what we can inspect. The most agreed-with statement in the entire social care section of the Big Listen was that 'Ofsted should have greater powers to address unregistered providers that have vulnerable children in their care'. Eighty-four per cent of respondents agreed.

There may be hundreds of children in unregistered children's homes. These settings are often unsafe and unsuitable, and are not held to account for the care they give. The fact is, we do not know how many there are. This is shocking and it must end. **Ofsted should be given the powers and resources to put a stop to unregistered children's homes, once and for all.** There is a once-in-a-decade opportunity to modernise the children's social care regulatory system. It should be transformative.

We are also aware that some registered children's homes have become an investment vehicle for private equity, often based overseas. These companies also own much of the fostering agency market, as well as hundreds of SEND providers and independent special schools. This means some firms can profit from multiple aspects of a vulnerable child's life: their home, their school, their additional support, or their move into foster care. Many private firms do a good job. But we are worried about the risks of so many services supporting vulnerable children being held in so few private hands. And we do not have the right tools to regulate them. **We want to work with the government to improve the oversight of these groups through upcoming legislation.** We need to hold to account those

who look after the most vulnerable children.

We also recognise that our judgements cause frustration. This is why we will work with the DfE to **replace the single-word judgement for overall effectiveness**.

We will aim to keep our proportionate and risk-based approaches to inspection. We will still give information about the quality of services and settings, in order to trigger support or intervention as necessary. We will also maintain respectful relationships with those we regulate and inspect, as fellow professionals. But we will continue to hold them to account when they fail vulnerable children.

What we heard

Of the 16,033 people who responded to our main consultation, 15% answered questions about children's social care. We also heard from over 500 children who said that they had a social worker through the online consultation for children. On top of this, we heard from over 1,700 people who work in the social care sector through our commissioned research. We ran focus group panels with care-experienced children and young people.

The [annexes](#) set out our analysis of the Big Listen responses in full. Below is a summary of what we heard and some of the key messages for us about social care.

Children told us

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In the children's Big Listen, we asked children who said they have a social worker what 3 main things we should look at when we inspect children's homes, residential schools or fostering services.

As in the [education section](#) of the children's consultation, children told us to prioritise their happiness and well-being:

Overwhelmingly, children said that the top 2 priorities for what we inspect should be 'how safe I feel' (69% of children) and 'how happy I am' (64%).

'How I am being supported in my education' (47%) was the next highest response, followed by 'how I am involved in decisions about me' (42%).

We heard from children directly during our focus group discussions with looked after children and care leavers (run by Coram Voice, Career Matters and Catch 22). We asked about social care inspections. Children told us they want inspectors to ask whether they are happy and whether they feel safe. They also want them to ask about the relationships they have with foster families, carers and social workers, as well as school staff.

Several of the care leavers we heard from were in a young offender institution (YOI). They had had very little contact with their local authority or social worker

since going into the YOI. They said Ofsted should ask about the help they get from carers to keep them in school and prevent them from being excluded. We also heard powerful testimony about the result of being moved from home to home:

‘Having a social worker that’s constantly changing and switching: how’re you going to build a bond?’

Some children and young people were sceptical about the impact of inspections. They did not believe that inspections always captured the reality of being a child in their school or local authority. Care leavers and a care-experienced young person in the YOI said:

‘Either Ofsted isn’t doing what they’re supposed to, or they don’t get truth and correct data from providers.’

‘I think in secure units and also children’s homes in general, you do notice that they do kind of scramble to try and make the place not look like a dungeon.’

‘When Ofsted was there, we got a bowling trip and we got taken out of the house and it was almost like they didn’t want Ofsted to speak to us because they knew they were going to get shut down if Ofsted did.’

‘If Ofsted made a difference, why would I still experience the issues that I’m having at school at present?’

Individuals and organisations representing children and young people told us

Most respondents to the consultation told us that children’s happiness and safety should be a core aim for us. This includes their mental well-being and sense of security. Many respondents who were advocating for vulnerable children insisted that we should focus far more on children’s outcomes. Seven in 10 (69%) told us that we should focus more on children and young people’s experiences and

progress, and not only on providers' compliance with regulations.

One group shared concerns about Ofsted's impact on children's services. They told us that, while 'the intent of Ofsted is a good one', too many services are spending too much time on 'recording activity in a way that is Ofsted-friendly rather than child-centred'. They want us to focus more on supporting providers and services to improve. Another group raised concerns about the high profits made by groups operating children's homes and children's services. They said:

'Ofsted should help tackle the system in which children are often unnecessarily separated from their families, friends and support network and often sent long distances to children's homes. Most of these homes are owned by private companies, which have local authorities over a barrel and so charge high fees and make excessive profits of 25%. Instead, the money could be used to support many families to prevent the increasing numbers of children going into care.'

Professionals who work with vulnerable children told us

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Social care respondents to the independent research company IFF Research survey were consistently the most positive about our inspections, out of all the professionals we work with. Three in 4 of those surveyed agreed with the coverage

of what we inspect, the feedback we gather, and how they are informed about findings. They also said inspections minimised disruption.

But in the consultation, respondents shared some of the same frustrations as other sectors. They were concerned about the over-simplicity of the single-word judgement for overall effectiveness. They thought it failed to account for context in local authority children's services inspections. One particular response captured this widely held view:

'Single-worded inspection judgements create an unnecessarily punitive approach that does not provide context and balance around each local area. A wealthy outer-London borough being compared with a deprived inner-London borough is both unfair and inaccurate in terms of the context they are operating in.'

There were some responses about Ofsted making more of our position of oversight across education and care. One respondent said:

'Ofsted has an unparalleled overview of local systems, processes and practice, which is not currently being systematically captured and shared across all domains of work.'

Organisations representing local authorities, children's homes, residential special schools and the children's social care workforce told us

Some local authorities said that they are subject to too many inspection frameworks. This makes some feel that they are almost continuously preparing for inspection. Not all of these are Ofsted-led inspections. Some are led by other inspectorates, such as the Care Quality Commission and HM Inspectorate of Probation.

The Local Government Association (LGA) raised this concern in its response. It told us that some local authorities have experienced multiple inspections in quick succession. This has been resource-intensive for the local authority and highly stressful for the officers involved. The LGA also said:

'Councils report that the ILACS framework has a welcome focus on the experiences of children, is more proportionate [than its predecessor] and supports improvement. There are, however, concerns about the continued

use of a single-word judgement and how this can accurately reflect the complexities of the child protection system.’

The Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) also shared concerns about single-word judgements, which ‘tell a partial and too often a punitive story’. The ADCS said its members ‘generally support the principle of inspection and accountability’. But members find ‘a growing lack of congruence between different frameworks and regulatory regimes’. The ADCS said:

‘The shocking abuses at the Hesley Group of residential special schools also underlined the danger of different regulations and inspection frameworks not speaking to each other.’

What we will do



We will strengthen the regulation and inspection of the children’s social care sector in partnership with the government and the sector.

- We will continue to reform our regulatory and inspection approach to complement and keep pace with the government’s children’s social care reforms. This will include responding to, and learning from, pilots to identify good practice.
- We want to make sure that our social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) inspections take account of how children’s homes create stability for children and avoid unplanned endings to placements. We want children to experience stability. We will therefore look at how children’s homes stick with children and work in partnership with local authorities when things are not working well.
- We will do our utmost to make sure that ILACS focus more on supporting family networks and aiming to keep children with their families, wherever possible and safe to do so.
- We want our inspections to highlight good practice when services and settings meet children and families’ needs at the lowest point of state intervention in family life. This includes intervening early, wherever possible.
- We will make sure that ILACS inspections report on the environment that leaders create for great child-centred, family-focused practice.
- We will continue to avoid duplicating inspection activity across ILACS and area SEND inspections. This will help to avoid burden for local authorities.

- We will open a pre-registration helpline so that providers wanting to open provision for children with the most complex needs can seek advice about their arrangements before applying.

We will work with the government on new legislation to improve the regulation of social care and our oversight of groups.

