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Ofsted: School inspections in England



Summary

- 1 Background to school inspection
- 2 Inspection process
- 3 Inspection outcomes
- 4 Current issues

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Summary

Scope of briefing

This briefing covers:

- Reform to how Ofsted inspects schools, including the decision to stop using one- or two-word overall effectiveness judgements such as ‘outstanding’ and ‘inadequate’
- How Ofsted has inspected schools to date
- Practicalities of inspections – their frequency, focus, and their consequences for schools

It applies to England. Separate school inspection arrangements apply in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

Ofsted’s remit

Ofsted inspects all state-funded schools in England, and around half of independent schools, in line with the relevant inspection framework. It also inspects a wide range of other services, including childcare, social care, further education, secure education and prison education.

Labour government announcements

On 2 September 2024, Education Secretary, [Bridget Phillipson announced](#) an immediate halt to one- or two-word overall effectiveness judgements (‘headline grades’) for state-funded schools. She also said the government was committed to removing headline grades for many other types of settings.

Historically, Ofsted has described a school’s overall effectiveness as either outstanding, good, requires improvement, or inadequate. Inadequate was further subdivided into two categories, serious weaknesses or requiring special measures.

Describing the previous reporting framework as “reductive”, Ms Phillipson said the government would introduce a replacement ‘report card’ system by 2025. In the meantime, schools will receive four graded sub-judgements on

four key areas of their provision, a judgement on whether safeguarding is effective, and graded judgements for any early years or sixth form provision.

Intervention following Ofsted inspection

Poor Ofsted inspection outcomes have long been linked to intervention for state-funded schools. Under the post-September 2024 system, this system remains, with some changes.

Schools can be placed into one of two ‘categories of concern’ by Ofsted following an inspection. They can either be deemed to have serious weaknesses, or to require special measures. For most types of maintained schools, being placed in either category will trigger the process of academy conversion, and for academies, it may trigger a transfer to a new academy trust.

Previously, schools that received two ‘requires improvement’ judgements in a row may have received intervention from the Department for Education (DfE). Now, these schools will normally receive support from another high-performing school instead.

Developments prior to the 2024 general election

Prior to the 2024 general election, teaching and leadership unions [intensified their calls for reform of the inspection regime](#). These calls were amplified following the January 2023 death of head teacher, Ruth Perry. Ms Perry’s school in Berkshire was inspected and the resulting report graded the school as inadequate, on safeguarding grounds only.

In January 2024 Labour stated their ambition to “[create a better system for inspecting and improving our schools](#)”, which included [ending single word Ofsted judgements and bringing in report cards with annual checks on safeguarding and attendance](#). This ambition was reiterated in March 2024: “[the days of the one word judgement will be coming to a close](#)”. In their [2024 Manifesto](#), Labour committed to “replacing a single headline grade with a new report card system telling parents clearly how schools are performing”.

In June 2023, Ofsted announced changes to school inspections, including that where schools are in judged inadequate on safeguarding grounds only, and would otherwise have been graded good or outstanding, they would be re-visited within three months and can be regraded at that point.

Ofsted's 'big listen'

In March 2024, [Ofsted launched its 'big listen' initiative](#). This spanned Ofsted's whole inspection remit including education, children's social care, teacher training, and early years. It ran until 31 May 2024, and asked for feedback on four areas: Reporting; inspection practice; culture and purpose; and impact on wider society, children and learners, and school staff.

The [consultation response](#) was published on 3 September 2024.

How the government is paying for Ofsted reform

Labour's general election [Fiscal Plan](#) earmarked £45million for Ofsted reform funded through £1.5 billion [revenue raised from applying VAT and business rates to private schools](#). The [Institute for Fiscal Studies agree that these changes may raise in the region of £1.3 – £1.5 billion](#), but said "the arguments for keeping or removing these exemptions [were] ... finely balanced".

More information on the private schools and tax arrangements can be found in the House of Commons briefing paper on [Charitable status and independent schools](#).

1 Background to school inspection

1.1 School inspection in England: Ofsted

Ofsted is a non-ministerial department that reports directly to Parliament. It inspects all state-funded schools, some independent schools, and a wide range of other providers in England.

The position of His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) has been held by Sir Martyn Oliver since January 2024.

