Guidance

Inspection information for initial teacher education (ITE): for use from January 2026

Updated 10 September 2025

Applies to England

Contents

For use on inspections from January 2026.

About this page

This page contains information about our inspections of initial teacher education (ITE) for a general audience.

It does not explain how inspectors carry out full inspections, which is in our separate operating guide for ITE inspections. The operating guide sets out what inspectors do on inspection, who we engage with and how, and how we feed back to leaders and report our findings. This page also does not contain the standards inspectors use to evaluate provision. Those standards, along with guidance on applying them across different phases and provider types, are in our toolkit for ITE providers. These documents should be read together.

Types of inspection

Full inspections

Full inspections are carried out under section 18B of the Education Act 1994 and the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Section 18B of the Education Act 1994 provides a power for His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) to inspect the initial training of teachers for schools and, when requested by the Secretary of State, a duty to do so.

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Prescribed Education and Training etc) Regulations 2007 set out HMCI's duty to inspect publicly funded training of further education (FE) and skills teachers, lecturers and trainers when requested by the Secretary of State.

Early years ITE inspections are covered by paragraph 9(1) of Schedule 13 (Interaction with other authorities) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, which states: 'The Chief Inspector may make arrangements with a public authority for the carrying out by him (a) in England or Wales, or (b) in Northern Ireland, of inspections of any institution or matter which he is not required or authorised to carry out by virtue of any other enactment.'

The ITE framework aligns with the principles of the education inspection framework (EIF). In full inspections, we grade the provider in each of our evaluation areas in each phase. For further information about how we carry out full inspections, please see our operating guide for ITE inspections.

Reinspections

Reinspections are carried out within 12 months of a provider receiving a grade of less than 'expected standard' in one or more evaluation areas.

Types of providers we inspect

We inspect all types of ITE provision, from standalone providers to complex partnership arrangements. We inspect:

- school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT)
- higher education institutions (HEI)
- independent learning providers (ILP)
- general further education (GFE) colleges
- specialist FE colleges
- local authorities who offer ITE for FE and skills

We identify an ITE provider by its unique reference number (URN). We use annual provider returns and information from the DfE initially to understand each provider's ITE delivery model.

Accredited providers are those offering early years, primary and secondary phase ITE who are approved by the DfE to award early years teacher status (EYTS) and/or qualified teacher status (QTS). Some of these accredited providers work with training partners to deliver some or all of their ITE provision.

During an ITE inspection, providers receive a grade for each evaluation area in each phase of ITE they deliver. They are solely and fully accountable for all aspects of ITE curriculum design, delivery and quality across all partners within the formal partnership arrangement.

We may visit training partners/partner colleges during the on-site inspection to gather evidence about the provider's effectiveness. However, we do not grade the training partners/partner colleges themselves. Further information on the involvement of training partners/partner colleges is in the operating guide for ITE inspections.

Scope of inspection

Early years, primary and secondary phase inspections

We inspect all teacher training that leads to the award of EYTS or QTS. Typical routes and qualifications include:

- graduate entry
- graduate employment-based

- undergraduate
- assessment only
- level 6 teacher apprenticeship standard

When we inspect the assessment-only route, we consider how the provider has met their duties as set out in the separate DfE guidance.

FE and skills phase inspections

We inspect providers that receive public funding for the following FE and skills ITE qualifications:

- qualifications at level 7, including the postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) and postgraduate diploma in education (PGDE)
- qualifications at level 6, including the professional graduate certificate in education (PGCE)
- level 5 certificate in education (CertEd)
- level 5 diploma in education and training (DET) (for those trainees completing this previously funded qualification)
- level 5 diploma in teaching (FE and skills) (DiT)
- level 5 learning and skills teacher apprenticeship standard

We inspect 3 different models of delivery:

Direct delivery refers to programmes awarded by and taught exclusively at a provider.