- We are determined to strengthen the regulation of the children's social care sector in partnership with the government. We are asking the government to make sure that future legislation includes:
 - **better oversight of children's homes at group level** so Ofsted can regulate groups of children's homes and other children's social care providers. We want our powers to include: being able to restrict growth within a group where there are systemic issues in multiple settings until they are resolved; being able to require significant persons at group level to address quality issues in a timely manner following inspection; and being able to enforce actions for providers at group level.
 - **new enforcement powers to tackle unregistered settings.** We need to be able to fine unregistered settings. This would act as a deterrent to those who manage these settings. Our current powers are limited to prosecution, which is costly and time-consuming. We need to act quickly to keep children safe
 - **improved standards of care wherever children live or stay.** We need quality standards for all places where children live away from home, including residential special schools, to ensure consistency across all settings
 - **improved regulation for registered managers**, including to allow them to move from one registered setting to another
 - **modernisation of the regulatory framework** to align with new models of care. This includes updating disqualification regulations and categories of children's homes. Ofsted should also be able to refuse applications based on 'need'. This would avoid situations where certain places, such as Blackpool, are oversaturated with children's homes without the need for them in that area
 - **regulating profit-making by large groups that provide services for vulnerable children.** The DfE should regulate large groups that own, for example, multiple children's homes, fostering services, independent schools, alternative provision and SEND services. This would make sure their decisions are made in children's best interests and not solely for profit
- We will also ask the government to support us to improve our systems so that we can better hold groups to account. We want to use a more advanced case-management system that will give us better insight about, and tracking of, groups with complex ownership chains and structures. This will help us inform the government of challenges and start earlier intervention.

We will work with the government, the sector and other regulators to replace the single-word judgement for overall effectiveness.

- We will work with the government to replace the overall effectiveness grade with a similar tool to a report card. This will allow us to give a set of assessments and to maintain a proportionate and risk-based approach to inspection. They will give more nuance to allow us to pinpoint and call out local, regional and national systemic failings.

We will introduce area insights to identify places that need help from the government to support vulnerable children.

- We will use our unique position from our oversight of everything we inspect and regulate across England. We will develop an area insights service to visualise local area data.
- This will set out what it is like to be a child in any area. It will give better information to parents and carers whose children move through everything we inspect and regulate, from birth to adulthood.
- We will use our insights from education and care inspections to tell the government, through this area insights service, which areas need additional support (see [‘how we will change’](#)).

We will introduce the Ofsted Academy to improve training for inspectors.

- The ‘how we will change’ section sets out the details behind the Ofsted Academy. This will transform how we recruit, train and develop all our staff.
- We want to make sure our training for inspectors is even better informed by good practice from the sectors we regulate and inspect. To do this, we will expand opportunities for inspectors to do secondments in the sector.
- We will also continue to offer shadow opportunities to sector leaders as part of their development. This gives them an insight into the inspection process.
- As set out in the ‘how we will change’ section, our national hubs will aim to ensure greater consistency across our work.

We will better capture the voices and views of children and care-experienced young people to improve our regulation and inspection of children’s social care.

- We will use focus groups further, as well as engaging more widely with children and care-experienced young people. This will help us design and develop our inspection frameworks and regulatory approaches.

- We will continue to improve how we survey children to gather their views. We want to make sure we hear as many views as we can. For example, we will look at making surveys more accessible for children in supported accommodation who speak English as an additional language, such as children seeking asylum.
- We will continue to use our training for children's social care inspectors to emphasise that children's views and experiences are at the centre of our decision-making and the actions we set.

Special educational needs and disabilities and alternative provision

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How we will change

There are some who want us to stop inspecting special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services across a local area. They argue that the system of SEND provision is too broken for us to hold providers and services to account fairly. But parents and carers told us about their frustrations with the system. It is precisely where challenges are greatest, and where vulnerable children are most concentrated, that inspection is critical. So, we will continue to inspect. We need to find these issues and highlight them, whether they are local, regional and/or systemic national problems.

We undoubtedly need to improve how we inspect the SEND and alternative provision (AP) sectors. We will call for improvement at all levels, whether that is at provider, local authority or national government level. We need to make sure the whole system puts the most vulnerable children first.

The challenges facing the SEND system are exacerbating cracks in the education system. Hundreds of thousands of children are regularly absent from school. Schools are reporting entrenched absenteeism, and a growing population of severely absent children.

Tens of thousands of children are missing education altogether. There is too little being done to prevent those children falling out of the education system. We suspect that many of these children are vulnerable and are in and out of both registered and unregistered AP. Many are also likely to have SEND. But we do not know for sure.

This is why the government's **upcoming legislation to introduce a 'children not in school' register** is urgently needed. We can use that data to inform new **annual attendance and off-rolling reviews**, as set out in the government's manifesto to address this growing crisis.

There are also an estimated 20,000 pupils placed in unregistered AP. [\[footnote 4\]](#) This is usually part time and not regulated. We cannot directly inspect unregistered AP and cannot ensure that it is safe and suitable. Many unregistered settings will provide good support. But as we cannot inspect them, we cannot report on their quality or safety. Through our unregistered schools investigations, we have found too many unregistered providers that operate in appalling conditions. We have found some run by people with criminal backgrounds, and some we fear may be grooming young pupils for gangs. In the vast majority of cases, children are placed in these settings by local authorities and schools, despite children not receiving suitable education or support in them. **We want to work closely with the government to end this unregulated market once and for all.**

We also want to put an end to illegal unregistered schools. Children in these are too often taught a substandard education, exposed to extremist views and living in squalid conditions. **We will work with the government to keep children safe wherever they receive their education or care. We need to make sure that children out of sight in unregistered settings are safe and learning.**

We recognise that we need to learn from our inspections of area SEND services, which we have carried out since January 2023. There are systemic weaknesses in the system. Our inspections pick these up. But we also need to identify where local areas need to improve, then make sure local leaders are supported to do this. **We will enhance our inspections of area SEND provision.** These proposals will give local partners the breathing room to address issues in their area. They will target inspection activity where it will have the most positive impact on services for children and young people with SEND.

We will use every tool at our disposal to raise standards in SEND provision and AP. Last year, we started **inspecting full-time online education providers.** We

do this through a voluntary accreditation scheme overseen by the DfE. This is part of making sure that there is oversight of the education of all vulnerable children. Some of these online providers cater for children with the most complex needs.

We are also establishing the **Ofsted Academy to improve SEND training and to recruit SEND specialists from the sector**. We aim to make sure no inspector goes into a mainstream school, special school or AP without a deep understanding of what good SEND provision looks like. We will also consult on including a new 'inclusion' criterion under the reformed education inspection framework. This will evaluate whether schools are providing high-quality support for disadvantaged and vulnerable children, including those with SEND.

What we heard

Of the 16,033 people who responded to our main consultation, 31% answered questions about SEND and AP. We also heard feedback on SEND and AP from the 4,300 children who responded to the children's consultation, as well as through the independent research we commissioned.

What children told us

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Through the consultation for children, children told us that how well pupils with

SEND are supported at school should be one of our top 5 priorities on inspection.

Through that survey, we also found that:

1 in 3 (32%) children who responded want inspectors to ask about the support they got in school, particularly how schools support the needs of distinct groups of pupils (such as young carers, children in care and those with SEND).

Children want inspectors to ask not just how well schools support pupils with SEND, but how well they understand how children's experiences and lives outside of school affect their learning in school.

What parents and carers told us

Through the consultation, parents and carers were eager to tell us about their frustrations with the quality of SEND support and their difficulties accessing it. They told us that the process of getting support was stressful, bureaucratic and exhausting. There was a clearly a view that, in SEND and AP, the 'broken' SEND system was the problem.

His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) and his team also heard from parents and carers at engagement events, like the Autism Show. They told heartbreaking stories about constantly fighting the system. There were mixed views about Ofsted's role in that system. Most felt that Ofsted is an important voice for parents of children with SEND, because we hold providers and services to account. But some saw Ofsted as a contributing factor to the challenges of the system. They thought that we did not do enough to call out the lack of SEND support in their area, or their child's school, nursery, college or other education or care provider.

Parents and carers told us that:

Local authorities are failing to provide timely and effective support for pupils with SEND. This reduces schools' ability to meet pupils' needs.

Schools should actively engage with parents in decision-making processes. They should have open communication channels to collaboratively support pupils with SEND.

The quality and effectiveness of SEND provision within schools should be a bigger part of what we look at on inspection. This should include the availability and quality of specialised support staff and resources.

Inspections should pay closer attention to how schools support pupils with SEND, and whether they meet their needs and ensure that they make progress.

Parents of children attending special schools told focus groups run by NatCen that it was important for reports to include details about a provider's recent record and history of issues. This should include safeguarding, off-rolling and the number of recent reports of incidents. Parents said that this would help them decide whether a special school could meet their child's needs.

Many responses called for regulation and inspection of all AP settings, including unregistered ones, to ensure safety and quality education for pupils with SEND. Over 7 in 10 (77%) respondents said there should be a system of oversight for unregistered AP.

What education and care professionals told us

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Some education and care professionals made similar points about Ofsted to those covered in the schools section. Respondents referred to well-documented national issues in the AP and SEND system, and the workforce challenges that arise from them.

The key messages about SEND and AP from the consultation were:

Respondents wanted us to give a full picture of individual schools' SEND provision. They want us to do more to engage pupils with SEND and their parents, as well as to give more nuanced and detailed evaluations of SEND provision.

