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Research and analysis

To what extent has curriculum quality changed in schools since the introduction of the education inspection framework?

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Applies to England

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Executive summary

This impact evaluation is part of a [programme of evaluation](#) assessing the [education inspection framework](#) (EIF).

It highlights the part the EIF has played in improving curriculum quality in schools. We aimed to:

- assess whether curriculum quality has changed, and in what ways, since we introduced the EIF
- understand the role that school leaders think the EIF played in any changes, in addition to any other factors that may have led to those changes
- explore any unintended consequences of the EIF

This study repeats [curriculum research](#) that we carried out in 2018. It gave us an opportunity to directly compare curriculum quality before and after we introduced the EIF. In 2024, we revisited 20 of the original schools.

We found that, overall, curriculum quality had improved. The schools in our study were more focused on curriculum quality, as we anticipated in the [EIF theory of change](#).^[footnote 1]

The EIF played a part in that change. What is included in our inspection frameworks, and what we inspect, have obvious consequences for practice in the sector. Yet we are only one part of the education system.

Other parts of the education system, such as the Department for Education (DfE), also led schools to make changes to their curriculum. Research agencies and academics led developments in evidenced-informed practice. New school leaders, multi-academy trusts (MATs) and staff in other schools also all supported changes to the curriculum.

Fundamentally, improvements were driven by school leaders and staff who aimed to give children a high-quality education. Schools continuously adapted to the changing needs of the children and the context of their school. The COVID-19 pandemic, and how it changed children's needs, has greatly influenced changes to schools' curriculums since we introduced the EIF.

Key findings

We saw improvements in many of the areas emphasised in the EIF.

Overall:

School leaders were positive about the greater focus on the quality of curriculum during inspection.

We saw broader, more in-depth, ambitious curriculums, in most of the schools we visited.

School leaders prioritised reading, which continued to be one of the highest-quality areas of curriculum practice we measured.

Schools had improved how they sequence and map subject knowledge and skills; the greatest improvements were in foundation subjects (all subjects beyond English, mathematics and science) in primary schools.

School leaders' views demonstrated that the EIF has played a part in influencing these improvements:

Around a third of the schools we revisited had made major changes as a direct result of the focus on high-quality curriculum in the inspection framework.

Many of the schools were already taking an evidence-informed approach to developing a high-quality curriculum. The inspection framework helped them to affirm and speed up the changes they were making.

The concepts of curriculum intent, implementation and impact, as set out in the EIF, influenced almost all school leaders' curriculum thinking. Many had not thought in detail about the rationale of their curriculums before we introduced the framework.

Leaders told us that the EIF gave them a shared language that they could use to facilitate change, and to collaborate on the curriculum with other schools. This finding supports our aim, set out in the theory of change, that the EIF would contribute to a shared concept of quality in the sector.

Many school leaders said reading was a curriculum area that the EIF had influenced. Some further credited the EIF with encouraging them to use standardised phonics programmes.

We heard that the EIF's focus on the curriculum, across all subjects, led to subject leaders having more responsibility for decisions about the curriculum. In many schools, this had helped to increase professional development opportunities for subject leaders. This was especially true for subjects other than English and mathematics.

The EIF also had a role in helping schools to improve their curriculum planning, mapping and progression across subjects.

However, unintended consequences can arise from what we include in our inspection frameworks:

Some school leaders told us that our focus on curriculum quality across all subjects put pressure on staff who lead multiple subjects or who are not

subject specialists.

In the early stages of the EIF, schools did not always fully understand the concepts of intent, implementation and impact. This was particularly true of 'intent'. It sometimes led to schools producing 'intent statements' for subjects, rather than setting out clearly what pupils should learn in a logical order. For some schools, 'intent' seemed to dominate other areas of curriculum thinking.

Although the focus on reading in the EIF has led to further improvements, it may have resulted in other areas being left behind. For example, mathematics did not receive the same attention as reading across the curriculum in the schools we visited. We do recognise that it takes time for schools to develop their curriculum.

Context

In the [Ofsted strategy 2022–27](#), we committed to evaluating the EIF. We have carried out a programme of evaluation that assessed the main things we designed the EIF to achieve. Through the evaluation, we wanted to understand:

- the impact of the EIF on those we inspect – childminders, nurseries, schools, colleges and other education providers
- the value the EIF has for parents, central and local government, academy trusts, governing bodies and other education sector stakeholders
- whether we are implementing the EIF as we intended

The EIF sets out how Ofsted inspects all education providers in England, in the early years, schools (including special schools and independent schools), and further education and skills remits (including specialist colleges). It affects all education professionals through inspections and the quality standards communicated by the EIF, [handbooks](#) and our [research](#).

One of the main changes from the [previous inspection framework](#) was to put the substance of education – the quality of curriculum – at the heart of an EIF inspection. [\[footnote 2\]](#) We created a new ‘quality of education’ judgement. It was underpinned by an [evidence-informed](#) conception of high-quality education. Under the EIF, inspectors evaluate a school’s quality of education through its curriculum intent (the quality of what the school intends pupils to learn), implementation (the teaching and assessment activities it chooses) and impact (whether pupils learn that content).

This study focused specifically on curriculum change and the quality of education judgement. We did not consider other EIF judgements or aspects of inspection, such as the role of one-word judgements for overall effectiveness.

Methodology

This study repeats [curriculum research](#) that we carried out in 2018. The original study helped us to develop the quality of education judgement in the EIF. This gave us an opportunity to directly compare differences in the quality of the curriculums in schools before and after we introduced the EIF.

Inspectors revisited 20 of the original 64 schools to re-evaluate curriculum quality using the same research methods as the original study. [\[footnote 3\]](#) By evaluating the same schools, in the same way, we were able to measure changes in curriculum quality since the introduction of the EIF.

His Majesty’s Inspectors (HMIs) gathered first-hand evidence through discussions with school leaders and subject leaders, discussions with pupils and governors, and work scrutiny. Using this evidence, inspectors measured:

- the quality of what pupils are intended to learn (intent)
- the activities chosen to teach their curriculum (implementation)
- whether that curriculum content is learned (impact)

The evaluations fed into a measure of overall curriculum quality. [\[footnote 4\]](#)

It is important to note that when we describe curriculum quality in this study, we are referring to these specific measures. [\[footnote 5\]](#) Although the measures broadly align with the [concept of quality](#) outlined in the EIF, they were determined by the original study and are not the same as used in inspection. As was the case in 2018, we did not consider achievement data or outcomes in our evaluation of curriculum quality.

To understand how the EIF may have contributed to curriculum change, we also spoke to school leaders.^[footnote 6] School leaders' views on the role the EIF played in curriculum change helped us to understand its impact. We asked school leaders about all the different factors that influenced the changes they made.

The original study aimed to include a balanced sample of schools across the country.^[footnote 7] Of the schools that chose to take part in 2024, there was a similar proportion of primary and secondary schools, and geographical spread, as in 2018. In this study, however, there were more outstanding schools, and fewer that required improvement, than in the original study.^[footnote 8] The experience of participating schools may not be representative of schools nationally.^[footnote 9]

Not all schools in this study had had an inspection under the EIF.^[footnote 10] This study does not measure the impact of inspection itself. However, when schools described the impact of an EIF inspection on the curriculum changes they have made, we included this in our qualitative analysis.