Franchised delivery refers to programmes awarded by one provider but also taught at other providers as part of a formal partnership agreement. In these cases, we inspect the partnership, not the individual providers.

Validated delivery refers to programmes a provider delivers that are validated by a degree-awarding body. We do not inspect the validating body, only the provider.

We consider provision for both in-service and pre-service trainees in our inspections of ITE for FE and skills.

Outside of scope

We do not inspect FE and skills ITE provision that is not publicly funded, such as programmes fully funded by an individual or an employer, unless this is funded through the Taking Teaching Further programme. Each year, the DfE publishes guidance on recognised further education teacher training courses eligible for student support. Providers may use other names for their ITE qualifications. However, these must still be aligned to the learning and skills teacher occupational standard.

When we inspect ITE providers

General information

We inspect providers of ITE on a 4-year cycle. We do not confirm the exact timing of an inspection until we formally notify the provider. Typically, inspections do not last longer than 4 days.

Newly accredited providers of ITE for QTS normally have their first inspection in their second year of offering ITE to trainees. At this point, we normally inspect all the ITE programmes that the provider offers, including any new phases that they may have introduced in their second year of operation.

The timing of an ITE inspection is determined by our annual risk assessment process and the information that ITE providers return to us annually. We use risk assessment methodology to make sure our approach to inspection is proportionate, so that we can focus our efforts on where we can have the greatest impact. This means we may inspect some ITE providers more than once during an ITE inspection cycle.

Early years, primary and secondary phase inspections

As trainees typically start their training in the autumn term, it may not be appropriate for inspectors to gather evidence so early in the course. Therefore, full inspections of early years, primary and secondary ITE usually take place in either the spring or summer terms. Reinspections can take place in any term and are carried out within 12 months of the previous inspection.

FE and skills phase inspections

ITE for FE and skills is not always taught in a single academic year. Therefore, these ITE inspections may take place in any term. Where ITE for FE and skills is offered in a provider which has other ITE phases, we will usually align their inspection with the timing of the inspection for the other phases.

The inspection team

The size of the inspection team depends on the size, geographical spread and complexity of the provider. Some team inspectors might not be on the team for every inspection day.

If a provider offers multiple phases, we usually inspect all the phases at the same time. Each phase is inspected by a dedicated team, led by a phase lead inspector (PLI).

We assign a lead inspector (LI) to oversee a single-phase inspection and an overall lead inspector (OLI) to oversee a multi-phase inspection. The LI or OLI is responsible for writing the report card.The PLI is responsible for writing the phase-specific sections of the report card.

ITE inspectors are:

- His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), who we employ directly and will typically lead ITE inspections
- Ofsted Inspectors (OI), who are contracted to work for us part-time; they are either serving or non-serving practitioners

Sometimes new inspectors, members of our non-inspection staff or other professionals may be present on site to observe an inspection. An HMI or senior HMI may also visit the provider, or monitor the inspection remotely, to make sure the inspection meets our quality assurance and consistency standards. We will notify leaders during the notification call if there will be additional people with the inspection team.

Conduct

Throughout the inspection, we expect providers and inspectors to act in line with our code of conduct and to show professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect at all times.

Full inspections: information about the inspection process

Overall inspection focus

Our renewed inspections reflect a significant shift in inspection culture. There is a stronger emphasis on leadership as a driver of sustained improvement, and on inclusive practices. These emphases are reflected both in the themes guiding our evidence-gathering and in the standards within the toolkit.

Inspections are grounded in respectful professional dialogue, focused on impact and designed to support self-improvement and inclusive practice. They are structured but also flexible, adapting to context, responding to evidence and concentrating on what matters most for trainees. Opportunities to undertake joint inspection activities between leaders/ staff and the inspection team are important and allow leaders/ staff to share their context.