Inspections should consider the funding and resources available to schools for SEND provision, and how this affects schools' ability to meet pupils' needs.

Respondents called for reform of the inspection of special schools. They emphasised the need for inspectors with relevant experience and understanding of SEND.

Professionals had similar frustrations as parents about the issues across the SEND support system. Professionals told us schools are struggling to provide adequate support for pupils with SEND due to insufficient funding and resources. They said that schools are striving to work with external services to support pupils with SEND, but face challenges due to limited control and long waiting times for specialist support. This caused huge pressures on schools and staff. It worsened the educational experience for pupils.

What organisations representing SEND services/AP told us

The LGA and the ADCS were critical of area SEND inspections. They said that we are holding local leaders to account for national problems with the SEND system. The ADCS described area SEND inspections as ‘perhaps the most complex and challenging inspection Ofsted currently undertakes’. Both associations wanted a form of pause to area SEND inspections, until reforms to the wider SEND system are in place.

The National Association for Pupil Referral Units and Alternative Provision (PRUsAP) commented on a lack of consistency between inspections. They had concerns about inspectors’ expertise in pupil referral units (PRUs) and AP, and that the current framework was not entirely suitable for PRUs and AP. They also advised moving away from single-word judgements, which contributed to staff anxiety. PRUsAP said leaders often feel overwhelmed and constrained by the anticipation of inspections, which can distract from their main responsibilities. PRUsAP advised us to ‘prioritise a developmental approach centred on continuous improvement and targeted support’. They want us to use an ‘evaluation that acknowledges the unique strengths, assets, and achievements of each setting’.

The National Network of Parent Carer Forums suggested that ‘there should be a measure around how many pupils with SEND are in a school compared to the other schools and a school should be downgraded for not taking their equal share of [pupils with] SEND and supporting them effectively’. The National Association for Hospital Education (NAHE) said that Ofsted needs to improve how it inspects services for children who are inpatients in a paediatric hospital. The NAHE said inspection should become a ‘done with’ rather than ‘done to’, in a ‘collaborative approach with the child at the centre’. The NAHE said: ‘There have been improvements recently which we acknowledge’ but that ‘this needs to be built on.’

The National Association of Independent Schools and Non-Maintained Special Schools (NASS) shared their reflections on improvement made in recent inspections of their members but also ongoing challenges. NASS said they welcomed their role in supporting inspectors’ training ‘but not all inspectors have the amount of SEND knowledge and experience to be confident in their judgments’. NASS said they would like inspectors to build a long-term relationship with schools. They said this ‘would allow the inspector to get to know the unique context of each setting and advise accordingly and understand the medium- and long-term impact that the provision has on the lives of children and young people

rather than a quick snapshot over a few days’.

What we will do



We will make sure the new report cards give insight into the quality of SEND provision.

- **We will increase our focus on and scrutiny of how providers are meeting the needs of children and young people with vulnerabilities such as socio-economic disadvantage and SEND.** We will consult on introducing a new inspection criterion for ‘inclusion’ across education settings.

We will reform our inspection framework to work effectively for SEND and AP.

- We will make sure that our reformed inspection framework is suitable for inspections of SEND in mainstream schools, special schools (including independent and non-maintained) and AP.
- We will consider whether we need a rubric for specialist provision.

We will strengthen our AP inspections.

- We will strengthen our inspections of registered (regulated) AP. This will include improving training for inspectors of AP. We will also improve how we use data and insights to inform AP inspections.
- We will strengthen how we evaluate schools’ and local authorities’ use of registered and unregistered AP. We will highlight where they have made decisions that compromise the education and care of vulnerable children.
- We will recruit more inspectors from the AP and special schools sectors. This will help make sure our inspectors’ expertise matches the settings they inspect.

We want the government to introduce regulation of unregistered AP.

- We want to work with the government to make sure all AP is regulated and

inspected at a national level. Part-time unregistered AP is currently unregulated. And yet it educates and looks after around 20,000 children (and this number is rising). [\[footnote 5\]](#) Nearly 8 in 10 respondents to the Big Listen survey (78%) said that Ofsted should have oversight of unregistered alternative provision.

- Our unregistered schools inspectors frequently visit unregistered AP on suspicion it may be operating as an illegal school. We have seen a setting run by a convicted sex offender and many settings in hazardous buildings (for example, condemned by the fire service, not storing chemicals safely, exposed wiring). We have also seen many that charge local authorities tens of thousands of pounds for little to no education.
- The DfE should take action to protect vulnerable children abandoned in these dangerous settings. Upcoming legislation provides an opportunity to do this. Unregistered AP must be regulated.

We want to end illegal schools and keep children in unregistered settings safe and learning.

- Ofsted's powers to investigate suspected unregistered and illegal schools and other education settings are very limited. Our power of entry is ineffective. And we have no power to search for or seize evidence. It is therefore challenging to prosecute.
- A loophole in legislation allows unregistered settings with the worst curriculums to operate. Settings with an extremely narrow curriculum cannot be registered as 'independent schools' due to a technicality. As a result, Ofsted's unregistered schools team cannot progress investigations into them, even when hundreds of children are crammed into unsuitable buildings 6 days a week.
- The government has said that upcoming legislation will address our concerns. We warmly welcome this.

Ofsted and CQC will review area SEND inspections to enable local areas to enhance the support they offer to children with SEND.

- We will work closely with children and families, local partnerships and the DfE, the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England. Together, we will review the current area SEND inspection framework.
- We will publish a summary report for the government, setting out the national and systemic issues we are seeing. This is part of our wider advocacy for SEND and AP system reform.
- We will continue to inspect area SEND partnerships. But we will hold off monitoring inspections until after we have completed our review. We will meet with local areas that are due to receive a monitoring inspection in the autumn term, and will produce further guidance on what to expect from monitoring inspections.

We will introduce the Ofsted Academy to improve training for inspectors.

- The [‘how we will change’ section](#) sets out the details behind the Ofsted Academy. This will transform how we recruit, train and develop all our staff. It also means we will make sure inspectors have the expertise and training they need to inspect SEND across all forms of education and care.

We want regulation of independent schools to be strengthened.

- We want upcoming legislation to give the DfE power to suspend the operations of independent schools on an immediate basis. This would allow the DfE to take swift action to keep children safe across all independent schools. Almost 700 of the 1,139 non-association independent schools we inspect are special schools, supporting the most vulnerable children.

Early years

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How we will change

Ofsted's mission in the early years is to make sure all children have the best start in life. A good early years education can be transformative to a child's life chances, especially the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children. All children deserve to be safe, happy and cared for. That is the bare minimum. But we should strive for more.

We know from [our international research](#) that prioritising communication, language and numeracy for children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, is especially important to providing the best start in life. These are core criteria in the current education inspection framework. For us, the best start in life is not a phrase. It is a driving force. We will use the findings from our '[Best start in life](#)' [research](#) to **emphasise the importance of communication, language and numeracy in our inspections and regulation.**

This will come together with the government's plans to implement early language interventions and raise the standards of maths teaching across nurseries and primary schools. Inspectors will pay particular attention to whether all children – especially the most disadvantaged and vulnerable – enjoy a rich diet of texts read to them by early years professionals. This will help develop their communication and language skills, their love of books and their wider knowledge of the world. It will also enhance children's enjoyment of early years education, which is crucial to improving their cognitive, physical, social and emotional well-being.

High-quality early education and childcare is the bedrock of education. But only around 1 in 3 parents and carers (32%) agreed that Ofsted reassures them about the learning and development of children at early years and childcare settings. This is despite the fact that we grade 96% of settings as good or outstanding overall. Too many parents and carers are not finding the information they need in our reports to help them decide who to trust with the care of their child.

We also heard clearly from the sector about the deep frustration that these single-word judgements for overall effectiveness cause. They told us that these are overly simplistic. They also cause anxiety because getting a negative judgement has potential consequences for a provider's funding and business viability.

This is why we will work with the government to **remove the overall effectiveness grade across early years inspections.** We will consult on introducing report cards, so parents and carers can have **more nuanced reporting about the strengths of providers.**

The Big Listen feedback told us to adapt our regulation and inspection practices to be bespoke and proportional to the size of settings and the number of hours they care for children. The early years foundation stage (EYFS) framework is what all early years providers must follow, by law. It sets the expected minimum standards for all providers. The EYFS is the basis for our inspection practice: we make sure all providers follow it. We will build on all the positive aspects of our current approach by **introducing a new early years inspection framework, built on our**

current strong principles but more flexible to apply to different types of setting.

Our role as regulator is to approve and oversee the registration of childcare settings. This is to provide assurance that they are safe and suitable for children. But regulated early years education and childcare is a complex sector. It covers many different types of providers. There are childminders (some overseen by childminding agencies), nurseries, pre-schools, before- and after-school clubs, and Nursery and Reception classes in schools, for under 5s and older children.

