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Guidance

# Education inspection framework: for use from November 2025

Updated 9 September 2025

**Applies to England**



**For use on inspections from 10 November 2025.**

# Introduction

The education inspection framework ('the framework') sets out how Ofsted inspects registered early years settings, maintained schools, academies, non-association independent schools and further education and skills provision in England (for a full list, see [Provision inspected under the education inspection framework](#)). It includes the principles that apply to inspection, and the main evaluations that inspectors make.

The framework applies to our inspections of different early years, education and skills settings. It supports consistency across the different areas of our work (or 'remits') and enables comparisons between them.

Note that we use the term 'learners' throughout for brevity; this refers to all those attending education, skills and registered early years settings.

The framework reflects relevant legislation for each type of setting. These inspections are carried out under:

- the [Childcare Act 2006](#)
- [section 5 of the Education Act 2005 \(as amended\)](#)
- [section 8 of the Education Act 2005 \(as amended\)](#)
- [the Education and Inspections Act 2006](#)
- [section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008](#)
- [the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#)

All inspections carried out using the framework meet relevant legislative requirements.

The framework includes the principles of inspection (which are set out in this document) and the standards we use to inspect providers (which are in our inspection toolkits).

We have also published the following core inspection materials for each remit:

- operating guides that set out the methodology inspectors use to gather evidence
- inspection information pages that provide useful information about the inspection process for a wide audience

All the toolkits and operating guides reflect the needs and expectations of different remits. They also reflect the needs and expectations of different phases and the differences between various age groups. Inspectors inspect the types of provision for which they have appropriate expertise and training.

## **Inspection toolkits, operating guides and information**

The toolkits, operating guides and inspection information pages for each education remit are available here:

- [registered early years provision](#)
- [maintained schools and academies](#)
- [non-association independent schools](#)
- [further education and skills](#)

## **Principles of inspection**

We are required to carry out our work in ways that encourage the providers we inspect and regulate to improve, to focus on

learners, and to be efficient and effective in their use of resources. This is set out in the [Education and Inspections Act 2006](#).

Inspections provide independent, external evaluation and identify what providers need to improve in order to become better. Inspectors gather a range of evidence and evaluate it against an inspection framework. They take full account of our policies and relevant legislation in areas such as safeguarding, equality and diversity.

Inspectors gather evidence in similar ways across different settings. However, there may be some variation, for example depending on the age of learners and the type of provision. Inspectors comply with relevant guidance and codes of conduct, such as the Home Office guidance [Powers of entry: code of practice](#).

We use evidence-led insights and inspector training to ensure that our process for determining grades is as valid and reliable as possible. Our inspections and grading process focus on 2 things: key strengths, from which other providers can learn intelligently, and priorities for improvement. They act as a trigger for others to take action.

Inspections provide important information for parents and carers (who we will refer to as 'parents' throughout, for ease of reading), learners and employers about the quality of education, training and care. These groups should be able to make informed choices based on the information published in inspection report cards.

Inspection assures the public and the government that:

- expected standards of childcare, education and skills are being met
- where relevant, public money is being spent well
- safeguarding requirements are met

# **Raising standards and improving lives for all**

Ofsted exists to raise standards and improve lives for all. We put children and learners who face barriers to their learning and/or well-being at the heart of what we do. This is our mission.

## **Helping to protect learners**

Inspectors always take into account how well learners are helped and protected so that they are kept safe. Inspectors now provide a separate grade for this important aspect of a provider's work: safeguarding will either be 'met' or 'not met'.

The approach inspectors should take to inspecting safeguarding in the settings covered by the framework is set out in our toolkits and operating guides.

## **The Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998**

Our inspections are intended to raise standards and improve the lives of all learners. The framework is clear that our expectation is that all learners should receive a high-quality, ambitious education.

Inspectors assess the extent to which the provider complies with the relevant legal duties as set out in the [Human Rights Act 1998](#) and the [Equality Act 2010](#), including, where relevant, the Public Sector Equality Duty.

# Conduct during Ofsted inspections

Ofsted's [code of conduct](#) sets out our expectations for the conduct of both our inspectors and providers during inspection.

Inspectors uphold the highest professional standards in their work. They act with professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect.

Providers should approach their inspection with integrity and be open, transparent and honest. This includes providing evidence – or access to evidence – that enables inspectors to report honestly, fairly and reliably. It means not withholding or concealing evidence or providing false, misleading, inaccurate or incomplete information.

## Provision inspected under the education inspection framework

This framework applies to inspections of:

- registered early years settings
- maintained schools and academies (which include all sponsor-led academies, academy converter schools, academy special schools, free schools, special free schools, maintained nursery schools and alternative provision academies, university technical colleges and studio schools, 16 to 19 academies and 16 to 19 studio schools) [\[footnote 1\]](#)
- non-maintained special schools (as approved by the Secretary of State under section 342 of the Education Act 1996)
- pupil referral units

- non-association independent schools, as defined in the [Education Act 1996](#) (this definition brings into the scope of inspection a number of very small independent schools, many of which have dual registration as an independent children's home and provide exclusively for vulnerable looked-after young people who may also be disabled or have a special educational need)
- independent training providers (including those providing apprenticeship training up to and including level 7)<sup>[\[footnote 2\]](#)</sup>
- FE colleges, including specialist colleges and land-based colleges
- sixth-form colleges
- independent specialist colleges
- dance and drama colleges<sup>[\[footnote 3\]](#)</sup>
- local authority providers
- designated institutions<sup>[\[footnote 4\]](#)</sup>
- employer providers
- higher education institutions that provide FE and/or apprenticeship training up to and including level 7 (to the extent of this provision only)
- 16 to 19 academies/free schools (including 16 to 19 secure academies)

## The evaluation scale used for inspection

We use a 5-point scale to grade different areas of a provider's work. From November 2025, we no longer provide an overall effectiveness grade for any provider inspected under the framework. Safeguarding is evaluated on a 'met'/'not met' scale for providers.