Main findings

Curriculum improvements were driven by school leaders and staff, who aimed to give children a high-quality education. The EIF played a part, alongside other factors.

School leaders and staff have been the main drivers of change to curriculum. All school leaders talked with passion about their focus on providing a high-quality education that enables all their pupils to thrive. Therefore, the greatest driver for curriculum change by school leaders was their determination to meet the needs of their pupils. Many school leaders explained that they are constantly evolving their curriculums with this in mind.

“I think you just mustn't ever stand still with curriculum. You have to always provide for your community... You have to say, “Has that had the impact or not? ... Ok, so what do we need to change?””

Primary leader

Almost all school leaders said that learning from other schools was an important driver of curriculum change.

“I think one of the biggest factors as well has been that idea of that external stimulus: “What are other people doing? How are they approaching this?” and just learning from others and being really open to ideas... I think that’s very helpful.”

Secondary leader

Sometimes, when new staff with curriculum responsibility, for example a headteacher, joined the school, this helped bring about changes to the curriculum. For some schools, new senior leadership or staff created opportunities for a ‘rethink’ and brought a new focus on developing the curriculum. Some schools also had individual members of staff with interests in research, specific subjects or aspects of pedagogy. They contributed significantly to curriculum design.

Conversely, school leaders told us that the challenges of recruitment and high staff turnover can slow down changes and make it more difficult to maintain coherence across the curriculum. [\[footnote 11\]](#)

Schools that were part of a MAT, or had joined one, had also worked with trust leaders to develop their curriculums. This influence varied. Some trust leaders offered curriculum guidance and support. In another case, a central expert team developed the curriculum for use across its schools. [\[footnote 12\]](#)

“We still have our own individual curriculum even though we’re part of a MAT, but they were very supportive in that. So, we have a curriculum director that worked closely with my curriculum architect to really develop that across the school.”

Primary leader

Secondary school leaders also discussed the influence of other parts of their accountability system, often determined by the DfE, but assessed by Ofsted. Some

schools made curriculum decisions based on the then government's ambition for [EBacc](#) subjects, the influence of [Progress 8](#) attainment scores and changes to [GCSE](#) specifications.

“Accountability measures and progress attainment 8... the number of children that do separate sciences, and that has to shape your curriculum. That has to have an impact. Again, you don't have any choice. You'll be compared with all schools in the country, ... that will affect recruitment and retention of staff, attracting students, reputation and community, standing with parents, all of those things.”

Secondary leader

Several secondary school leaders also told us they increased their vocational offer to meet local skills needs.

School leaders made it clear that they considered the COVID-19 pandemic to be one of the most critical factors for their curriculum development since the EIF was introduced. Almost all of them discussed it. COVID created huge challenges for schools, but several leaders thought, with hindsight, that the pandemic gave them the opportunity to reflect and make changes to the curriculum. Schools made significant changes after they identified gaps in pupils' knowledge caused by low attendance during the pandemic.

“[COVID] meant that we had to take a step back and survey the landscape a little bit in terms of where we were with our students, in order to design a curriculum that was going to meet the need of the learning that they'd lost [and help them] make progress.”

Secondary leader

“We had lots of children and parents coming back with really heightened levels of anxiety... if we'd continued using the programmes and the ways of learning, ways of teaching, that we were using [before COVID], we would have just been setting them up to fail.”

Primary leader

When lockdowns came into force in March 2020, the EIF had only been operational for 6 months. Because of this timing, school leaders found it difficult to separate the impact of COVID from the impact of the EIF on many aspects of curriculum change.

Research and evidence-informed practice also drove changes to the curriculum in schools. Our conversations with school leaders about research often included mention of the EIF, as an evidence-informed framework, and the research and publications associated with it, including Ofsted's [curriculum research reviews](#).

Some schools felt the framework aligned with their curriculum work, especially those already engaged in research and evidence-informed practice. Others felt the EIF confirmed their approach, helping to speed up changes they were already making. Many school leaders said the EIF was a useful lens for reflecting on their work.

“So, for me it [the EIF] didn’t... necessarily drive what we did. It kind of gave us a shape for talking about [the curriculum].”

Secondary leader

In some cases, mainly in primary schools, school leaders told us that they made major changes to their curriculum in response to the EIF. Most of these school leaders told us the publication of the EIF triggered these changes. While we did not seek to evaluate the impact of inspection, it was clear that others needed the inspection process itself to clarify the actions they needed to take.

“The EIF undoubtedly had a significant impact and the publication of that led to a complete review of what is taught, when and why.”

Secondary leader

“Once we had the inspection, which was robust... it provided that clarity of where we really needed to go, with a really clear focus.”

Primary leader

In summary, the school leaders we spoke to described many factors that had influenced their curriculum designs since 2018. Ofsted, inspection frameworks and the inspection process itself are part of a wider system. How this system works together to drive change is a complex process of interconnecting factors.

Overall curriculum quality improved in revisited schools

When we used the same research methods to judge how curriculum quality had changed in 2018 and 2024, we found a statistically significant increase in overall curriculum quality measures. [\[footnote 13\]](#) Only 2 schools had a lower overall curriculum quality score in 2024 than they did in 2018. Changes in overall curriculum scores are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Revisited schools' overall curriculum quality in 2018, compared with 2024*

* Band 1 is the lowest curriculum overall banding and band 5 is the highest.

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

In 2018 and 2024, the primary schools we visited had lower overall curriculum quality scores than the secondary schools. As Table 1 shows, fewer primary schools (1 out of 9 primaries revisited) were awarded the highest measure of overall curriculum quality (5).

Table 1: Overall curriculum quality scores for primary and secondary schools in 2024*

Phase	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Band 4	Band 5	Total
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Primary	0	1	3	4	1	9
Secondary	0	0	1	6	4	11
Total	0	1	4	10	5	20

* Band 1 is the lowest score, given when curriculum design is absent. Band 5 is the highest score, given when curriculum design is central to the school's work.

However, we saw a greater proportionate increase in overall curriculum quality scores in primary schools compared with secondary schools. Over half of the primary schools (5) received a higher overall banding score in 2024 than 2018.

We focused on measures relating to the quality of what schools want pupils to learn (intent), the activities they choose to teach their curriculum (implementation) and whether pupils do learn that curriculum content (impact). We found that the scores for implementation and impact had improved significantly, but the scores for intent had not.

In 2018, average intent scores were highest, followed by implementation and then impact. In 2024, the order stayed the same. All areas increased between 2018 and 2024. The biggest increases were in implementation and impact, which were statistically significant.^[footnote 14] Average measures of implementation improved in 16 schools, compared with only 4 that were weaker. We observed the greatest improvements in implementation scores in primary schools.^[footnote 15] Thirteen of the 20 schools saw impact scores improve. Intent did increase, but not significantly.^[footnote 16] Average scores for intent, implementation and impact are provided in Table 2.^[footnote 17]

Table 2: Average intent, implementation and impact scores for revisited schools in 2018 and 2024

Year	Intent	Implementation*	Impact*
2018	3.77	3.51	3.5
2024	4.11	4.07	4.03

* Statistically significant improvements in scores observed.