Too often, the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children do not receive the highest quality early education and care. Children from disadvantaged families are less likely to take up government offers of free childcare for 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds.[\[footnote 6\]](#) And nurseries in the most disadvantaged areas are less likely to be good or outstanding.[\[footnote 7\]](#)

We will work with the government on its childcare reforms to help tackle these challenges. **We will continue to streamline our registration process to support more early years education and childcare providers to register.** This will help meet the government's plans to **have 3,000 more nurseries on primary school sites.**

What we heard

Of the 16,033 people who responded to our main consultation, 51% answered questions about early years. This included over 700 responses from those employed in a registered childcare setting. Our independently commissioned research included 783 early years specific responses from parents and carers and 1,152 responses from early years organisations. You can see the full analysis of the Big Listen responses for early years in the [annex](#).

Parents and carers told us

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Many respondents told us that the top priorities for early years inspection should be the safety and happiness of children. This was followed by ensuring that they are supported through their learning and development to be ready for the transition to primary school.

We also heard that:

Most parents and carers NatCen surveyed were aware of our role as the regulator of registered early years and childcare settings: 9 in 10 parents and carers (90%).

7 in 10 parents and carers (70%) place some value on an Ofsted report when choosing a setting for their child.

1 in 3 respondents (35%) agreed that Ofsted reassures them of the learning and development of children at early years settings.

Parents and carers in focus groups felt that reports could provide greater

insight into safeguarding, support for children with SEND and the context of the provision (such as its staffing).

Professionals told us

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Concerns raised by early years professionals aligned with those set out in the 'how we will change' section.

Specifically, in the consultation and independent research, we heard:

Concerns about single-word judgements for overall effectiveness being overly simplistic. IFF Research found that half (49%) of providers opposed the use of single-word judgements and only 1 in 3 (33%) supported it. Respondents also had concerns about the potential consequences of the judgement on their funding and business viability.

That professionals want a more collaborative process to inspection. They want a more descriptive reporting method, which includes strengths and areas for improvement.

Frustration from professionals who felt inspectors on primary school inspections do not have the early years expertise needed to inspect Nursery or Reception phases.

That leaders and staff had less trust or confidence in inspections when they thought an inspector had low levels of sector knowledge and experience. IFF Research found that 6 in 10 providers (61%) rate inspectors' levels of knowledge and expertise as good; 1 in 10 (12%) rate them as poor.

That 3 in 4 (75%) practitioners want us to consider the local area of the setting. This would help us to understand the challenges it faces and the context in which it is caring for children. Professionals want reports to cite children's starting points and progress, rather than using the local or national averages to compare against.

Organisations representing early years settings and professionals told us

The National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) raised concerns from its members about the difference in approach Ofsted takes when inspecting school-based early years provision (which is part of a wider school inspection) and registered early years provision (which gets a standalone early years inspection). This has led to some NDNA members feeling that provision within a school setting does not receive the same level of attention, time or level of early years expertise in their inspection as other registered settings do.

The London Early Years Foundation (LEYF) told us that it believes that Ofsted has a strong platform to build on, with our focus on early education as well as regulation. Similarly to the NDNA, the LEYF commented that currently 'early years often feels like an afterthought in Ofsted's strategy and communication [and that the current inspection model] feels like an attempt to shoe-horn the early years [in]'. It called for 'a specific early years directorate led by a director of early childhood' within Ofsted.

The LGA passed on concerns from councils about the inconsistency of early years inspections. They challenged how robust our processes are and noted concerns about judgement outcomes. They called for a greater focus on SEND and on how settings prepare children for transition to primary school, particularly those with

SEND. The LGA also raised issues about the expansion of childcare entitlements. Councils welcome this but are concerned about the potential for Ofsted to rush when registering many new providers.

Many of the organisations agreed that we need to review our approach to regulating and inspecting multiple providers, such as early years groups or chains. This was also reflected in the consultation. Seven in 10 (68%) respondents agreed that Ofsted should inspect early years groups.

What we will do



We will reform our early years inspection and regulatory framework.

- We will introduce a reformed inspection framework. This will be better suited to the early years. The EYFS will be at its heart, to make sure providers secure the best start for the youngest children. We will aim to make sure all children – especially the most disadvantaged and vulnerable – enjoy a rich diet of texts read to them by early years professionals. This will help develop their communication and language skills, their love of books and their wider knowledge of the world.
- The framework will follow the principles set out in the ‘how we will change’ section. We will be informed by the views we heard through the Big Listen, as well as evidence from our [‘Best start in life’ research](#). In our latest research, we found that good early literacy and maths development gives children lifelong benefits. It is crucial to their later achievement.
- We will continue to put the safeguarding, welfare and well-being of children above and beyond any other criteria for all early years and childcare settings. We know that children learn best when they are happy and safe.

We will introduce report cards.

- With the agreement of the government, **we will remove the overall effectiveness grade and replace it with a new report card** for early years and childcare providers. This will reflect what parents, carers and professionals told us matters most to them. We will consult on what the report card looks like later this academic year.

We will introduce the Ofsted Academy to improve training for

inspectors.

- The 'how we will change' section sets out the details behind the Ofsted Academy. The Academy will transform how we recruit, train and develop all our staff. This will include improving our recruitment of inspectors from the early years sector.

We will support the government's plans to meet the demand for childcare places.

- We will **support the opening of 3,000 nurseries on primary school sites.**
- **We will streamline our registration process.** We will update our registration guidance to make sure options and processes are clear to all applicants. This will build on the welcome calls we now carry out. These calls help to explain the options available to applicants and support their application process.
- **We will better share our insights**, providing more online resources and carrying out more speaking engagements and curriculum roadshow events.
- We would also like the government to support childminders to work more flexibly by creating a new type of early years provider: childminders without domestic premises.

We will continue to share our insights to drive improvements in the early years sector.

- **We will develop an area insights service to visualise local area data.** We will use our unique position of having oversight of all the areas we inspect and regulate. Our 'childcare deserts and oases' project will map how childcare provision is distributed nationally. It will help those responsible for growing the sector to target efforts and resources towards the areas in most need.
- This autumn, we will publish the third part of our ['Best start in life' research](#). In our latest research, we found that good early literacy and maths development gives children lifelong benefits. It is crucial to their later achievement. We will train inspectors using these findings and use them to inform future improvements to our inspection frameworks.

We want to review how we register, inspect and regulate multiple providers.

- We want to work with the government to amend legislation so that we can

regulate and inspect multiple and group-owned early years providers, at group level.

- This would give us regulatory oversight of these providers. This is especially important as the government has committed to expanding childcare entitlements and is expected to fund 80% of the hours the sector offers. [\[footnote 8\]](#) Given this increase in government spending, we want to make sure the sector can continue to meet the demand for early years settings over the longer term.

We want the government to review legislation relating to the Childcare Register, so that we can tackle fraud in the childcare system.

- We need to remove loopholes in legislation that allow far too easy access to those wishing to use their registration solely to commit fraud.
- We want to work with the government to create a more thorough process for assessing those applying to be registered to provide childcare for older children. This would enable us to prevent those wishing to commit fraud from registering. We currently inspect 10% of those registered on the Childcare Register. We would like to inspect more, targeting those who are suspected of committing fraud.
- If the government agrees to this, we can work in partnership with other government bodies, such as HM Revenue and Customs, the Student Loans Company and other regulators. We can invest in systems to prevent, detect and tackle fraud. Resource saved through this work could then be reinvested in the early years system.

We will have a single point of contact for early years within Ofsted.

- This will make sure that we always carefully consider the particular context, needs and voice of the sector when creating policies and in all decision-making. It will join up our early years regulation and early years inspection work under one post.

Schools

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How we will change

Children only get one chance at childhood. The quality of their education and care is crucial for their life chances. We know that school inspections can be better. They can improve for parents, for professionals and for our ultimate goal of driving up standards for all pupils.

Parents want more information about schools. They want clear assessments of performance across a range of areas. At the request of the Secretary of State for Education, we are going to work with the DfE (the schools regulator) to **remove the overall effectiveness grade and replace it with a report card**. The report cards will focus on what children, parents, carers and professionals told us matters most to them. They will give parents a more nuanced view of a school but continue to assess its standards.

Professionals want inspections to be more constructive, more transparent and more manageable. This is why, as part of our wider changes to school inspection, we will give more detail about how we evaluate schools. We will introduce **rubrics to guide leaders on what we expect from inspection. We want inspections to be conversations between the lead inspector and headteacher, discussing the school's strengths and areas for improvement**. This will help support leaders' professional freedom to do what they think is best for their pupils.