The Chair of Ofsted's board is Dame Christine Ryan, DBE.

1.2 School inspection in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

Wales

Estyn is the inspectorate for state-funded schools, independent schools and many other types of providers in Wales.

Further information about school inspection in Wales can be found on the [Estyn website](#).

Scotland

Schools in Scotland are inspected by Education Scotland. Further information about inspection for primary schools, secondary schools and other providers can be found on the [Education Scotland website](#).

Northern Ireland

The [Education and Training Inspectorate](#) (ETI) is responsible for inspecting schools and other education and training providers in Northern Ireland. Information about the evidence considered, and what happens during and after an inspection, can be found in [an ETI website article](#).

1.3 Who inspects different types of schools in England?

This briefing concerns inspections of state-funded schools, although Ofsted also inspects around half of independent schools in England.

In the schools sector, Ofsted inspects:

- Maintained and academy mainstream schools, pupil referral units and alternative provision academies
- Maintained and non-maintained special schools and special academies
- Independent schools that are not affiliated to the Independent Schools Council (ISC), a large share of which are independent special schools
- Boarding and residential provision in some independent schools, all maintained schools and residential special schools

Independent schools affiliated to the ISC, and their boarding provision, are inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI).

1.4 Key developments in inspection

Changes under Labour government

On 2 September 2024, [the new Labour government announced](#) single or two-word overall effectiveness judgements for schools would cease with immediate effect. A new 'scorecard' system would be introduced by 2025.

In the meantime, schools will receive four graded sub-judgements on different aspects of their provision, as they do now, but there will be no overarching judgement of outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate. Schools will also be judged on whether their safeguarding is effective, and graded for any early years or sixth form provision they offer.

Other changes announced include:

- Schools are now notified of routine inspections on Mondays, and routine inspections will take place on Tuesdays and Wednesday
- Schools judged to require improvement in two consecutive inspections will no longer be subject to government intervention, but will instead receive support from another high-performing school. Some schools already in the conversion process would carry on, however.

- Where any of the four graded judgements are inadequate, or safeguarding is judged to be ineffective, a school will be placed in a formal ‘category of concern’, that is, ‘serious weaknesses’ or requiring ‘special measures’
- A new ‘suspend and return’ policy for some schools, enabling inspections to be paused while safeguarding issues are resolved, but only in cases where safeguarding is the only issue, and also depending on the wider school context.¹
- The introduction of new regional improvement teams from January 2025

Changes prior to the 2024 general election

Changes to Ofsted school inspections had already been made prior to the election. These included:

- The introduction of a new complaints policy for those concerned about the conduct of a school inspection
- Provision for inspections to be paused in certain cases, including in response to serious wellbeing concerns about school staff
- Training for Ofsted inspectors around recognising and responding to any distress shown by school staff, during inspections
- Ofsted’s ‘big listen’ consultation, which closed on 31 May 2024
- June 2023 announcement that Ofsted would re-visit schools within three months, if they are judged inadequate solely on safeguarding grounds and were otherwise good or outstanding.²

¹ Ofsted, [Guidance: Summary of changes](#), 16 September 2024

² Ofsted press release, [‘Changes made to school inspections’](#), June 2023

2 Inspection process

2.1 What do routine inspections of state schools look at?

Since September 2019, Ofsted has inspected schools in line with the new [Education Inspection Framework](#) (EIF).

Ofsted is required to undertake routine inspections of qualifying schools at prescribed intervals. Inspections can be graded, or ungraded. As the name suggests, graded inspections may change a school's four key, and other supporting, judgements. Ungraded inspections look instead at whether a school has taken effective action to maintain standards.

Graded inspections report four separate judgements on:

- The quality of education
- Behaviour and attitudes
- Personal development
- Leadership and management

These are graded either outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate.

Inspectors will always make a written judgement on the effectiveness of the arrangements for safeguarding pupils, and will also grade any early years or sixth form provision.

Inspectors also take account of the effectiveness and impact of the provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and how well the school meets pupil needs, including the needs of pupils with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND).

2.2

How are schools performing in Ofsted inspections?

Ofsted publishes regular statistics on state-funded schools' inspection outcomes. It has also published [summary statistics for the new 2024 parliamentary constituencies](#).