Inspectors work with providers to build an accurate view of the quality in the ITE phases they deliver. This includes knowing and understanding how well trainees:

> - achieve – preparedness to teach their subject(s) and phase and successfully complete their ITE programme
> - belong – feel welcomed and valued as trainee teacher professionals within their teaching community
> - thrive – benefit from an effective ITE curriculum so that the pupils and learners they teach are kept safe and are able

> to flourish, whatever their background or individual needs

Inspectors will consider what leaders are aiming to achieve, how well they are doing it and how they know it is working. Their starting point is the standards for ‘expected standard’ in the evaluation areas in the toolkit. These considerations underpin planning, shape evidence-gathering and guide our evaluation from preparation through to final reporting.

The core foundations of our renewed inspections are:

- trainees first – high expectations with a focus on preparedness to teach their subject(s) and phase
- the care and well-being of those we inspect – through collaborative working with providers and building positive relationships with leaders and staff
- a provider’s unique context – evidence is evaluated in the light of each provider’s strengths, challenges and priorities for improvement per phase, and how it identifies and meets the needs of significant groups of trainees
- the lens of the toolkit – the toolkit sets out the grading standards, supporting shared professional dialogue
- quality and impact – evidence-based decisions focus on the quality and the impact of leaders’ choices and actions on trainees, reflected in the grading standards

Throughout the inspection, we give particular attention to the experiences and outcomes of trainees with identified special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or well-being. These groups remain central to planning, inspection activity and evaluation.

We also focus on the extent to which trainees are supported to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils and learners, those with SEND, those known or previously known to children’s social care and those who face other barriers to their learning and/or well-being.

What happens when a provider is notified of an inspection

An inspection support administrator notifies the ITE provider about a full inspection by telephone call to the named contact. After this call, we send confirmation by email. This email sets out the information that the provider needs to know before the inspection, and the information that it will need to make available to inspectors by the start (see the documents that providers must provide section). We send a separate email that includes links to the provider portal and the necessary log-in information.

The email we send after the notification call also includes a link to the relevant Ofsted surveys. The provider needs to forward this to all stakeholders and trainees. Once we have notified the provider, the surveys are opened for completion. They close part way through the inspection.

The initial notification call is followed by a number of planning calls between the provider leader(s), the nominee(s) and the OLI/LI/PLIs. During the first planning call, inspectors and the provider agree on who attends the planning calls.

Which leaders can attend the notification and planning calls

During the notification call, the inspection support administrator and the provider agree who will attend the planning call.

We encourage leaders to have at least one other senior leader with them to assist and support them in all calls. Typically, this is someone who usually deputises for them and who can understand and discuss the educational content of the calls.

Inspectors will ask the provider not to record these calls or any further calls.

Information the inspection support administrator may ask for during the notification call

We ask the provider to confirm the following information during the notification call:

- the main contact's full name and title
- the main contact's email and phone number
- the provider's postal address
- the approximate number of trainees on roll for each phase
- any reason the inspection should not take place
- any dates the provider will be closed in the next 2 months
- details of the nominee (where applicable)

The inspection support administrator asks the provider whether anyone who will be joining the planning calls requires any reasonable adjustments due to a disability. They will also ask whether we need to make any other adaptations to the inspection process where those with other protected characteristics may be put at a disadvantage.

Documents that ITE providers must provide

The provider needs to submit the following information on the day of/after the inspection notification:

- a list of trainees, their ITE programme (including subject(s) for secondary and FE and skills) and details of where they are currently on placement or employed for their teaching practice (the setting/provider's name, URN and postcode)
- their timetable for the days of the on-site inspection, including the delivery location(s) of any ITE-taught elements of the ITE curriculum and any training partners and partner colleges

The following operational documents are helpful to the OLI/LI/PLI in planning the inspection:

- Wi-Fi details, if the ITE provider has it, so that inspectors can connect to the internet
- maps and other practical information
- details of any relevant staff absence
- whether any specific teacher educators should not be visited for any reason

Providers should upload documents only to the named folders on the provider portal. This ensures that the inspection team can see and access them. Once uploaded, these files should not be moved, renamed or deleted, because this could make them inaccessible. The following file formats cannot be uploaded to the portal: exe; json; php5; pht; phtml; shtml; asa; cer; asax; swf; xap.