Inspections should be rigorous, for the sake of the children and learners. But they

should not be so intense that they cause leaders to feel so anxious that inspection becomes a process to 'get through'. Inspections should be an opportunity to showcase achievement and good practice. Report cards will tell the school what it can improve on so that leaders can raise standards.

We want the assessments we make to inform parents, carers and professionals. We also want them to support a cycle of continuous improvement, so that everyone connected with schools demands high standards. We will maintain the most effective parts of the education inspection framework, such as the focus on the quality of curriculum and teaching.

We also believe there is more we can do to show what it is like to be a child in this country, including how their experiences vary by location. This is why we will include **area insights** in report cards. And we will do more to highlight the experiences of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. We think if we get it right for disadvantaged and vulnerable children, we get it right for all.

We expect to see schools breaking down barriers for disadvantaged and vulnerable children. We want to support schools to reverse the widening gap between those children and their peers. This is why we will consult on introducing a **criterion on inclusion** within the report card. **It will evaluate whether schools are providing high-quality support for disadvantaged and vulnerable children.** This includes evidence-based use of pupil premium funding and support for children in need, looked-after children and those with SEND.

Our focus on inclusion will complement the government's **proposed annual safeguarding, attendance and off-rolling reviews**. These reviews should help with regular, constructive conversations between inspectors and schools. We want to use them to call out schools that illegally or unethically put children off a school before they even apply. But we will continue to recognise schools that meet the needs of their local children. Importantly, we will not penalise schools that use suspensions and exclusions legitimately. We will focus on whether behaviour policies and practices are appropriate and whether the school uses suitable, high-quality **registered AP**. Inclusion should not be in tension with having the highest behavioural and academic expectations of children. We should break the barriers to opportunity down by raising standards up.

We are charged by Parliament with responsibility for safeguarding children in schools. This is an integral part of how the state protects and safeguards children. Over half (58%) of respondents to the consultation told us they want to see more frequent safeguarding inspections of schools (against 42% who did not). Safeguarding will be a key part of the new reviews. We will also introduce a **separate safeguarding** criterion in report cards. This will signal how important it is and that all members of staff should be proactive about safeguarding. We put forward that proposal in the Big Listen: 84% of respondents agreed. However, our reach only extends to the schools that we have the power to inspect, so not to unregistered providers ([see SEND and AP section](#)).

Children told us that they want us to prioritise their happiness and welfare in our inspections. They also want us to look at how well they are taught, and their behaviour. We will reflect that in our changes to the way we inspect and report on

schools. Our report cards will include **how schools are supporting children's happiness and well-being**. We will give due attention to how all providers – early years, schools, FE and skills, children's services, dioceses, trusts, and other civic partners – collaborate to provide children and learners with a rich and fulfilling experience in the local community. And we will continue to hold the providers and organisations that care for and educate vulnerable children to account. This is at the heart of everything we do.

What we heard

Of the 16,033 people who responded to our main consultation, nearly two thirds (64%) answered questions about schools. Forty-seven per cent of respondents answered questions about safeguarding in schools. We received over 10,000 responses from teachers, leaders and other professionals who work in schools.

Our commissioned research heard from over 4,000 members of the public, and over 4,000 parents and carers of school-age children. We had 1,084 responses to the provider survey, and 1,660 to the individual survey from professionals working in or with schools. IFF Research also carried out 6 focus groups with school leaders and 5 with school staff, as well as 2 focus groups with multi-academy trust (MAT) leaders and 3 with governors. We also heard from over 4,300 school-age children. The [annex](#) sets out our analysis of the Big Listen responses for schools in full. This is a summary of what we heard and some of the key messages for us about schools.

Children told us

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We had a separate consultation for school children. We asked what their priorities for inspection should be. Children told us their top 5 priorities for Ofsted were:

- how happy pupils are at school
- how their school keeps pupils safe and well
- how well teachers teach
- how pupils behave at school
- how well pupils with SEND are supported at school

Children said that teachers behave differently during an inspection. This means that inspectors do not see the reality that children experience each day in school. Several children referred to teachers coaching pupils on what to say to inspectors and to pupils being removed from classes during inspection. In our focus groups, care-experienced young people in a YOI told us, concerningly, that:

‘You were not allowed in school if you were in trouble when inspection was taking place.’

‘If you are a bad student, you are asked to take the day off when inspectors

are coming.'

Parents and carers told us

Parents and carers had some positive messages for us.

Independent research we commissioned from NatCen found that half of parents and carers believe we:

'Act in the best interest of children' (51% agreed, 27% disagreed).

'Help improve standards of education' (52% agreed, 31% disagreed).

Are 'a valuable source of information' (56% agreed, 28% disagreed').

Parentkind, a network for parents of school children, gave us similar responses. A survey commissioned independently by Parentkind found that:

An overwhelming majority of parents (96%) said it is important to have an independent organisation to inspect schools.

Two thirds (63%) of parents said they had a positive view of Ofsted.

Only 1 in 8 (15%) had a negative view.

Parentkind also said that positivity had increased since January.

However, parents and carers did not believe that we considered their views on inspection. Only 15% thought their views were considered 'a lot'.

Parents had a strong appetite for judgements or grades on how a school performs on a range of assessment criteria. But they had mixed views on single-word judgements for overall effectiveness:

Only 4 in 10 parents (38%) told NatCen they supported a 'one-word grade' for Ofsted's judgements, while about half said they opposed it (49%). But 3 in 4 parents and carers (76%) said they wanted separate judgements for each inspection area.

In NatCen's focus groups, parents and carers suggested modifying the existing approach to judgements rather than scrapping it. Some proposed that we remove overall judgements and replace them with separate grades and summaries for different areas of inspection.

Eight in 10 parents in the Parentkind poll wanted an 'overall evaluation' as part of our inspection reports.

Professionals told us

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Education professionals shared the biggest concerns about Ofsted. They told us that they believe there should be a strong, fair, constructive inspectorate. But they told us we are not living up to that.

Teachers and leaders told us that Ofsted inspections are often negative experiences for those who work in schools. They said the anticipation of inspection and the consequences of action that the DfE (the regulator) may take are factors in this. Some also told us that they had a good inspection experience that they thought was fair.

Some respondents told us that they felt inspections were too punitive, too inconsistent and far too stressful. This also came through IFF Research's independent research. The anxiety and stress caused by the inspection process were brought up frequently in focus groups.

A common view among school professionals, in both the consultation and the independently commissioned research, was that they want us to be more constructive and focus on recommending how schools should improve.

IFF Research found that over half (56%) of school professionals said that Ofsted is effective in holding providers to account for the quality of service they provide. However, about 3 in 10 (33%) said that inspections and reports did not help schools to improve the quality of provision.

The single-word judgements for overall effectiveness received significant criticism through the consultation's open-text boxes. The independent IFF Research shed more light on what school professionals thought about overall effectiveness grades. About 1 in 10 (10%) respondents from the schools sector supported them. About half (46%) of respondents in schools suggested that there should be separate judgements for each inspection area instead.

Organisations representing schools and professionals in schools told us

We heard similar messages from representative bodies, school groups and charities.

The NAHT told us that we should overhaul our reports, and that we should reform our inspection frameworks and our processes for challenging an inspection and its outcome.

The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) told us similar. ASCL also said that the 'perception of Ofsted may differ from the reality of current inspection' but the process 'creates real anxiety in the system and is deeply concerning'. ASCL said that 'the single biggest reform that would alleviate anxiety in the system and begin to rebuild trust would be to remove the one-word judgement'.

NASUWT was highly critical of Ofsted and the current model of inspection, saying it was 'not fit for purpose'. NASUWT said that 'a balanced scorecard approach, alongside greater emphasis on qualitative evaluation, would have significant merit and should be explored further'.

What we will do



We will reform our inspection framework.

- We will reform the framework to respond to what people told us. We will:
 - make sure that the inspection process is appropriate to the school phase and type (such as primary or special school)
 - take into account the context that a school is working in, drawing on area insights (see below)
 - introduce rubrics to guide leaders on what we expect from a high-quality school
 - make the inspection process more collaborative, based around a conversation between the inspector and leaders
 - allow inspectors and leaders to discuss strengths and diagnose areas for improvement so that leaders can take action to improve the quality of their provision
- We will consult on the reformed framework later in the academic year.
- When we consult, we will set out how we will apply the framework to the non-association independent schools we inspect.

We will introduce report cards.