Details about the inspection history of individual schools can be found via [Ofsted's 'find an inspection report' web page](#).

The statistics in this section describe the situation as at 31 December 2023, under the 'old' system where schools received an overall effectiveness grade.

Most schools were either good or outstanding

At 31 December 2023, 91% of primary schools and 83% of secondary schools were rated good or outstanding overall at their most recent graded inspection. 90% of state-funded special schools were rated good or outstanding.

93% of primary pupils are in good or outstanding schools, as are 85% of secondary pupils and 93% of special school pupils.³

In some cases, a school's most recent graded inspection will have taken place several years ago, and may relate to a predecessor school – for example, in cases where a maintained school has converted to an academy and hasn't been inspected since.

Regional inequalities in school Ofsted outcomes

State-funded primary schools

Before the move away from summary judgements, at primary level, the share of schools rated good or outstanding (combined) varied only slightly between regions.

In terms of individual grades, London had the highest proportion of primary schools in the highest Ofsted category of outstanding (23%), compared to 8% of primaries in the East Midlands.

The proportion of primary schools in the lowest Ofsted category, inadequate, was very small in all regions, ranging from less than one per cent of schools in

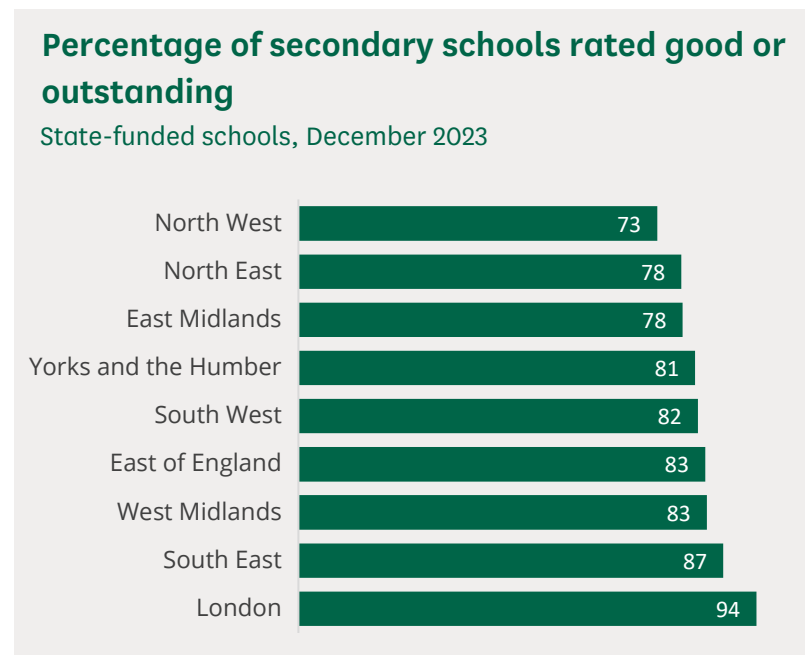
³ Ofsted, [State-funded school inspections and outcomes: December 2023](#), published 14 March 2024, "state-funded school statistics as at 31 December 2023" csv file, accessed 12 July 2024

London and the North East, to just above two per cent in the South West and West Midlands.⁴

State-funded secondary schools

At secondary level, there was more variation between regions in the proportion of schools graded good or outstanding (combined). The North West had the smallest share of good or outstanding secondary schools, at 73%, compared to 94% in London.⁵

Again, a relatively small proportion of secondaries were rated inadequate in all regions – ranging from 6% in the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber, to less than 1% in London.



Source: [Ofsted, State-funded school statistics as at 31 December 2023](#), published March 2024, “state-funded school statistics as at 31 December 2023” csv file

2.3

How often do inspections take place?

Full details of the evaluation criteria and evidence Ofsted considers prior to and during both graded and ungraded inspections can be found in:

- Ofsted, [School inspection handbook](#), 16 September 2024

In the past, the timing and nature of a school’s next inspection depended in large part on the overall effectiveness of the school at its last inspection. That

⁴ As above

⁵ Ofsted, [State-funded school inspections and outcomes: December 2023](#), published 14 March 2024, “state-funded school statistics as at 31 December 2023” csv file, accessed 12 July 2024

is, schools with an overall judgement of requires improvement or inadequate could expect more frequent monitoring or re-inspection than could those judged good or outstanding.