The intent, implementation and impact structure that the EIF provides has influenced school leaders' curriculum thinking

Almost all school leaders said the concepts of 'intent, implementation, impact' in the inspection framework influenced their curriculum thinking, especially when the EIF was first introduced. School leaders often referred to these as the '3 Is'.

"The intent, implementation, impact way of thinking about your curriculum from that very, sort of, big intent statement... it did make us think more about "what our locality need[s], what do we want for our children?"

Primary leader

In particular, the distinction between these 3 areas in the framework prompted some schools to think about their curriculum in a different way.

"I think it was useful in the early stage because... it kept coming back to "What are we trying to achieve?" ... [We] keep coming back to that intent again and again and the fact that it was separated in the framework got us, I think, on the right... on the right journey... at the time it was needed."

Secondary leader

The EIF led some schools to speak more consistently about curriculum quality across all subjects. It provided a shared language for curriculum conversations. In the [first phase of our curriculum research](#) in 2017, we identified that the language of the curriculum was not clear.

"I think the 3 Is have really allowed our teachers... helped really make it quite cohesive amongst our team leaders. They can use the same language."

Secondary leader

The EIF facilitated shared learning on curriculum design across different schools and MATs. School leaders explained that the concepts of intent, implementation and impact enabled them to have more reflective conversations about the curriculum with other schools.

“You had more schools who were really thinking about intent, implementation, impact.”

Secondary leader

The distinct areas of intent, implementation and impact helped to support new and more experienced staff, particularly in secondary schools. School leaders explained that it can sometimes be more difficult to maintain the quality of the curriculum when there is high staff turnover. Having the distinct areas of intent, implementation and impact helped to focus training for new staff and made sure that a subject’s curriculum is equally embedded across all teaching. Similarly, the structure also supported more experienced staff in developing their good practice.

“At one end you’ve got the new staff – that’s our language, that’s what we do. At the other end, if you’ve been in post for a long time as a middle or senior leader, it’s really helpful to think, “Actually, are we really clear on that?” So, it’s been really helpful, I think, at kind of both ends of the... experience level.”

Secondary leader

School leaders found the concept of intent particularly useful. They said intent was an informative starting point. Some school leaders said they had never thought in detail about the purpose of their curriculums before we introduced the EIF. Others suggested that placing intent before implementation and impact encouraged staff to securely establish what they wanted pupils to know, learn and understand. We found that, in most of the revisited schools, the rationale and aims of the curriculum design were shared across the school, and fully understood by all. [\[footnote 18\]](#)

“It went beyond just saying what your vision was to “OK, why is that your intent?””

Secondary leader

“We were already very engaged with the concept of curriculum intent, with what we wanted students to be able to do. I think what the framework gave us was almost a mechanism for... a rationale for why we would take a particular approach.”

Secondary leader

However, the highly influential concept of ‘intent’ seemed to dominate other areas of curriculum thinking for some schools. Some school leaders told us that the concept of intent was useful for making sure that they identified the purpose of their curriculum and that children were learning what was intended. However, this was not the case for all. A few schools had only recently started to focus on ensuring, and assuring, that the curriculum has impact on what pupils know and can do. [\[footnote 19\]](#)

We also recognise further unintended consequences arising from the introduction of the concepts of intent, implementation and impact in the framework. A few school leaders said they initially felt uncertain about how to interpret ‘intent, implementation and impact’. Some explained that they thought they had to immediately incorporate the ‘3 Is’ into their curriculum practice. One school leader described their initial panic at the prospect of this. Another reported that, at first, they had misunderstood how much flexibility the framework allowed them. Schools that were expecting an inspection soon after the launch of the framework believed that they needed to demonstrate their intent, implementation and impact in particular ways to inspectors.

“When it came out, when it was all about intent, implementation, impact, everyone went crazy. Like you’ve got to come up with this clever strap line... and you’ll be tested on how much you understood what intent means... It’s not that... there are some freedoms to think about what the right curriculum looks like and not get tied up with trying to please [Ofsted]. It’s ok to think about your own curriculum. It’s ok to shape it in the right way. It’s the rationale, not having clever 3 Is.”

Secondary leader

This initial uncertainty around Ofsted’s expectations made some schools carry out unnecessary work. Schools rewrote existing curriculum statements to frame them in

terms of intent, implementation and impact or produced entirely new ‘intent statements’ for each subject. For instance, one school leader rushed to write curriculum statements structured around intent, implementation and impact, and publish them on their website. The ‘3 Is’ initially added ‘a complication to curriculum planning’.

“And then the framework changes around the 3 Is, that led to some pieces of work leading out of that. Some of [them] probably were unnecessary looking back... being as we rewrote everything into each ‘I’... But also, some of it created good conversations about the curriculum.”

Primary leader

We have previously recognised these unintended consequences.[\[footnote 20\]](#) We have worked with the sector to improve understanding about what a high-quality curriculum is, and how we evaluate this on inspection. We have explained that subject leaders do not need to prepare special documentation for Ofsted on intent, implementation and impact.

We also heard from several school leaders who described how they applied intent, implementation and impact to their quality assurance processes. This included carrying out their own deep dives. We do not recommend using inspection methods to quality assure a school’s curriculum. As schools see curriculum being taught every day, we advise that there are better ways of drilling down into the quality of the curriculum than doing internal deep dives.[\[footnote 21\]](#)

In summary, school leaders were positive about the effect that intent, implementation and impact had on curriculum thinking. Most importantly, they were positive about the EIF’s focus on what lies beneath these terms – a high-quality curriculum. The unintended consequences, described above, highlight how the changes to the inspection framework influence schools, even in the absence of inspection.

Schools were now more likely to offer more ambitious curriculums, focused on all subjects

The 2018 [curriculum research](#) found that many schools were prioritising test and

exam results, and teaching a curriculum narrowly focused on those tests and exams. Inspectors found that, in schools with the highest-quality curriculums, school leaders were valuing all subjects so that pupils received equitable provision across a range of subjects.

The EIF was designed, therefore, to encourage all schools to provide an ambitious, rich curriculum that remains as broad as possible for as long as possible. In the [school handbook](#), there is a specific focus on a broad curriculum in key stages 2 and 3, as these stages are particularly susceptible to curriculum narrowing.

We did see improvements, with most schools providing broader, more ambitious curriculums that featured greater depth. Inspectors observed that ambitious curriculums were a particular strength in many of the schools we revisited. When measuring curriculum intent, we saw the greatest improvements in how ambitious schools' curriculums were. [\[footnote 22\]](#) In the subjects that inspectors examined, we also found that depth of knowledge had improved in three quarters of the schools we revisited.

Around half of the schools we revisited explained that the EIF had partly driven improvements in curriculum breadth and depth. This was especially the case for primary schools. Secondary schools also mentioned that contextual factors, such as pupil demographics, and other accountability measures had influenced their curriculum offering.

“We do... offer a lot more subjects than... we did in 2018, for lots of different reasons. And I think the framework was – is – part of that, absolutely part of that.”

Secondary leader

“Inevitably the pupils benefit, they get a better deal, they learn broader subjects and in more depth, and I think it prepares them better for their next stage and beyond.”

Secondary leader

Schools reported that the EIF's focus on all subjects was an important influence on a wider sector shift that prioritised all subjects across the curriculum. For example, one

primary school leader told us that they had noticed a change of stance towards a broad curriculum by training providers and fellow headteachers, driven by the publication of the EIF.