- As the Secretary of State has set out, we will **remove our current overall effectiveness grade (often referred to as the ‘single-word judgement’) and replace it with report cards**. We will work with ministers and the DfE, parents and carers, experts from across the education sector, and representative bodies, on what the report cards will look like. We will consult on the report cards alongside the reformed framework later in the academic year.
- **We will introduce new criteria as part of report cards** to inform parents and carers about the school. Report cards will show what a school is doing well and what the areas for improvement are, allowing for nuance and variation.
- **We will introduce area insights as part of the new report cards**. This will transform the way parents and carers can find out about schools, including the experiences that all children have in their local area, particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged children. We want to inform parents and carers of the quality of local schools in an easy to understand way.
- **We will consult on introducing a new inclusion criterion within the report card**. This will evaluate whether schools are providing high-quality support for children and young people with vulnerabilities such as socio-economic disadvantage and SEND, which keeps high aspirations for them at the core of our work. It will include evidence-based use of pupil premium funding and support for children in need, looked-after children and those with SEND.
- **We will continue to hold schools to account, clearly identifying those that need to improve and those that need support**. We will improve the way we describe how schools are performing, removing unnecessarily negative terminology like ‘inadequate’. We will instead focus on how schools can be better in the context they are working in.

- When we consult, we will set out how we will use the report card in relation to the non-association independent schools we inspect.

We will improve how we inspect safeguarding in schools.

- In some cases, we find safeguarding concerns in a school that appears to be doing well in all other respects. **From September 2024, we will pilot a new approach for graded inspections. Where we consider that leaders are capable of resolving the issues within 3 months, we will withhold our judgement and revisit the school within 3 months to complete the inspection.** The majority of respondents in free-text responses agreed with this proposal. In these cases, we will send a letter to schools to share with parents about the safeguarding failings.
- **We will make clearer what inspectors are looking for when they review a school's single central record.** We will update our inspection handbook to explain the statutory expectations set out in the DfE's ['Keeping children safe in education'](#) guidance. We want to help schools better understand the regulatory requirements so that this anxiety and uncertainty is reduced.
- **We will have a separate safeguarding criterion in the new report cards.** This will be distinct from leadership and management, to emphasise that all members of staff should be proactive about safeguarding. We want to show more clearly how the school is keeping children safe.
- **We will work with the government to introduce a new annual safeguarding, attendance and off-rolling review.** The review will look at how schools meet their duties around safeguarding, work to increase attendance and clamp down on off-rolling.

We will improve notification periods.

- **We will give notice for all routine inspections on a Monday.** Our notifications for all routine (graded and ungraded) inspections will take place on Monday, unless an inspection has previously been deferred. This will allow leaders to know by Monday afternoon if a routine inspection is planned.
- We will pilot this approach over the autumn term. It will not apply to monitoring visits or emergency inspections.
- This will help reduce the anxiety of waiting for a notification while the inspection period is open.

We will improve our processes to ensure consistency.

- We aim to always give notice of a routine inspection on Monday, and to start the

inspection on Tuesday. On Fridays, our Deputy Chief Operating Officer (Delivery) and National Director will lead a rigorous consistency review of inspection findings. We will build in similar consistency meetings for inspectors right through the organisation to make sure we apply a consistent approach across all inspections.

We will make immediate changes to our practice for ungraded school inspections.

- We heard that these often placed a significant burden on schools, particularly small primary schools. The changes mean that **40% of inspections (nearly 3,000) next year will not include deep dives**.
- Inspectors will now gather evidence more flexibly, in way that is right for the school's context. This means more time for inspectors to have richer conversations with leaders about where they have improved and where they still have work to do. This will come into effect this September.

We will introduce the Ofsted Academy to improve training for inspectors.

- The [‘how we will change’](#) section sets out the details behind the Ofsted Academy. This will transform how we recruit, train and develop all our staff. This will include improving our recruitment of inspectors from the schools sector.

We want to reduce the risk of concurrent inspections for schools with a faith ethos.

- In state-funded schools with a faith ethos, collective worship and religious education are usually inspected by a body appointed under section 48 of the Education Act 2005. These ‘section 48 inspections’ are additional to Ofsted inspections. It is possible for schools to receive notice of both inspections at the same time.
- Some concurrent inspections will be unavoidable. But we want to alleviate this where we can. We will work with the section 48 inspectorates to avoid section 48 and Ofsted inspections taking place concurrently, wherever possible.

We want to inspect groups.

We will work with the government on upcoming legislation to allow us to inspect MATs.

- We strongly believe this should be expanded to cover all school groups, so we can inspect the quality of groups and chains of state-funded schools (MATs and local authorities) and independent schools at the level of the responsible body. This would help to improve standards across the system. It would also make sure accountability reflects decision-making, separating schools from the trusts in which they sit. Inspection should align with the governance structures of schools and the bodies responsible for supporting leaders.

Further education and skills

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How we will change

The government has made growth a national mission as it aims to deliver a decade of national renewal for this country. An FE and skills system that develops the right skills and opportunities will be a vital part of this. And for the FE and skills sector to improve, we recognise we should improve too.

FE and skills provision ranges from programmes for young people just out of school at an FE college, through to degree-level professional apprenticeships for

adults in a university. It also includes prison education.

The FE and skills sector underpins employment and growth in the most disadvantaged areas. The most vulnerable young people and adults, including those with SEND, are also overrepresented in the sector.^[footnote 9] We want to work with the government, Skills England, and the sector to transform the skills landscape in England. We want to help raise the quality of skills training and dismantle barriers to opportunity.

We heard similar criticisms from the FE and skills sector as we did from other sectors. These included criticism of single-word judgements for overall effectiveness. **We will therefore replace the overall effectiveness grade with a report card that has a sharper focus on outcomes.** Respondents also thought Ofsted did not sufficiently understand the context providers are working in. Our area insights service will visualise local area data and enable inspectors to better understand local context. It will also help them to judge how providers are contributing to meeting the skills needs of local, regional and national economies.

We recognise we need to better adapt our approach to a diverse FE and skills sector. We have heard in the Big Listen feedback that the system of inspection does not always feel as applicable to independent specialist colleges, apprenticeship training and adult learning as it does to courses for 16- to 18-year-olds. This is why **we will consult on reforming the inspection framework for FE and skills to better tailor our inspections to the diverse range of provision in the sector.** This means the framework needs to work as well for classroom-focused qualifications as it does for employer-led vocational and technical training.

We also want the new inspection framework to change the way we inspect. We will introduce rubrics to better inform providers about what we expect on inspection and to support an effective professional dialogue between leaders and inspectors.

We have introduced a 5-day notice period for colleges and large and complex FE and skills providers. We will consult with the sector to make sure that our other notice periods and the size of our inspection teams are proportionate to the size and complexity of all those we inspect.

What we heard

Of the 16,033 people who responded to our main consultation, 23% answered questions about FE and skills. Our independent commissioned research by IFF Research also received feedback from nearly 300 FE and skills providers and around 700 individuals.

We work with an exceptionally varied sector. It covers apprenticeship training and adult learning providers, higher education institutions, general FE colleges, sixth-form colleges, independent specialist colleges, prisons and YOIs, and Ministry of Defence training establishments. The range of qualifications and programmes also varies hugely within and across these providers.

There are positives that we want to celebrate and build on. But, like all our work at Ofsted, there are things we can and will need to do differently in response to the feedback.

From professionals working in the FE and skills sector

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The independent research we commissioned provided some positive findings on how we inspect FE and skills, which was encouraging:

Over half (56%) of providers from the FE and skills sector told IFF Research that they trusted Ofsted, compared with 3 in 10 (29%) of respondents from the schools sector.

Seven in 10 (70%) of them said inspections accurately identified strengths and areas for improvement; 6 in 10 (59%) said this helped them understand how to improve provision.

Around 3 in 4 respondents agreed that we hold providers to account for the

quality of provision (70%) and for safeguarding (75%).

However, our public consultation and independent research highlighted a range of areas where we need to improve. IFF Research found that just over half (56%) of professionals opposed single-word judgements for overall effectiveness. Only 1 in 4 (26%) supported them. They were criticised for being overly simplistic. We were told that a wider range of judgement areas would help give a more rounded view of a provider.

A common frustration we heard from respondents was that they believed we took a one-size-fits-all approach to our FE and skills inspections. Some said our inspection practice was not nuanced or consistent enough across the range of providers we inspect. Providers told IFF Research that bits of the education inspection framework did not feel relevant to them. They wanted it to offer a more tailored approach to different types of provision.

Notification periods were also brought up as an aspect of our work that caused frustration. Only half of FE and skills respondents (51%) told IFF Research that they received enough notice ahead of an inspection. A recurring response to our public online consultation was that notice periods were too short, particularly for more complex provision or for new and small providers.

Through the consultation, we heard that respondents want inspectors to have relevant experience and expertise of the particular provision type they are inspecting. Respondents raised concerns that there was too much variation in practice across regions and between inspectors. They told us that we need inspectors who are current practitioners or have recent experience of the sector. IFF Research found that 3 in 10 (29%) of respondents said inspectors lacked up-to-date knowledge and sector expertise.