The situation now is more complicated. Where schools were last inspected under the (old) 'overall effectiveness' system, their next inspection will be timed based on a range of factors, including the overall outcome at that inspection, and how long ago that inspection took place.

An [Ofsted guide](#) outlines when schools last inspected under the 'old' system (with overall effectiveness judgements) can inspect to be re-visited.

Ofsted has said that by September 2025, it will set out details of when schools inspected under the current 'no summary grade' should anticipate reinspection.

Inspection of new schools and schools that have changed status

Wholly new free schools and maintained schools that have been replaced by a sponsored academy usually receive a full graded inspection within three years of opening.

Converter academies with a predecessor school judged good or outstanding would normally be subject to an initial ungraded inspection, but some may receive a full graded inspection depending on the inspection history of their predecessor school.

Further details about the arrangements for inspecting new schools can be found in:

- Ofsted, [Selecting new schools for inspection](#), updated 1 September 2022

2.4 How much notice do schools get before an inspection?

Schools are usually notified the working day prior to the start of a school inspection. From September 2024, as part of a pilot, schools are notified about routine inspections on Mondays and the inspection will take place on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

However, Ofsted has powers to undertake no-notice inspections in certain circumstances – for example, where there are serious concerns.⁶ It also undertakes monitoring visits.

⁶ Ofsted, [School inspection handbook](#), para 85 onward

Deferring an Ofsted inspection

In exceptional circumstances, schools may be able to request that their inspection is deferred. More information on deferral policy can be found in Ofsted's publication, [Ofsted inspections and visits: deferring, pausing and gathering additional evidence](#), 16 September 2024.

3 Inspection outcomes

3.1 Schools graded inadequate for any of the four main judgements

Schools graded inadequate for any of the four key judgements, or where safeguarding is judged ineffective, will be put into an Ofsted ‘category of concern’. There are two different categories:

- Schools with **serious weaknesses** are those that need significant improvement.
- Schools requiring **special measures** are those that are failing to give their pupils an acceptable standard of education and where the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.⁷

The criteria for deciding which of the two categories of concern to apply are explained in [paragraph 190 onwards of Ofsted’s current school inspection handbook](#).

3.2 What happens if a school has serious weaknesses or requires special measures?

An academy order is mandatory for a maintained school or pupil referral unit

The Education and Adoption Act 2016 places a duty on the Secretary of State for Education to make an academy order if a maintained school has serious weaknesses or requires special measures. This is the starting point for turning the school into an academy. Further information about likely interventions when a maintained school is graded inadequate can be found in the Department for Education’s (DfE’s) [Schools causing concern](#) guidance.⁸

⁷ [Education Act 2005, section 44\(1\)](#)

⁸ Department for Education, [Schools causing concern](#), January 2024

What happens to schools that are already academies or free schools?

Local authorities have no general power to intervene in academy or free schools in a formal Ofsted category of concern. However, the Department for Education or the Secretary of State for Education may intervene in these schools.

The [DfE's Schools causing concern guidance explains](#) what happens when an academy is rated inadequate. Options include:

- Identifying a new academy trust for the school, and entering into a new funding agreement with the new trust. In the meantime, the school continues to operate
- If formerly a standalone academy, transferring the school into a strong multi-academy trust
- In exceptional cases and where the school is not viable in the long term, terminating the funding agreement and closing the school outright.⁹

3.3 Complaining about an Ofsted inspection

Complaints about an Ofsted inspection that took place on or after 5 April 2024 follow [a two-stage process](#).

If the issue cannot be resolved informally during or immediately after the inspection, then schools can make a formal complaint within five working days of receiving the draft report.

Publication of reports for complaints submitted within the deadline will be withheld, while the complaint is considered.

Complainants who remain dissatisfied after this can refer the complaint to the [Independent Complaints Adjudication Service for Ofsted \(ICASO\)](#), and then on to the [Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman](#).

⁹ Department for Education, [Schools causing concern](#), January 2024, p39

4 Current issues

4.1 Scrapping the ‘overall effectiveness’ judgement: sector reaction

Teaching and leadership unions have reacted positively to the decision to scrap the overall effectiveness summary judgement.