“There was a disengagement, I think at a national level, from a lot of schools in the broad curriculum, and the framework re-engaged headteachers.”

Primary leader

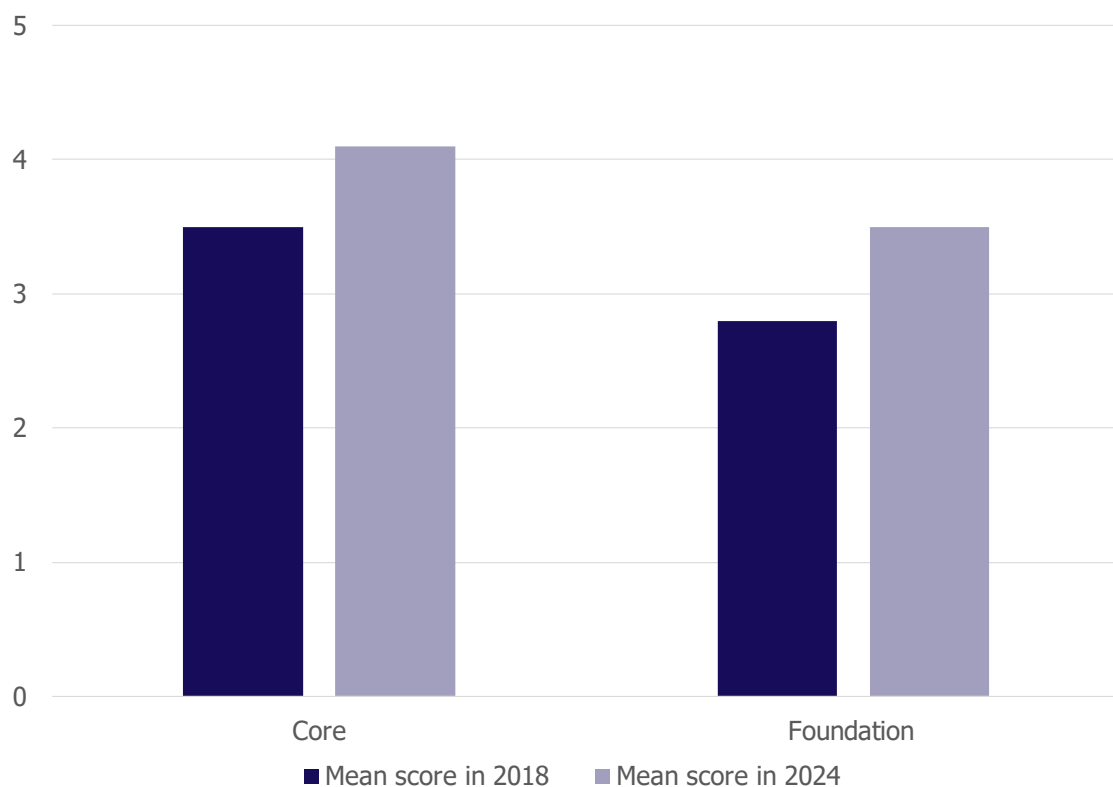
“I think... [there was] a far bigger national focus on the entire curriculum. The county certainly, but I think also nationally, had been very driven by English and maths for a long, long time, and that was a real shift and that gave us support with refining and improving our curriculum.”

Primary leader

In 2018, as well as a narrowing of the curriculum, inspectors found differences in curriculum quality between subjects, especially in primary schools. Inspectors found that most of the foundation subjects often had weaknesses in the curriculum design that were not present in English or mathematics.

When looking specifically at the primary schools we revisited in 2024, we found the largest improvements in the implementation of foundation subjects (see Figure 2). While this change relates to a small number of schools (9), it suggests that many of the weaknesses we found in the implementation of foundation subjects in 2018 are being addressed.

Figure 2: Changes to average implementation measures for English, mathematics and science (core) and all other subjects (foundation) at the revisited primary schools between 2018 and 2024



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

Although implementation of foundation subjects had improved, we found that foundation subjects were still weaker than core subjects in many of the revisited schools, across primary and secondary. This was attributable to:

- assessment strategies being more developed for core subjects than foundation subjects, particularly in primary schools (as in 2018)
- teacher professional development being more focused on core subjects, although many school leaders told us they were prioritising training and development across all subjects
- some weaknesses in planning and monitoring for foundation subjects (across primary and secondary)

The [school handbook](#) specifically states that a focus on subject-specific knowledge should not prevent a topic-based or thematic approach.^[footnote 23] In 2018, many of the primary schools we visited were using a topic-based approach. Inspectors found this tended to prevent good coverage of, and progression through, subjects.

We observed a move away from topic-based teaching in several of the primary schools we revisited. School leaders reported that the focus on ensuring the progression of knowledge and skills across all subjects had led them to identify knowledge gaps and overlaps of content in the topic-based approach. In many cases, this mapping process was instigated by subject leaders focusing on the

intended purpose of their subjects and what they wanted pupils to know and do, driven by the EIF's '3 Is'.

“When we broke down the intent of each subject, actually every subject had quite different intents and so actually to teach cross curricula all the time for everything and very topically was not going to work for the benefit of every subject.”

Primary leader

Although the shift from topic-based approaches was not always due to the EIF, a few primary schools said the EIF prompted a total rethink of their curriculum planning. One primary leader explained that before their curriculum review, which was triggered by an EIF inspection, they taught foundation subjects through topics. This meant teachers were not always clear on specific knowledge. It also meant that subjects lacked integrity. Art, for example, had often been a 'tag on' to topics, with little thought given to the knowledge and skills progression specific to art and design. Similarly, another school explained that the framework led them to understand that their curriculum approach was not covering the national curriculum sufficiently.

“Using the EIF framework, we have... stripped the curriculum completely and restarted... In 2018 it was topic-based and... trying to make it cross-curricular, which didn't always work, which didn't necessarily mean that the full national curriculum was being covered or the same parts of the national curriculum were being covered over and over again.”

Primary leader

School leaders were mainly positive about the EIF's focus on all subjects. However, a few school leaders also told us that this focus had some unintended consequences, particularly for primary schools.

For example, we heard from a few primary school leaders that making sure that knowledge is delivered equitably across all subjects can lead to rigid timetabling. Several school leaders told us there was 'too much' to fit in the timetable. Although school leaders explained that this was due to the requirements of the national curriculum, they felt this pressure more acutely because the EIF's [deep dive](#) methodology meant any subject might be sampled in an inspection. Concerningly,

one school leader told us they had made timetabling decisions in order to evidence teaching of all subjects, in case they have an inspection.

“... if the framework wasn't there, we'd be freer to... mentally feel freer, to plan our curriculum in a different way. But we keep our curriculum timetabled so we're teaching everything over time. In case we have an inspection, and we need to showcase, show, deep dive.”

Primary leader

When reflecting on the changes they had made, away from a topic-based approach, a few primary leaders questioned whether they had lost some benefits for younger children. They had made changes to ensure that the curriculum was implemented well across all subjects, in line with the EIF's concept of quality. Although they recognised that pupils' knowledge and skills' progression, and subject coverage, had improved, these school leaders felt that the EIF was designed around a secondary model.