Some submissions to the public consultation told us that our inspections were disproportionately burdensome for smaller providers. We were also told we needed to understand the context that providers work in to reflect the challenges of geography, economic context and learners' needs.

From representative bodies of professionals working in the FE and skills sector

Groups representing colleges raised concerns about our judgements. The Sixth-Form Colleges Association told us that, while there were many aspects of the current framework that they welcomed, 'The use of one-word graded judgements is a high stakes approach that can lead to damaging consequences to careers and communities where low grades are awarded, fairly or unfairly'.

The Association of Colleges (AoC), which represents most types of FE college, said that single-word judgements 'have a significant effect on parental and learner

decision making, thus learner numbers and income.’ The AoC told us that current reports are too short and vague to be useful for the inspected college, or for other colleges to be able to learn about good practice. We were told reports need to do more to signpost strengths and suggest improvements because providers want to hear more about what they do well and what they can build on.

The Fellowship of Inspection Nominees (FIN) told us that reporting should include more guidance on how to improve provision. FIN also said that ‘98% of surveyed nominees are adamant that 5 days’ notice of an inspection should be given to providers of all sizes’.

What we will do



We will reform our inspection framework.

- As set out in the [‘how we will change’ section](#), we will consult on a reformed inspection framework tailored to FE and skills. This will transform the process of inspection. The reformed framework will take account of the different contexts of providers and be tailored to the age of the learners, their stage of development and the nature of the provision.
- We will consult on the framework later this academic year. This will include the size of our inspection teams and notice periods, to make sure these are proportionate for different types of providers.

We will introduce report cards.

- We will work with the government to **remove single-word judgements for overall effectiveness** for FE and skills inspections. These will be replaced with a report card, which will be better tailored to different types of FE and skills provision. We will consult on what this looks like later this academic year.
- We will have a sharper focus on outcomes, including providers’ contributions to meeting the skills needs.
- We will consider how our inspections focus on how providers remove the barriers to opportunity for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with SEND.
- In the meantime, we will clarify how we will apply personal development and behaviour judgements from September 2024.

We will introduce the Ofsted Academy to improve training for inspectors.

- The 'how we will change' section sets out the details of the Ofsted Academy. This will transform how we recruit, train and develop all our staff, including improving our recruitment of inspectors from the FE and skills sector.

We will reduce the burden of inspection on providers.

- We will consult with the sector to make sure that our notice periods and the size of our inspection teams are proportionate to the size and complexity of the providers we inspect.
- We have introduced a 5-day notice period for colleges and large and complex FE and skills providers. This received positive feedback in the Big Listen.

We want the government to broaden the range of provision included in FE and skills inspections to properly safeguard young people and raise standards.

- We will work with the government to make sure that provision for all learners, especially the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, is considered through our inspections of FE and skills providers.
- Legislation currently does not allow us to inspect education for 14- to 16-year-olds delivered part-time in colleges (where the student is not a pupil registered at a school). These will often be some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable learners, including those excluded from school, unaccompanied asylum seekers and home-educated learners. Six in 10 Big Listen respondents (64%) said we should be able to inspect this; 1 in 10 disagreed (13%).
- We will call on the government to amend legislation so that Ofsted can inspect providers offering Higher Technical Qualifications. This is a major new skills qualification. We should inspect these providers, who spend public money, so that they are accountable and standards are high. Over half (61%) of respondents said we should be able to inspect them. About 1 in 7 disagreed (15%).

We want the government to improve the education provision in YOIs.

- We will soon publish our findings from a review of YOIs, which we carried out jointly with His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). Children and young people in YOIs are some of the most vulnerable that we encounter through our

work. Getting their education right is fundamental to their rehabilitation and to helping them have successful lives in the future.

- The review found a pattern of decline in the quality of education in YOIs. Teachers are not able to manage behaviour. Young people are not getting access to the education they need. This is reinforced by our Big Listen children's consultation, which found that some young people in YOIs did not get the support they needed. The review will make recommendations, including to the Ministry of Justice, to improve education for children held in YOIs.

Teacher professional development and education

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How we will change

A world-class education system is determined by its workforce. Children told us in the Big Listen that how well teachers teach was in their top 3 priorities for inspectors to look at. We recognise the effect a brilliant teacher has on their students. They are the single most important factor in improving outcomes for children, and we know they are especially important for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND.

We inspect all initial teacher education (ITE) providers, as well as providers

delivering the early career framework (ECF) and the revised national professional qualifications (NPQ). We want to make sure teachers receive high-quality, evidence-based training and development.

Feedback on teacher development from respondents to the Big Listen emphasised, above all, the desire for a collaborative relationship between Ofsted and providers. That is why we will **remove the overall effectiveness grade** for our teacher development inspections. We will replace it with **report cards**. These will focus on a broader range of assessment criteria, setting out more clearly what providers' strengths are and where they can improve. They will also focus more on how well trainees are taught to become good teachers of pupils with SEND, and how well trainees understand how to keep children safe.

We will also develop **rubrics** that more clearly outline the key areas of focus for inspection. This will provide a shared language for inspectors and providers to support a professional dialogue. These will empower leaders to improve their services, while helping them to focus on evidence-based practice, informed by high-quality research and the content frameworks for ITT, ECF and NPQs.

We will do more to **reduce the overall burden of inspection**. We will work with the DfE to review the length of the inspection cycle. Many teacher development providers and their partners are also inspected under the framework for schools or FE and skills. We will try to avoid teacher development inspections occurring at similar times to other types of inspection. We do not want too many inspectors on site for smaller providers, or too few in larger, more complex provision. And we will review our notice periods for ITE inspections to reduce the pressure on providers and partners.

What we heard

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Of the 16,033 people who responded to our main consultation, 19% answered questions about teacher development. Our commissioned research surveyed 58 different providers and 98 individuals. The [annexes](#) set out our analysis of the Big Listen responses for teacher development in full.

We heard some positive messages about teacher development inspection:

Providers welcomed our framework's focus on the quality of education and leadership and management. Respondents supported our emphasis on subject specificity and evidence-based teaching methods.

Two in 3 respondents told IFF Research that we are effective at holding teacher training and development providers to account for the quality of service they provide (63%). They also thought our inspection reports accurately identified providers' strengths and areas for improvement (69%).

IFF Research found that over 8 in 10 organisations (84%) said inspectors carried out their inspections with courtesy and respect. This was the highest of all our sectors.

We heard that our focus on the quality of the curriculum and evidence-based teaching methods in our inspections of FE and skills ITE was welcome. And we have seen real improvements in standards in this sector.

However, we also heard that:

Single-word judgments were over-simplified.

Providers wanted inspectors to be part of a constructive professional dialogue. They wanted inspection to be more collaborative and supportive. Only half of providers agreed we helped improve the quality of provision (49%).

Our inspections often put too much pressure on providers. Many wanted us to reduce the frequency of inspections across the cycle and increase the length of ITE inspection notice periods.

Respondents wanted us to use our inspections to focus more on the extent to which teachers are equipped to teach pupils and learners who have SEND and those who are disadvantaged. They also wanted teachers to learn about and apply good safeguarding practices.

A number of respondents focused on changes they wanted to see from providers and from the DfE. Many called for government action to address wider problems with teacher recruitment and retention.

What we will do



We will introduce report cards.

- We will **remove the overall effectiveness grade** and replace it with a new report card for teacher development. We will consult on the content of report cards later this academic year.

We will reform our inspection framework.

- We will introduce rubrics to highlight the areas that make the most difference to the quality of teacher development. This includes evidence-based approaches to teaching and high-quality curriculum design. Rubrics will support leaders to self-evaluate and set up more constructive conversations with inspectors.
- We will further increase our focus on how well teacher education providers teach trainees to support disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. We will also place greater emphasis on how well trainees learn to keep children safe.
- We will consult on the timeframe for framework reform later in the academic year.

We will reduce the burden of inspection.

- We will reduce the information we ask for during our planning calls to help ease the workload for leaders and staff at the beginning of inspection.
- We will review the number of inspectors we need for each inspection to make sure this is proportionate.
- We will try to make sure providers do not receive teacher development inspections too close to other types of inspection.
- We will work with the DfE to consider the appropriate cycle length for our teacher development inspections. This includes how frequently we revisit providers whose previous inspections did not raise concerns.

We will introduce the Ofsted Academy to improve training for inspectors.

- The [‘how we will change’ section](#) sets out the details behind the Ofsted Academy. This will transform how we recruit, train and develop all our staff. This includes inspectors of teacher training and development providers.

We will work with the DfE to continue to raise standards of teaching in the FE and skills ITE sector and drive out any unscrupulous providers.