The [National Association of Head Teachers \(NAHT\)](#) said it was “a very welcome move and a major step in the right direction by the new government”. It noted NAHT had campaigned for many years for inspection reform. It also cautioned that it had wanted the government to go further, scrapping sub-judgements as well, and said the changes raised a range of questions. These included what would happen to inspections that took place at the end of the summer 2024 term.¹⁰

The [National Education Union \(NEU\)](#) also welcomed the move. General Secretary, Daniel Kebede said:

The idea that you could give a verdict on a whole school in one or two words was always ridiculous. The Secretary of State for Education is right to say that single headline grades are low information for parents and high stakes for schools.

The NEU’s wider view remains that Ofsted should be abolished and replaced. Mr Kebede said it was “toxic for teachers and school leaders and no amount of rebrand or reform will help Ofsted win back the trust of the profession”. Instead, there should be a “system of accountability that fosters a culture of collaboration between all stakeholders”.¹¹

The Conservative party opposes the scrapping of Ofsted headline judgements. Shadow Education Secretary, Damian Hinds, argued the overall effectiveness judgement was “a vital indicator for parents”. Also pointing to concerns with the promised regional improvement teams, he said the changes meant “less transparency for parents and a step backwards, from a proven school improvement approach with academy trusts to a directive top-down approach.”¹²

¹⁰ National Association of Head Teachers news story, [Ofsted update September 2024 from NAHT general secretary, Paul Whiteman](#), 5 September 2024

¹¹ National Education Union press release, [Government scraps single headline inspection grades](#), 2 September 2024

¹² [HC Deb 3 September 2024](#), Col. 170 onward

4.2

Death of head teacher Ruth Perry and subsequent Ofsted reforms

In January 2023, Ruth Perry, head teacher at a primary school in Berkshire, died. In November 2022, Ofsted had inspected her school and rated it inadequate on safeguarding grounds only. The inquest into her death recorded a narrative conclusion of suicide, contributed to by the Ofsted inspection.

Shortly after Ruth Perry died, BBC News [published extracts from a statement made by her sister](#), Julia Waters, on behalf of the family:

The family statement said: "We are in no doubt that Ruth's death was a direct result of the pressure put on her by the process and outcome of an Ofsted inspection at her school.

"We do not for an instant recognise Ofsted's 'inadequate' judgement as a true reflection of Ruth's exemplary leadership or of the wonderful school she led."

[...]

"School inspections should be a welcome and positive contribution to improve standards in education," they said.

"They need to be genuinely supportive and so to safeguard the health and wellbeing of hard-working, talented, altruistic headteachers and staff".¹³

School teaching and leadership unions had also reacted to Ms Perry's death by calling for a pause to Ofsted inspections and reiterating long-standing calls for reform of the inspection system. The National Education Union (NEU) called for Ofsted "to be replaced" with a new system that was "supportive, effective and fair",¹⁴ and on 23 March 2023 it handed a petition signed by 52,000 people to the government on this issue.

The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) called for Ofsted to give "urgent consideration to reform of the inspection system to make it fairer and less punitive".¹⁵

The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) said it had:

long campaigned for fundamental reform of the current inspection system. We know that at our upcoming annual conference, our members will be determined that this campaign is intensified.

¹³ ["Ofsted: Head teacher's family blames death on school inspection pressure"](#), BBC News [online], 22 March 2023, accessed 24 March 2023

¹⁴ National Education Union press release, [Ofsted and school leader wellbeing](#), 20 March 2023,

¹⁵ Association of School and College Leaders press release, [ASCL calls for pause to Ofsted inspections following death of Ruth Perry](#), 20 March 2023

It is clear that school leaders up and down the country are placed under intolerable pressure by the current approach. It cannot be right that we treat dedicated professionals in this way. Something has to change. Whilst it should never take a tragedy like this to prompt action, this has to be a watershed moment.¹⁶

Reaction of Inspectorate

On Friday 24 March 2023, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills, [Amanda Spielman](#), published a response to Ruth Perry's death.¹⁷ This said that her death was a tragedy, and that Ofsted was deeply sorry for her loss. However, as the inquest was ongoing, it would "not be right to say too much", said Ms Spielman.