“... I do think we've changed the curriculum, and I do think that the coverage of each subject area and the progression in skills is better. But I do wonder if that has caused a bit of overload, and whether our previous creative topics meant that everything was under one umbrella and whether children were more immersed in one topic at a time, rather than trying to jump from one subject to another. So that does concern me and has concerned me throughout the time that we've altered our curriculum. Yeah, maybe it's more of a secondary approach.”

Primary leader

Overall, we have found strong evidence that the EIF has encouraged schools to focus more equally on all subjects. This has generally been a positive shift for schools. One unintended consequence of the focus on all subjects, however, is that a few primary school leaders feel that the EIF was not designed with the primary phase sufficiently in mind.[\[footnote 24\]](#)

The quality of reading in schools was high in our initial study – these schools have now further prioritised reading

The EIF emphasised how well schools teach pupils to read.^{[\[footnote 25\]](#)} If children cannot read, they cannot access the curriculum. There was a strong focus on the teaching of early reading. The EIF introduced a mandatory early reading deep dive for all primary schools.

The quality of reading in the revisited schools was originally high. In 2018, inspectors found that many of the school leaders were prioritising reading to allow pupils to access the full curriculum offer. Now, we have seen schools make some further improvements. Overall, inspectors found the prioritisation of reading to be one of the highest-quality areas of curriculum practice. There were examples of exceptional quality in half of the revisited schools.

When describing the changes made to their curriculum since 2018, many school leaders mentioned changes to reading as a particular area of focus. This included using more standardised approaches for the explicit teaching of phonics. Secondary schools took a whole-school approach, raising the profile of reading across all subject departments. Secondary schools also increased the number of reading interventions. Several secondary schools recruited specific literacy coordinators to lead reading programmes. These specialist staff were placed outside of English departments to emphasise that reading is everyone's responsibility.

Around half of the school leaders we spoke to said reading was one of the curriculum areas the EIF had most influenced. This was especially the case in secondary schools, with most making changes because of the focus on reading in the EIF. One leader even described reading as being 'writ large' in the framework. Primary schools have always had a focus on early reading, but the emphasis on early reading in the EIF, regardless of key stage, seems to have had a particular impact on secondary schools.

"... there's not a shadow of a doubt because of the EIF, and so on, we've upped our game with reading."

Secondary leader

School leaders also attributed their use of standardised phonics programmes to the EIF. This was the case for both primary and secondary schools, although for some secondaries, this was a bigger change.

“I would say that the framework itself has been a lever mainly in English... putting the phonics in – not that we weren’t doing phonics before – but it’s much more formalised now.”

Secondary leader

Alongside the EIF, COVID had a large impact on schools’ curriculum decisions around reading and phonics. Secondary school leaders, in particular, described the challenges raised by children’s attainment gaps and missed learning opportunities and the impact of these challenges on the teaching of reading. Children were beginning Year 7 with much lower levels of reading ability than before the pandemic. Schools needed to make changes to address this. [\[footnote 26\]](#)

“I think every secondary school has had to up its game in reading because you’ve had children arriving that weren’t at that [reading] age before.”

Secondary leader

Compared to the EIF’s focus on reading, we did not observe the same attentiveness to mathematics across the curriculum. Inspectors considered whether school leaders regarded mathematical fluency and confidence in numeracy as preconditions of success across the national curriculum. This was the only curriculum area we found to be weaker in 2024 than in 2018. [\[footnote 27\]](#) Inspectors found that around a quarter of schools (6) had inconsistencies and weak strategies in this area.

Although some school leaders said they had created more meaningful cross-curricular links since 2018, very few described any specific changes that they had made related to mathematics across the curriculum. Inspectors did also record evidence from 2 schools identifying this as a priority area for school leaders going forward.

Overall, there is strong evidence that the EIF has driven changes to the way reading and phonics are taught across primary and secondary schools. Mathematics does

not have the same high profile in the EIF as reading. The weaknesses in this area of curriculum intent perhaps suggest that the emphasis on reading in the EIF has led schools to prioritise this over other areas, such as mathematics.

Under the EIF, school leaders told us subject leaders have greater levels of ownership and responsibility

The 2018 curriculum research found that schools with high-quality curriculums typically delegated curriculum decisions to those with curriculum and subject expertise. The study also found that staff subject knowledge was very important, particularly for subject leaders designing appropriate progression through content.

The EIF, therefore, emphasised the importance of teachers having expert knowledge of the subjects that they teach. It also highlighted how vital training and support is for teachers who have gaps in their knowledge. In the EIF, subject leaders are more involved in an inspection than they were under the previous inspection framework. [\[footnote 28\]](#)

According to the school leaders in this study, the EIF shifted greater responsibility to subject leaders, making them more accountable for curriculum planning and coverage. Most of the school leaders were very positive about this change. They talked about how the increased ownership made staff more confident and helped them reflect and improve their practice. For some, placing curriculum ‘centre stage’ also reignited subject leaders’ passion for the subject they teach, and made them more enthusiastic about sharing that knowledge and understanding with students.

“I definitely think it’s made us think differently about our middle leadership in the school... when you were asking questions you could just see the love of their subject coming through and they were so eager to show you... what the students were able to produce on the back of them thinking more deeply about the curriculum and evidencing within it.”

Secondary leader

“For me it was a breath of fresh air. I’m saying that from my point of view, as a... middle leader, you know? I love the framework in the sense that it put in

centre stage what really mattered – and that was the subject and nothing else.”

Secondary leader

School leaders also told us that because of the greater responsibility, there have been more professional development opportunities for subject leaders, especially for those leading foundation subjects. In some cases, subject leaders took the initiative to develop their subject knowledge. They did this by joining subject networks and professional groups, attending webinars, engaging with exam boards, and keeping up to date with the latest educational research for their subject.

“I think... if [the EIF] hadn't been introduced, the subject leader's development and role and monitoring and so on, would have remained a secondary partner in the broad curriculum.”

Primary leader

Several school leaders also told us that they use elements of the EIF methodology to structure their subject monitoring and to develop opportunities for subject leaders to reflect on their curriculum. School leaders also told us that the EIF provided a helpful structure for less experienced subject leaders, and this has helped to build coherence across subjects.

Although it was generally positively received, some school leaders told us that the increased ownership within the subject leadership role can put pressure on staff in smaller primary schools. In these schools, staff often lead multiple subjects and are not necessarily subject specialists.[\[footnote 29\]](#)

“... there's been more responsibility for [subject leaders] and that's positive in a lot of ways. I think it's also come with more pressure. And a lot of the time in a primary school, the subject leader is a subject leader of 2 or 3 subjects, hasn't necessarily done a degree or, you know, had much experience with that subject before they found themselves in that role. And that is probably a negative consequence of it.”

Primary leader

We recognise the specific pressures that small primary schools, in particular, can face. We have set out [how we adapt inspections](#) to take these pressures into account.

In the schools we visited, curriculum is now more purposefully sequenced and mapped

In the 2018 study, inspectors found that schools with weaker curriculums tended to focus on delivering curriculum content rather than on the progression and sequencing of knowledge. Inspectors found that, when teachers thought carefully about the substantive and disciplinary knowledge they wanted pupils to learn, and planned it so that pupils made progress, this was more useful for pupils' learning.