- The DfE funded us to inspect a small number of FE and skills ITE providers who were not previously known to Ofsted. Trainees on these courses were not being prepared for their teaching careers. These providers were wasting trainees' time, draining public money, and failing to build the pipeline of FE and skills teachers that the sector needs. Evidence we have gathered has contributed to reforms that make it more difficult for these providers to continue.
- We want to see better oversight of the FE and skills ITE system. The DfE should consider regulation to make sure all providers are held to account, and that funding is directed to those delivering the best outcomes.

Summary of key actions

We will reset our relationship with those we regulate and inspect, working collaboratively with them to put children and learners first.

We will consult on creating a **reformed inspection framework** for schools, early years and FE and skills. This will take the best of the current approach (such as the curriculum focus) but account for lessons we have learned through the Big Listen.

We will work with the government to **remove the overall effectiveness grade** (often referred to as the 'single-word judgement'). We will replace it with a report card, or a similar tool, across all the sectors we inspect.

We will consult on introducing a new inspection criterion for inclusion. This will increase our focus on, and scrutiny of, **how education providers support vulnerable children and young people, such as those who are disadvantaged or who have SEND.**

We will work with the government to make sure **children are kept safe and learning wherever they receive their education or care.** We will do this by using safeguarding, attendance and off-rolling reviews for schools, enhancing social care regulation and area SEND inspection, tackling illegal schools and children's homes, and calling for unregistered alternative

provision to be regulated.

We will foster a culture of integrity in which we always treat people with professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect.

We will launch the **Ofsted Academy**. This will be the single place that draws together all of our induction, training, learning, development and good practice work.

We have delivered **mental health training** to every inspector. This now forms part of our regular core training for all inspectors.

We will set up an inspection welfare, support and guidance hub to make sure our inspectors and providers have access to supportive information, and to offer any other assistance during inspection.

We will be a learning organisation that operates transparently, listens to challenge and takes action to change.

We will **improve how we engage with children, learners, parents and carers**, across all the areas we inspect. We will build on Parent View and our other engagement tools, learning from what we heard.

We are centralising Ofsted's processes and practices to **create greater consistency** in how we work.

We will have a **culture of transparency** across all our work. This will include being clear about what we look at on inspection, making our training

materials openly available, allowing Big Listen data to be accessible to researchers, and sharing more of our data, evidence and insights.

We are further **improving our complaints investigations**. Inspectors assessing complaints will always be from a different region to the one from which the complaint originated.

Conclusion: moving forwards

The Big Listen was the largest consultation in Ofsted's history. We have heard the feedback, addressed the criticism, and set out our plans to improve what we do. We will continue to listen as we take those next steps. We will consult with children and learners, parents and carers, and our sectors on inspection reform. And we will roll out the changes to how we work, and how we support and train our own workforce. The Ofsted Board will hold our executive team to account for delivering these changes.

We know we can improve because we have started to do so already. Our independent research told us that less than half of schools (45%) and early years providers (48%) inspected before September 2023 felt that we carried out our work in an empathetic manner. This has risen to over half of schools (56%) and early years providers (57%) inspected since September 2023. It has also risen from 6 in 10 (60%) to 7 in 10 (70%) children's social care providers.

We heard these improvements reflected in the conversations the independent researchers had with leaders:

'In light of recent tragic events Ofsted seem to have put in much more regular check-ins, and are much more "are you okay?" focused. If you are not [there is opportunity to] speak up, have those conversations. They are leaving the door open to do that, for the well-being of staff. Those meetings are really, really important and are a good step forward for Ofsted.'

'In the last inspection, I was absolutely blown away by all three of them [inspectors]. They were so personable. They were so supportive of the staff and so respectful. And if they had said one more time, "are you OK?" "Are your staff OK?"... But it didn't feel forced. So it felt very genuine. And I think that they wanted to get the best out of us.'

Organisations that represent providers and professionals from different sectors gave us similar feedback on this improvement:

The NAHT said it recognises and welcomes the commitment made by the new Chief Inspector to improving the way inspectors work with staff.

The FIN, who had sampled 770 of their members, reported that ‘inspectors are showing more consideration towards the learning organisation’s staff. Long may this continue’.

The NASS said: ‘They noted that previously members said ‘they would rather leave the profession rather than having to go through another Ofsted inspection’, but ‘many more colleagues reporting a less stressful and more collaborative approach by inspectors in the past year.’

We want to go further to improve the experience of inspections for professionals and practitioners in our sectors and to help tackle the challenges they face. At the same time, we must never lose sight of the role we play in informing and assuring parents, carers and learners about the services they use.

But it is for those whose voices are quietest that we will speak loudest. The last words of this response are for those we exist to serve and support: children and learners, especially those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable. Everything we do must be to raise standards for them and improve their lives.

Annexes

Find all of the [annexes](#) for the Ofsted Big Listen response.

- [Report detailing results of the public consultation](#)
- [Ofsted: public consultation data tables](#)
- [Ofsted: public consultation data tables \(sub-groups\)](#)
- [Independent report, written by IFF Research, into the views of the professionals we work with](#)

[Independent report, written by NatCen, into the views of the parents and carers we work for](#)

- [Report detailing results of our children’s consultation](#)
- [The internal Big Listen: responding to our people](#)
- [Independent learning review led by Dame Christine Gilbert](#)
- [Ofsted’s response to Dame Christine Gilbert’s independent learning review](#)

Data tables for figures

Data for figure 1: What we inspect

Area	What we inspect
Schools	<p>21,900 state-funded schools and academies (nurseries, primary, secondary and special schools, alternative provision)</p> <p>52 state-funded non-maintained special schools</p> <p>1,140 non-association independent schools(new) Online education providers</p>
Social care	<p>153 local authority children’s services</p> <p>3,480 children’s homes (excluding secure children’s homes) 13 secure children’s homes</p> <p>2 secure training centres</p> <p>200 settings where children board (such as residential special schools)</p> <p>98 residential family centres</p> <p>400 adoption, adoption support and fostering agencies</p> <p>12 residential holiday schemes</p> <p>The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass)</p> <p>(new) Supported accommodation</p>
Area SEND	153 local area partnerships
Early years	27,100 childcare on non-domestic premises providers

(nurseries)

34,700 childminders, home childcarers and other childcare on domestic premises providers

6 childminder agencies (with 1,240 childminders on roll)

Further education and skills

160 general further education colleges

44 sixth-form and other colleges

140 adult and community education providers

1,270 independent learning providers (including employer providers)

70 16 to 19 academies

110 higher education institutions

13 specialist further education colleges

130 independent specialist colleges

17 dance and drama colleges

120 prisons

Ministry of Defence establishments

Teacher training

220 accredited initial teacher training providers

11 ECF/NPQ lead providers

See [Figure 1](#).

Data for figure 2: Who we heard from

Over 20,000 responses to our public consultation, including over 4,300 responses from children to our bespoke children’s consultation.

We commissioned further **independent** research from the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), who surveyed over 4,000 parents and the 4,000 members of the public.

We commissioned **independent** research from IFF Research, who surveyed over 7,000 professionals from the sectors we inspect and regulate. NatCen ran 7 focus groups with parents and carers and IFF Research ran 52 focus groups with professionals.

We commissioned **independent** research from Coram Voice, Catch 22 and Career Matters, who ran focus groups with children in care and care leavers. We ran an internal version of the Big Listen that engaged over 1,000 of our own staff, including Ofsted inspectors.

We spoke to thousands of people at events with stakeholders, led by HMCI and other leaders at Ofsted.

We commissioned an **independent learning review** by Dame Christine Gilbert into Ofsted's response to the tragic death of Ruth Perry.

See [Figure 2](#).

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1. [‘Children in need’](#), Department for Education, October 2023. [↪](#)
 2. [‘The education background of looked-after children who interact with the criminal justice system: December 2022’](#), Office for National Statistics, December 2022. [↪](#)
 3. [‘Main findings: children’s social care in England 2024’](#), Ofsted, July 2024. [↪](#)
 4. [‘Out in the open: a framework for the regulation of unregistered alternative provision’](#), Centre for Social Justice, August 2023. [↪](#)
 5. [‘Out in the open: a framework for the regulation of unregistered alternative provision’](#), Centre for Social Justice, August 2023. [↪](#)
 6. [‘Education provision: children under 5 years of age’](#), Department for Education, July 2024. [↪](#)
 7. [‘Quality and Inequality Do three- and four-year-olds in deprived areas experience lower quality early years provision?’](#), Nuffield Foundation, 2014. [↪](#)
 8. [‘A new social care contract in the childcare system: driving up standards through ambitious new conditions on policy funding for childcare’](#), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, March 2024. [↪](#)
 9. [‘SEND review: right support, right place, right time’](#), Department for Education, March 2022. [↪](#)

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