Providers and inspectors must make sure that they comply with legal requirements on data protection and information-sharing.

We do not want providers to do any additional work or ask trainees to do work specifically for the inspection. We also do not want inspections to create unnecessary workload for providers. Importantly, providers do not need to provide:

- any information beyond what we ask for during the inspection
- information in any specific format (as long as it is easily accessible for inspectors)

- written evidence of oral feedback to trainees

Role of the nominee

Providers are invited to nominate a senior member of staff to support planning, communication and engagement throughout the inspection. Multi-phase providers may have multiple phase-specific nominees. Nominees help the inspection to run smoothly.

In particular, the role of the nominee(s) is to:

- attend the planning call(s) alongside other relevant leaders
- provide information for the OLI/LI/PLI to support inspection planning
- attend meetings with inspectors throughout the inspection to review evidence and discuss emerging findings and grades
- provide insight into the provider's context
- be the link between the OLI/LI/PLI and leaders if the provider wants to raise any issues and concerns or to clarify anything about the inspection
- join inspection activities, where appropriate
- liaise with the OLI/LI/PLI and make sure that documents and other information are available
- make sure that staff can attend meetings or join inspection activities, where relevant
- suggest to the inspection team where they could gather additional evidence
- brief the provider's staff about inspection arrangements
- keep other leaders up to date on the progress of the inspection
- inform relevant stakeholders about the inspection

- ensure that staff, mentors and trainees are informed about how they can give their views through the relevant online surveys
- coordinate feedback arrangements at the end of the inspection

Further information about the nominee(s)

It is not compulsory to have a nominee. Providers will not be at any disadvantage if they do not nominate someone.

The nominee(s) should have thorough knowledge of how the provider operates on a day-to-day basis.

The provider leader may take on this role if they wish to and feel able to.

A member of staff who is also an OI can be a nominee.

Training for nominees is available but not compulsory.

The nominee(s) will not have access to confidential inspection notes, complaints or any whistle-blowing information.

Nominees will not be present during confidential discussions with trainees or staff, or where their presence could limit open dialogue.

Requesting a deferral or to pause an inspection

If the provider needs to ask for a deferral, it should do so as soon as possible after it is notified of the inspection. The decision whether to grant a deferral will be made in accordance with our deferral policy.

If a provider leader thinks an inspection should stop once it has started, we will consider the request under our pausing policy.

You can find detailed information about inspection planning and the onsite inspection process in our operating guide for ITE inspectors.

Next steps following our inspection findings

At the end of the inspection, inspectors provide feedback to the provider, including their final evaluation of its strengths and priorities for improvement in each phase inspected. They also let leaders know the implications of being graded below the ‘expected standard’ in one or more of the evaluation areas. More details are available in our operating guide for ITE inspections.

Who can attend the final feedback meeting

Those who may attend the inspectors’ final feedback meeting include:

- the provider leader(s)
- other senior leaders (as determined by the provider)
- the nominee(s)
- representatives from funding bodies (where applicable)
- those responsible for oversight of the ITE provision

- someone to take notes (there can be more than one note-taker if necessary)

Attendance at the meeting is voluntary. You can find further information about what the OLI/LI will discuss during the feedback meeting in the operating guide for ITE inspections.

The OLI/LI seeks to ensure that the meeting is practical and constructive when engaging with all attendees, and manages the conduct of all attending.

Gathering additional evidence

In some circumstances, we may carry out another visit to the provider to gather additional evidence. Please see our gathering additional evidence protocol for further information.

Potential misconceptions about inspection

Toolkit

We do not expect leaders to produce written evidence to support each standard in each evaluation area of the toolkit.