The EIF, therefore, aimed to encourage schools to prioritise the substance of education – knowledge, skills and progression. The handbook emphasises that the curriculum should be carefully planned and sequenced. Pupils should develop knowledge and skills by building on what has been taught before.

The schools we revisited had improved in this area. Inspectors observed greater purposeful sequencing, curriculum mapping and progression of knowledge within subjects than they did in 2018; this was the case in at least three quarters of the schools.

Figure 3: Number of revisited schools scoring the highest banding (5 out of 5) for curriculum progression and mapping (where best practice was embedded and may have included examples of very high quality) in 2018 compared with 2024

Schools achieving the highest measure (5) for curriculum progression



Schools achieving the highest measure (5) for curriculum mapping



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

The 2018 study highlighted that assessment of the curriculum, particularly to identify gaps or misconceptions in pupils' knowledge, was integral to a well-sequenced, progressive curriculum. Interestingly, although progression and sequencing had clearly improved in the schools we revisited, we did not see similar improvements in the quality of assessment. We did observe some improvements in assessment for foundation subjects.

Only a few schools discussed changes to assessment when considering the main changes they had made since 2018.

“I think the focus on knowing more and remembering more, and the push that we had through our assessment strategies, has also helped encourage subjects to more clearly define what [pupils] need to know and remember at each stage.”

Secondary leader

However, most schools did explain that they had made important changes to curriculum sequencing and progression since 2018. Many attributed these changes to the EIF.

The EIF shifted school leaders' curriculum thinking to focus on children having a 'rich schema' of knowledge, as well as 'knowing more and remembering more'. Many school leaders told us the EIF helped them to improve the consistency of their curriculum planning and mapping across subjects. Primary schools, which are less likely to have subject specialists, described how the EIF helped them to refine and improve their curriculum progression.

"I think that [the focus on sequencing] possibly wouldn't have happened without the inspection framework in quite the same way. There's always been... knowledge, but [it] wasn't quite so carefully thought about as a sequence."

Secondary leader

"Certainly progression documents, because I think the introduction of those had helped staff understand what they are teaching and why they are teaching that, and then they can see that bigger picture across school."

Primary leader

Some schools had already clearly sequenced and mapped their curriculums before 2018. These schools were positive about the EIF's focus on knowledge progression and sequencing. They said the EIF reinforced their approach and helped them to speed up changes they were already making in their schools.

The EIF was just one part of this, though. There was also growing evidence from educational research on the importance of curriculum progression. When we asked schools about what influenced the changes they made, they also mentioned research, evidence and guidance from evidence-informed charities and organisations, such as local maths hubs.

The pandemic subsequently made schools focus more intently on high-quality sequencing and progression. Children developed gaps in their learning as a result of

the school closures.^[footnote 30] Around half of the school leaders told us they made changes to the sequencing and progression of their curriculum because they needed to fill these knowledge gaps.

“... because... they’ve lost a lot of learning [due to COVID], so we’ve had to re-sequence some of the learning and then go and look at our most important knowledge as well, refocus on that. And then we had to... reschedule our learning sequence based on that. So this has had a massive impact on the way we deliver.”

Secondary leader

It is not possible for us to identify how much of the improvement we have seen in progression and sequencing is due to the EIF rather than the effects of COVID-19. What we have seen is that the focus on progression and sequencing in the framework, alongside the influence of research evidence, enabled schools to respond to the needs of their pupils.

Appendix

Detailed methodological note

In the [Ofsted strategy 2022-27](#), we committed to evaluating the EIF. We developed a [theory of change](#) that identified how we expected the EIF to work and the impact we expected it to have. In this study, we used a pre-post design to evaluate our assumptions about how schools’ curriculum would change.^[footnote 31] We assessed the quality of schools’ curriculums before we introduced the EIF. We then revisited them 6 years later to assess curriculum quality again. This allowed us to determine whether curriculum quality improved following the introduction of the EIF.

Seven HMIs visited 20 maintained schools and academies, across 7 of Ofsted’s regions, during the 2024 summer term. These comprised 10 secondary schools, 9 primary schools and 1 special school.^[footnote 32] One further school was unable to participate in a research visit, so a member of the research team carried out a

telephone interview with the school leader.

This study applied a mixed methods approach, collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously (what is known as a convergent parallel mixed-method design). A single inspector led each research visit, which took place over 1 day. A researcher shadowed inspectors for 3 of the visits.

In the research visits, we collected quantitative data. We did this by evaluating curriculum quality against the rubric developed as part of the 2018 study, and awarding a score of 1 to 5.^[footnote 33] The only change we made to the rubric was to remove the indicator 2b, which no longer forms part of the quality of education judgement.^[footnote 34] We evaluated the curriculum through conversations with senior leaders, subject leaders, pupils and, when available, governors. The same set of standardised questions and prompts used in the 2018 study guided these discussions. To assess implementation and impact, inspectors also carried out workbook scrutiny alongside subject leaders.

At each school, we also held a semi-structured interview with the headteacher and at least one other member of senior staff. This was an additional inclusion; it was not part of the 2018 study design. We included the interview to help us understand the factors that influenced schools' curriculum since 2018. It was also an opportunity for leaders to reflect on their experiences developing their curriculum over the past 6 years. We piloted this interview with 2 school leaders ahead of carrying out the research.

In the original study, inspectors assessed the quality of 4 subject areas, one of which was English or mathematics. In 2024, to reduce the burden of the research visit on school staff and inspectors, we looked at 3 of the 4 original subjects from the 2018 study. Of these 3 subjects, one was always English or mathematics. Schools then chose which of the original 2018 subjects they would not include.

The 7 inspectors that visited schools in 2024 were not the same inspectors that visited schools as part of the 2018 research study. We gave inspectors training ahead of the research visits so that they could apply the rubric as consistently as possible.

We analysed rubric score data in Stata. We used the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed rank statistical test to test for statistically significant differences between the 2018 scores and 2024 scores (this method was pre-specified). We took a deductive thematic approach to coding the qualitative data in MaxQDA.

Sometimes, themes emerged from qualitative coding that might be reflected in the

quantitative data. In such instances, we checked whether the quantitative data conflicted with those themes. No findings from our quantitative data disputed any qualitative data findings. Some of the themes that emerged from the qualitative data were not measured in the rubric; these findings could not be compared with our quantitative data.

As part of quality assurance, we had transcripts and evidence forms from research visits independently checked before we analysed them. This made sure that scores were consistent with the evidence provided, and that there was no missing data. When coding qualitative data, 2 researchers coded the same transcript initially and met to discuss the coding framework and any inconsistent application of codes, or missing codes. Following this meeting the coding framework, including code definitions, were finalised.

We carried out the study in line with our [ethical research policy](#). Our ethics committee approved the evaluation.

We let all the schools know what their participation means and what their rights in this evaluation are. All participants gave voluntary informed consent.

Strengths and limitations

This impact evaluation provides compelling evidence of the impact of inspection frameworks, combining inspectors' measures of quality (before the EIF and now) with leaders' views on how the EIF influenced the changes they made. Hearing from school leaders themselves is the best evidence we can get on why they made those changes.