Ms Spielman said stopping inspection activity or preventing inspections would "not be in children's best interests" but that the broader debate about reforming Ofsted to remove grades was "a legitimate one".¹⁸

Responding to Ms Spielman's statement, the NAHT said that deciding not to pause inspections, even for a short period, "was a terrible mistake" and that the inspectorate had "completely underestimated the strength of feeling amongst educational professionals".¹⁹

Coroner's Prevention of Future Deaths report

The coroner for the inquest into the death of Ruth Perry, Heidi Connor, used her statutory powers to publish a [Prevention of Future Deaths report](#).²⁰ This raised a number of matters of concern, including (but not limited to):

- The impact on school leader welfare where a school is judged inadequate solely on grounds of safeguarding and would otherwise be graded good or better.
- An "almost complete absence" of Ofsted training or policy on: signs of distress in school leaders; dealing with such distress; pausing an inspection owing to distress; and who is able to attend meetings with inspectors during inspections.²¹
- Absence of a clear path to raise concerns during an inspection
- The requirement for confidentiality following an inspection, meaning head teachers may feel isolated and unable to seek support

¹⁶ National Association of Head Teachers press release, [School leaders call for pause on Ofsted inspections after Ruth Perry tragedy](#), 20 March 2023

¹⁷ Ofsted news story, [Statement from His Majesty's Chief Inspector](#), 24 March 2023

¹⁸ As above

¹⁹ National Association of Head Teachers news story, [School leaders respond to statement from Ofsted Chief Inspector on Ruth Perry tragedy](#), 24 March 2023

²⁰ Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, [Ruth Perry: Prevention of future deaths report](#), 19 December 2023

²¹ As above, p3

- The length of time it took to publish inspection reports.

[Ofsted published its response to the Prevention of Future Deaths report](#) in January 2024.²² This confirmed:

- A new policy enabling the pausing of inspections in certain cases
- A ‘big listen’ exercise for professionals, parents, children and young people to give views on Ofsted’s operation, purpose and role
- Training for all inspectors in responding to mental distress
- New procedures for raising concerns during inspections
- Appointment of an expert reference group on leader and staff wellbeing
- Appointment of an independent expert to lead a learning review of Ofsted’s response to Ruth Perry’s death.

Ofsted’s ‘big listen’

In March 2024, [Ofsted launched its ‘big listen’ initiative](#). This spans Ofsted’s whole inspection remit including education, children’s social care, teacher training, and early years. It ran until 31 May 2024, and asked for feedback on four areas: Reporting; inspection practice; culture and purpose; and impact on wider society, children and learners, and school staff.

The [consultation response](#) was published on 3 September 2024. Findings included:

- Only 3 in 10 professionals, and 4 in 10 parents, supported single-word judgements for overall effectiveness
- Only 1 in 8 respondents to the schools section of the consultation agreed the number of good and outstanding providers was truly reflective of actual sector quality.
- More than half of all professionals responding thought Ofsted identified strengths and improvement areas. However, only a third of school professionals agreed Ofsted was helpful in understanding how to improve the quality of provision. Confidence was much higher among children’s social care professionals and early years and FE professionals, where 74% and 59%, respectively, agreed.
- Around 49% of parents said they trusted Ofsted, but only 41% of professionals said the same
- There were mixed messages on the impact of Ofsted’s work, with just under half of professionals saying the inspectorate was good at

²² Ofsted, [Prevention of Future Deaths Report \(Regulation 28\): Ofsted’s response](#), 19 January 2024

minimising stress for staff during inspections, and also just under half of school respondents believing inspectors showed empathy. However, there were signs of improvement on this measure among schools inspected more recently.

- The consultation responses suggested Ofsted was “too defensive when concerns are raised. When we get complaints, respondents thought we lack transparency or accountability.”