The toolkit focuses on the quality and impact of leaders' choices and decisions on trainees, rather than compliance alone. It is used to guide conversations, reflect on evidence and make sure grades reflect the evidence gathered. It supports a shared understanding and discussion of the strengths of the provider's work, its context, and areas for further exploration.

We do not expect providers to have completed any formal self-evaluation using the toolkit. However, they may wish to use the toolkit to support continuing improvement. In the planning call with leaders, we will ask where they see themselves against the 5-point scale of each evaluation area.

Curriculum, teaching and training

We do not advocate a particular ITE curriculum or require the curriculum to be in a specific format. It is for providers to determine their ITE curriculum and for leadership teams to justify it on its own merits.

We do not require ITE curriculum planning to be organised around the teachers' standards for QTS and EYTS. These are endpoint, summative assessments and not a curriculum.

We usually only consider the initial teacher training and early career framework (ITTECF), intensive training and practice (ITAP) and lead mentor/mentor leadership teams in phases that lead to QTS, unless the provider has chosen to apply the ITTECF, ITAP and/or lead mentor/mentor leadership teams into wider phases.

We do not advocate a particular approach to sequencing ITAP within the curriculum. It is for providers to determine their practices and for leadership teams to justify them on their own merits.

We do not have a preferred model for dividing the curriculum between centre-based and placement-based training. For example, in ITE for FE and skills, some aspects of the centre-based training may be generic, with trainees learning more about how to apply these to their specific subject on their teaching practice. However, inspectors will consider how well this training aligns with and complements the intentions of centre-based leaders, where applicable. The DfE's expectations for ITE for

FE and skills are that providers should consider subject specificity in all elements of the ITE curriculum for trainees preparing to teach in the sector. [footnote 1]

We do not prefer a particular method of planning, teaching and training, or assessment.

We do not require the provider to produce previous, current or future lesson plans.

We do not require the provider to show us grading evidence of trainees' progress towards individual professional standards, such as EYTS or QTS.

When we visit trainees teaching on teaching practice, we do not grade individual lessons or provide feedback to trainees.

When we visit ITE-taught elements of the ITE curriculum (including ITAP), we do not grade individual sessions or provide feedback.

We do not require trainees to be assessed in a particular way or at a specified frequency during their teaching practice.

We usually only consider a specific mentor training curriculum in phases that lead to QTS. Where the provider does produce a mentor training curriculum, we do not require this to be in any specific format. We do expect providers to deliver training for their mentors in all phases.

Safeguarding

Our safeguarding expectations are those that the DfE has set out in Keeping children safe in education.

Evidence/recordings

We do not require photographic evidence of trainees’ work (although inspectors may ask to take photographs of trainees’ work – they will take all reasonable steps to anonymise these).

We do not require providers to share recordings of live sessions that are delivered remotely, unless they are normally stored for future use by staff or trainees.

We do not expect providers to prepare a presentation or any additional documents about their setting or context for inspection. Inspectors prioritise gathering first-hand evidence during the inspection.

Artificial intelligence

A provider’s use of artificial intelligence (AI) is not an explicit part of our inspection and regulation frameworks.

There is no expectation that a provider will use AI in a certain way or will use AI at all.

Inspectors do not directly evaluate the use of AI or any AI tool. Our focus is, instead, on the quality of decision-making about AI.

Concerns or complaints about an inspection

We take any concerns seriously. Leaders are free to raise concerns, and doing so does not negatively affect inspection findings or how we grade a provider.

If a provider has any concerns during an inspection, including about inspectors' conduct or any potential or perceived conflicts of interest, they should raise these with the OLI/LI at the earliest opportunity to try to resolve issues before the inspection is completed.

If leaders cannot resolve their concerns with the OLI/LI during the inspection, they can contact a senior Ofsted leader using the number provided as part of the notification process.

If it is not possible to resolve concerns through either of these routes, the provider should follow the steps set out in our complaints procedure.