However, all schools received the EIF when it was published in 2019. We therefore cannot know what would have happened to curriculum quality were the EIF not introduced.

Our pre-post study provides a unique opportunity to use research we had previously carried out for the purpose of understanding how schools have changed. The design enables us to make claims about the extent to which the curriculum has changed in our sample of schools.

However, the design limits our sample to the schools that took part originally. The schools participating in 2024 may not reflect the schools that we did not visit.

Furthermore, compared to the original study, we have a higher proportion of schools with an overall effectiveness grade of ‘outstanding’ and with high scores for overall curriculum quality in our sample. It is notable that we saw improvement despite the limited room for improvement in these high-performing schools. It may be that these schools were more likely to have made improvements than other schools that did not take part.

Annex A: sample tables

Table 1a: Sample breakdown by school revisited and phase

	Primary	Secondary	Special	Total
Revisited in 2024	9 (45%)	10 (50%)	1 (5%)	20
Not revisited in 2024	24 (54.6%)	19 (43.2%)	1 (2.3%)	44
Total	33 (51.6%)	29 (45.3%)	2 (3.1%)	64

Table 1b: Sample breakdown by schools revisited and Ofsted region

Region	Revisited in 2024	Not revisited in 2024	Total
East Midlands	2 (10%)	5 (11.4%)	7 (10.9%)
East of England	3 (15%)	7 (15.9%)	10 (15.6%)
London	2 (10%)	7 (15.9%)	9 (14.1%)
North East	4 (20%)	4 (9.1%)	8 (12.5%)
North West	0 (0%)	7 (15.9%)	7 (10.9%)
South East	4 (20%)	2 (4.6%)	6 (9.4%)
South West	4 (20%)	6 (13.6%)	10 (15.6%)
West Midlands	1 (5%)	6 (13.6%)	7 (10.9%)

Total	20	44	64
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Table 1c: Sample breakdown by schools revisited and maintained/non-maintained

	LA-maintained	Not LA-maintained	Total
Revisited in 2024	7 (35%)	13 (65%)	20
Not revisited in 2024	17 (39.5%)	26 (60.5%)	43
Total	24 (38.1%)	39 (61.9%)	63*

Table 1d: Sample breakdown by schools revisited and Ofsted overall effectiveness grade

Ofsted overall effectiveness grade (at the time of 2024 research visits)	Revisited in 2024	Not revisited in 2024	Total
Outstanding	6 (30%)	5 (11.4%)	11 (17.2%)
Good	13 (65%)	32 (72.7%)	45 (70.3%)
Requires Improvement	1 (5%)	6 (13.6%)	7 (10.9%)
Inadequate	0 (0%)	1 (2.3%)	1 (1.6%)
Total	20	44	64

Table 1e: Sample breakdown by schools revisited and 2018 curriculum overall banding – Band 1 is the lowest curriculum overall banding and Band 5 is the highest

2018 curriculum overall banding	Revisited in 2024	Not revisited in 2024	Total
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Band 5	1 (5%)	2 (4.6%)	3 (4.7%)
Band 4	11 (55%)	13 (29.6%)	24 (37.5%)
Band 3	3 (15%)	17 (38.6%)	20 (31.3%)
Band 2	4 (20%)	10 (22.7%)	14 (21.9%)
Band 1	1 (5%)	2 (4.6%)	3 (4.7%)
Total	20	44	64

Table 1f: Sample breakdown by schools revisited and IDACI quintile

IDACI quintile (at the time of 2024 research visits)	Revisited in 2024	Not revisited in 2024	Total
Quintile 1	2 (10%)	12 (28.6%)	14 (22.6%)
Quintile 2	7 (35%)	8 (19.1%)	15 (24.2%)
Quintile 3	4 (20%)	7 (16.7%)	11 (17.7%)
Quintile 4	4 (20%)	6 (14.3%)	10 (16.1%)
Quintile 5	3 (15%)	9 (21.4%)	12 (19.4%)
Total	20	42	62*

Table 1g: Sample breakdown by schools revisited and schools who had received an inspection under the EIF, before the date of research visits (April – May 2024)

	School inspected under EIF	School not inspected under EIF	Total
Revisited in 2024	7 (35%)	13 (65%)	20
Not revisited in 2024	21 (47.7%)	23 (52.3%)	44
Total	28 (43.8%)	36 (56.3%)	64

* Data not available for all 64 schools in original sample

Annex B: rubric score descriptors and curriculum indicators

The score descriptors inspectors used to determine the indicator score are:

- 1: This aspect is absent in curriculum design.
- 2: Major weaknesses are evident in terms of either leadership/coverage or progression. Leaders have not identified or started to remedy weaknesses.
- 3: Coverage is sufficient but there are some weaknesses overall in a number of examples. These have been identified by leaders but they are not yet remedying them.
- 4: This aspect of curriculum is embedded with minor points for development. Leaders are taking action to remedy minor shortfalls.
- 5: This aspect of curriculum underpins/is central to the school's work/embedded practice. May include examples of exceptional curriculum.

Ref Intent curriculum indicators

- 1a There is a clear and coherent rationale for the curriculum design
- 1b Rationale and aims of the curriculum design are shared across the school and fully understood by all

-
- 1c Curriculum leaders show understanding of important concepts related to curriculum design, such as knowledge progression and sequencing of concepts
-
- 1d Curriculum coverage allows all pupils to access the content and make progress through the curriculum
-
- 2a The curriculum is at least as ambitious as the standards set by the national curriculum/external qualifications
-
- 2c Reading is prioritised to allow pupils to access the full curriculum offer
-
- 2d Mathematical fluency and confidence in numeracy are regarded as preconditions of success across the national curriculum
-

Ref Implementation curriculum indicators

- 3a Subject leaders have clear roles and responsibilities to carry out their role in curriculum design and delivery
-
- 3b Subject leaders have the knowledge, expertise and practical skill to design and implement a curriculum
-
- 3c Leaders at all levels, including governors, regularly review and quality assure the subject to ensure it is implemented sufficiently well
-
- 4a Leaders ensure ongoing professional development/training is available for staff to ensure curriculum requirements can be met
-
- 4b Leaders enable curriculum expertise to develop across the school
-
- 5a Curriculum resources selected, including textbooks, serve the school's curricular intentions and the course of study and enable effective curriculum implementation
-
- 5b The way the curriculum is planned meets pupils' learning needs
-
- 5c Curriculum delivery is equitable for all groups and appropriate
-
- 5d Leaders ensure interventions are appropriately delivered to enhance pupils' capacity to access the full curriculum
-

- 6a The curriculum has sufficient depth and coverage of knowledge in this subject

- 6b There is a model of curriculum progression for the subject

- 6c Curriculum mapping ensures sufficient coverage across subjects over time

- 7a Assessment is designed thoughtfully to shape future learning Assessment is not excessive or onerous

- 7b Assessments are reliable. Teachers ensure systems to check reliability of assessments in subjects are fully understood by staff

- 7c There is no mismatch between the planned and the delivered curriculum

Ref Impact curriculum indicators

- 8 The curriculum is successfully implemented to ensure pupils’ progression in knowledge – pupils successfully ‘learn the curriculum’

- 9 The curriculum provides parity for all groups of pupils

In the original study, there were 25 ‘indicators’ of curriculum quality. This was reduced to 24 in the current study. One indicator that originally included (2b) now falls within the personal development judgement and so was removed from the 2024 study.