The evaluation scale for each evaluation area, other than safeguarding, is:

**Exceptional (highest quality provision):** an evaluation area can be graded 'exceptional' when all the strong standards have been met and if it meets all the additional standards in the 'exceptional' section of the toolkit.

**Strong standard:** an evaluation area can be graded 'strong standard' when all the expected standards and all the strong standards have been met.

**Expected standard:** an evaluation area can be graded 'expected standard' when all the standards are met – this includes meeting the legal requirements and the expectations set out in statutory guidance, as well as the professional standards required of the particular type of provision, where these apply.

**Needs attention:** an evaluation area can be graded 'needs attention' when the 'expected standard' has not been met because some aspects of provision are inconsistent, limited in scope or impact and/or not fully meeting the legal requirements.

**Urgent improvement** (lowest quality provision): an evaluation area can be graded 'urgent improvement' when it needs urgent action to provide a suitable standard of education and/or care for children and

# The evaluation areas graded on inspection

Wherever appropriate, we have used similar content and terminology in the evaluation areas across the different remits. However, these can vary depending on each remit's context.

The evaluation areas represent the components of high-quality education provision. They reflect the different priorities and language used in each remit at each stage of the education system. Evaluating these areas enables:

- nuanced reporting for parents on the different aspects of provision
- clarity for providers on particular strengths and recommended areas for improvement

For information about how inspectors grade evaluation areas, please refer to the [operating guide for the relevant education remit](#).

## Early years

The evaluation areas for registered early years providers we inspect are:

- safeguarding
- inclusion
- curriculum and teaching

- achievement
- behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines
- children's welfare and well-being
- leadership and governance

## Schools

The evaluation areas for all schools we inspect, including non-association independent schools, are:

- safeguarding
- inclusion
- curriculum and teaching
- achievement
- attendance and behaviour
- personal development and well-being
- early years in schools (where applicable) [\[footnote 6\]](#)
- sixth form in schools (where applicable) [\[footnote 7\]](#)
- leadership and governance

## Independent schools

We continue to inspect [independent schools](#) against the independent school standards in addition to the areas listed above.

## Further education and skills

The evaluation areas for the range of further education and skills providers we inspect are:

- for the provider as a whole:
  - safeguarding
  - inclusion
  - leadership and governance
- for the provider as a whole, but only in colleges, further education colleges, sixth-form colleges or designated institutions (including specialist designated institutions):
  - contribution to meeting skills needs
- for each type of provision offered (for example, education programmes for young people, provision for learners with high needs, apprenticeships and adult learning programmes):
  - curriculum, teaching and training
  - achievement
  - participation and development

[The toolkits](#) provide the grading standards and/or indicators for each evaluation area.

## **Arrangements for different types of provision**

In some types of provision, inspectors need to carry out other assessments and regulatory activities in addition to the grading process. This section sets out those additional assessments and activities.

## Early years

This framework and the [operating guide for early years inspections](#) set out how we inspect providers on the Early Years Register. We are also responsible for the registration and regulation of these providers, and use inspection as one of our regulatory tools. You can read more about the [registration](#) and [regulation](#) of settings on the Early Years Register.

## Non-association independent schools

Non-association independent schools are subject to the [independent school standards](#). Inspectors check that schools meet all these standards during inspection.

## Settings with residential and boarding provision

We inspect boarding and residential provision under the Children Act 1989 (as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000) to make sure it is meeting the national minimum standards for boarding or residential provision, as appropriate.

Further details of how we carry out these boarding or residential inspections are in the sections of our social care common inspection framework for: [boarding schools and residential special schools](#) and [residential provision of further education colleges](#).

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1. While all of these providers are inspected under the

framework, 16 to 19 academies are inspected under part 8 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The others listed here are inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. ↩

2. Since 1 April 2021, Ofsted has been responsible for inspecting apprenticeships at levels 6 and 7 (degree and non-degree) as well as at levels 2 to 5. ↩
3. Dance and drama colleges are inspected against the principles of the renewed EIF at the request of the DfE. Ofsted inspects only those institutions who are approved by the DfE to administer the [Dance and Drama Awards scheme](#). ↩
4. Designated institutions have specially designated educational status under [section 28 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992](#). ↩
5. The nature of this action will vary depending on the education remit. ↩
6. We give maintained schools, academies and non-association independent schools that have early years foundation stage provision a separate grade for that provision as part of school inspections carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended by the Education Act 2011) or section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. We inspect provision for 2- and 3-year-olds in schools as part of a school inspection. ↩
7. We give maintained schools, academies and non-association independent schools a separate grade for sixth-form provision as part of school inspections carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended by the Education Act 2011) or section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. ↩

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