We respond to any complaints before we finalise and send the inspection report card to the provider. If the provider has highlighted some minor points of clarity or factual accuracy in the draft, it will not normally be able to submit a formal complaint or challenge about these once the report card has been finalised.

When and how report cards are published

We send report cards to the provider following moderation, quality assurance and a consistency check. In most circumstances, this will be within 18 working days of the end of the inspection.

Providers have 5 working days to comment on the draft report card. They can highlight minor points relating to clarity and/or factual accuracy. If they submit only minor points of clarity or factual accuracy, we consider these and respond to them when we share the final report card. This is normally within 30 working days of the end of the inspection. We may also send the draft report card to the DfE. This will take place only after moderation, quality assurance and consistency checking.

Providers can also submit a formal complaint seeking a review of the inspection process, including the grades given, or expressing concerns about inspectors' conduct.

Leaders should share the inspection findings with those responsible for oversight of the ITE provision and with whoever they consider appropriate, which may include colleagues, family members, and/or their wider support group; however, the information should not be made public or shared with trainees until the provider receives the final report card.

We do not normally issue draft/final report cards to providers or publish final report cards on our website during any holidays the provider has identified.

We normally publish the final report card on our reports website 5 working days after sending it to the provider.

How to provide feedback about the inspection

We invite all providers to take part in a voluntary post-inspection survey. We send the link to the survey with the final copy of the provider's inspection report card. The survey responses help us improve our inspection work.

How we handle evidence and personal information

Individuals and providers are legally required to provide inspectors with access to information. Section 18B(5) of the Education Act 1994 sets out HMCI's 'right to inspect, and take copies of, any records kept by the training provider, and any other documents containing information relating to the training provider' when inspecting the primary and secondary phases and ITE for and FE and skills.

Section 132 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 sets out HMCI's power to 'inspect, take copies of, or take away any documents relating to the education or training' during inspections of FE and skills ITE programmes. This power also allows inspectors to inspect computers and other devices that may hold information.

Inspectors gather any personal information necessary to assist them during the inspection. Our privacy policy sets out what personal information we collect, what we do with it, how long we keep it for, and individuals' rights under data protection legislation.

Inspectors record their notes using our systems. They may see information that contains personal information about staff, mentors and trainees. They may take notes from, or copies of, supporting information before returning it to an appropriate staff member at the end of the inspection. They may take photographs of trainees' work. Any notes, copies or photographs will be stored securely. Inspectors do not retain any inspection notes or supporting information personally. Information gathered electronically, including on laptops, mobile phones and tablets, is transferred securely in line with our security policies.

Inspectors are instructed to use digital methods for recording notes wherever possible. Where handwritten notes are unavoidable due to practical constraints, inspectors are required to transcribe relevant information into the secure system as soon as possible. Once transcribed, all handwritten notes must be securely disposed of in accordance with our retention policy.

Use of Ofsted logos

Provider phases that we judged to be outstanding or good for overall effectiveness before November 2025 can continue to use the specific Ofsted outstanding or good logos until their next full inspection. Once the phase receives their next full inspection, they must remove those logos, as they relate only to an overall effectiveness judgement, which they will not get as this no longer part of our grading. For more information, see our logo terms of use.

Research activities on inspection

We may carry out research, based on national priorities, during our inspections. This has no impact on the inspection.

We may use evidence that inspectors gather during inspections to inform other work, such as national reporting. No personal data obtained as part of the inspection evidence will be used to inform other work.

We may invite providers to participate in research visits (separate from inspections) at other times.

---

1. This guidance is currently non-statutory. The DfE plans to make it statutory during the course of the next inspection cycle. ↩

↑ Back to top

Housing and local services

Money and tax

Passports, travel and living abroad

Visas and immigration

Working, jobs and pensions

Help Privacy Cookies Accessibility statement Contact Terms and conditions
Rhestr o Wasanaethau Cymraeg Government Digital Service