Data tables

This section contains the underlying data in an accessible table format for all figures.

Data for Figure 1: Revisited schools’ overall curriculum quality in 2018, compared with 2024*

Curriculum overall banding	2024: Band 2	2024: Band 3	2024: Band 4	2024: Band 5	2024: Total
2018: Band 1	0	1	0	0	1

2018: Band 2	1	1	2	0	4
2018: Band 3	0	0	2	1	3
2018: Band 4	0	2	6	3	11
2018: Band 5	0	0	0	1	1
2018: Total	1	4	10	5	20

* Band 1 is the lowest curriculum overall banding and band 5 is the highest.

See [Figure 1](#).

Data for Figure 2: Changes to average implementation measures for English, mathematics and science (core) and all other subjects (foundation) at the revisited primary schools between 2018 and 2024.

Subject type	Mean score in 2018	Mean score in 2024
Core	3.5	4.1
Foundation	2.8	3.5

See [Figure 2](#).

Data for Figure 3: Number of revisited schools scoring the highest banding (5 out of 5) for curriculum progression and mapping (where best practice was embedded and may have included examples of very high quality) in 2018 and 2024.

Indicator	2018	2024
There is a model of curriculum progression for the subject (6b)	5	8
Curriculum mapping ensures sufficient coverage across subjects over time (6c)	2	8

See [Figure 3](#).

1. It is worth noting the limitations of this study, especially its small scale. This must

be considered when interpreting our findings. The experiences of the schools in this study are not necessarily representative of schools more broadly. See the [Appendix](#) for more information on the limitations of this study. ↵

2. [‘HMCI commentary: curriculum and the new education inspection framework’](#), Ofsted, September 2018. ↵
3. We revisited 9 primary schools and 11 secondary schools (including 1 special school). See [Annex A: sample tables](#). ↵
4. We assessed schools’ curriculum quality against 24 measures of intent, implementation and impact. The research methodology used a rubric with a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 equates to a strong curriculum design and 1 a weak design. Please see [Annex B: rubric score descriptors and curriculum indicators](#) for a list of curriculum measures and details of grade descriptors. ↵
5. The rubric was designed for testing the validity of a construct of curriculum quality, and as a methodology for collecting accurate evidence during the original study in 2018. It was developed through earlier phases of the 2018 curriculum research. It was, therefore, designed for research. Please see [‘HMCI’s commentary: recent primary and secondary curriculum research’](#), Ofsted, October 2017. ↵
6. We carried out interviews with 21 schools. One primary school was interviewed by an Ofsted researcher but did not have an HMI visit. This school has not been included in the sample descriptives or quantitative measures as it did not contribute any quantitative data. ↵
7. See [original report](#) for details on the sampling strategy. Broadly, the sample criteria aimed to reach a balance of schools across Ofsted grades (not including inadequate) geographical spread and type (local authority maintained and academies). ↵
8. See [Annex A: sample tables](#) for comparisons of the 2024 sample with the original 2018 sample. ↵
9. See [Appendix](#) for more information on the limitations of this study. ↵
10. The pause of inspections due to the pandemic has meant the inspection period has been extended for some schools. Also, outstanding schools, which had previously been exempt from inspection, may not have been inspected for a decade or more. Please see the blog [‘When will my school be inspected?’](#), Ofsted, June 2023. ↵
11. Many schools are facing challenges recruiting and retaining teachers. This is something we reported on in our [2022/23 annual report](#). ↵
12. Because this study focused on school leaders, we cannot say whether the EIF influenced how trust leaders design their curriculums. ↵

13. Wilcoxon matched pairs test, $z = 2.423$, $p = 0.0154$. ↵
14. Implementation: Wilcoxon matched pairs test, $z = 2.8$, $p = 0.0051$; Impact: Wilcoxon matched pairs test $z = 2.184$, $p = 0.0289$. ↵
15. We observed a 0.73 increase in mean implementation score for revisited primaries, and a 0.42 increase for revisited secondaries. ↵
16. Wilcoxon matched pairs test, $z = 1.326$, $p = 0.185$. ↵
17. Average intent, implementation and impact scores were calculated using the mean of associated indicators. The assessment rubric provided guidance to inspectors on how to make judgements on a 5-point scale and so the scale cannot be regarded as an interval scale. Nevertheless, average scores have been presented for illustrative purposes. ↵
18. Six schools were awarded the highest banding (Band 5) for curriculum intent indicator 1b (rationale and aims of the curriculum design are shared across the school and fully understood by all). Eleven schools were awarded the second highest banding (Band 4). ↵
19. Beyond this study, Ofsted has raised concerns that some schools have not focused sufficiently well on impact. In the [2022/23 annual report](#) we noted that, in most schools, the curriculum is effective in developing pupils' knowledge and skills over time. However, in schools where pupils' knowledge was weaker, we often found that leaders did not accurately understand the impact of the curriculum. ↵
20. For example, we have published various blogs including, '[Busting the 'intent' myth](#)', Ofsted, July 2019 and '[Curriculum: keeping it simple](#)', Ofsted, December 2021. ↵
21. For more information, see this blog post '[Curriculum: keeping it simple](#)', Ofsted, December 2021. ↵
22. We judged this according to the standards set by the national curriculum. ↵
23. See paragraphs 243 and 260 in the [School inspection handbook](#). ↵
24. Ofsted's subject reports have identified strengths around schools offering broad and ambitious curriculums that are in line with this study. The subject reports also found some unintended consequences of the focus on an ambitious, broad curriculum in the EIF. Some schools have focused on breadth at the expense of depth in the curriculum. Others have misinterpreted 'ambition'. '[Curriculum research reviews collection](#)', Ofsted, May 2021. ↵
25. '[Early reading and the education inspection framework](#)', Ofsted, November 2019. ↵

26. We have reported on the specific challenges this has caused for secondary schools beyond our study: '[Supporting secondary school pupils who are behind with reading](#)', Ofsted, April 2022. ↩
27. For indicator 2d (mathematical fluency and confidence in numeracy are regarded as preconditions of success across the national curriculum), 4 schools scored higher, 6 remained the same and 10 scored lower than in 2018. ↩
28. During deep dives, inspectors discuss the curriculum content, and the teaching and assessing of that content, with subject leaders. Subject leaders also join inspectors during lesson observations. ↩
29. In our [subject reports](#), we found that the best schools had systems and structures that enabled high-quality subject leadership. For example, the [science report](#) found the best schools made sure staff have dedicated time for subject leadership training. However, the time available for subject leadership training varied considerably between schools. ↩
30. Ofsted published a series of briefings on how schools responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. '[Ofsted: education recovery series](#)', Ofsted, first published December 2021. ↩
31. A pre-post study measures outcomes in a group of participants (in this case schools) before introducing an intervention (in this case the EIF), and then again afterwards. This study design cannot rule out that something other than the intervention may have caused a change. ↩
32. We have provided further detail on the schools revisited as part of this study in [Annex A](#). ↩
33. There is a detailed description of scores in [Annex B](#). ↩
34. Indicator 2b: curriculum principles include the requirement of centrally prescribed aims. ↩

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