The main changes confirmed in relation to school inspections were:

- The removal of overall effectiveness grades at the request of the DfE, and the introduction of report cards instead. Cards will include area insights to give an idea of how children’s experiences vary around the country.
- Rubrics for inspectors and a focus on inspections as conversations about strengths and weaknesses
- A greater focus on disadvantaged and vulnerable children, with an indicator on inclusion in report cards. A safeguarding criterion will also be included in the cards.
- Report cards will include commentary on how schools are supporting children’s happiness and wellbeing.²³

4.3

January 2024 Education Committee report on Ofsted

The [Education Committee published its inquiry report on Ofsted on 29 January 2024](#).²⁴ This said that while there was “widespread agreement on the importance of ... an independent inspectorate”, relationships between Ofsted and the sector had become “extremely strained” and that “trust in the inspectorate was worryingly low”.²⁵ The Committee made a number of recommendations, including that Ofsted:

- Should develop “an alternative to ... single-word judgements that better captures the complex nature of a school’s performance”. In the meantime, it should display all component judgements of the overall grade, for each school, on its website, as should the DfE website.

²³ Ofsted, Consultation outcome, [Hearing feedback, accepting criticism and building a better Ofsted: the response to the Big Listen](#), 3 October 2024

²⁴ Education Committee, [Ofsted’s work with schools, First Report of Session 2023–24](#), HC117, 29 January 2024

²⁵ Education Committee press release, [‘Ofsted and Government must rebuild trust and make major changes to school inspections, Education Committee says’](#), 29 January 2024

- Should review the support mechanisms available to school leaders during and after an inspection, and should train inspectors on recognising distress.
- Should have a clear policy on when inspections may be paused
- Should consult on changes to the way routine safeguarding is inspected in schools.

It will now be up to the new Labour government to formally respond to the Committee's report.

4.4 Inspection of multi-academy trusts

Multi-academy trusts (MATs) are usually groups of academies overseen by one central organisational structure and board of trustees. Ofsted does not currently have powers to inspect whole MATs, although since 2018 inspectors have carried out summary evaluations. Summary evaluations explore “the extent to which the MAT is delivering a high quality of education and improving pupils’ achievement”.²⁶

During her tenure as HMCI, Amanda Spielman repeatedly called for formal powers to inspect whole MATs, including their central functions. In Ofsted's annual report for 2021/22, the inspectorate said:

For the most part, we continue to inspect and regulate individual institutions. We inspect schools individually – but nearly 4 in 10 of them are in multi-academy trusts (MATs), and trusts are becoming larger. These trusts have a huge influence on how children are being educated, so we would like to be able to assess how this influence is being used.

[...]

We strongly believe, as we have for some time, that routine inspection of trusts must have a significant role to play in trust regulation. We continue to work with the Department for Education as it considers the future model of regulation, by building on our research and understanding of the sector.²⁷

New HMCI, Sir Martyn Oliver has also addressed the issue of MAT, or group, inspections, since taking office. In [an article for Schools Week in January 2024](#), he said that at that point his priority was:

Making sure our brilliant workforce is out there doing the great job and that people trust that great job to deliver not just a fair, but seen to be fair, inspections with compassion, empathy and respect.

²⁶ Ofsted, [Multi-academy trusts: summary evaluations](#), 14 September 2021, p3

²⁷ Ofsted, [Annual Report 2021/22](#), December 2022

When we've got that level of trust in the system, then I think the right time might be to discuss 'well now can we move to a group inspection?'

I focus on group, not trust – that sense of a common framework is important. You will have schools in trusts, diocesan groups, groups that are in the local authority. I think it's about who is the responsible body for that group? I think there is something that could be done, and it'd be interesting to find out what people want.²⁸

'Ten-Minute Rule' Bill – September 2021

On 8 September 2021, Jonathan Gullis MP presented the [Multi-Academy Trusts \(Ofsted Inspection\) Bill](#) to the House of Commons, a 'Ten Minute Rule' Bill, which would give Ofsted the power to "inspect the governing bodies of multi-academy trusts". He said he worried that "[a] loophole risks creating a new group of education authorities that are unaccountable to teachers, parents and pupils." Bringing MATs within Ofsted's inspection regime would, he said, "ensure that they are playing their full role and, crucially, allow those truly doing excellent work to be recognised."²⁹

²⁸ ['Interview: How Sir Martyn Oliver plans to turnaround Ofsted'](#), in Schools Week, 2 January 2024

²⁹ [HC Deb 8 September 2021](#), Vol. 700, Col. 319 onwards

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