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Guidance

Inspection information for state-funded schools: for use from September 2026

Updated 12 June 2026

Applies to England

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For use on inspections from 7 September 2026.

About this page

This page contains information about our inspections of state-funded schools for a general audience.

It does not explain how inspectors carry out inspections, which is in our separate [operating guide for school 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, with guidance on applying them across different phases and types of school, are in our [toolkit for schools](#). These documents should be read together.

Our [school monitoring operating guide for inspectors](#) sets out how we carry out monitoring of state-funded schools.

Types of inspection

Full inspections

Full inspections are carried out under [section 5 of the Education Act 2005](#). They were previously known as graded inspections or section 5 inspections. In full inspections, we grade the school against each of our evaluation areas.

Monitoring inspections

Monitoring inspections are carried out under [section 8 of the Education Act 2005](#). We monitor schools where we have identified a need for improvement.

Focused monitoring inspections

Focused monitoring inspections are also carried out under [section 8 of the Education Act 2005](#). These were previously known as urgent inspections, inspections with no formal designation and unannounced behaviour inspections. We use focused monitoring inspections to follow up concerns about schools that are not in a formal category of concern but that have been brought to our attention, for example through a qualifying complaint.

We may also carry out a monitoring inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 if the Secretary of State makes a request for information or advice about maintained schools and academies under [section 118 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006](#). His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) may also get inspectors to carry out a monitoring inspection at any time, for the purpose of providing advice to the Secretary of State under the same Act.

Types of schools we inspect

We inspect:

- maintained schools – including community, foundation and voluntary schools
- academies – including sponsor-led academies, academy converter schools, free schools, university technical colleges (UTCs), studio schools, city technology colleges, and city technology colleges for the technology of the arts
- special schools – including community special schools, foundation special schools, academy special schools, special free schools and some non-maintained special schools)
- pupil referral units (PRUs) and alternative provision (AP) academies
- maintained nursery schools

The [further education and skills inspection information](#) applies to the inspection of 16 to 19 academies.

We identify a school by its unique reference number (URN), which is issued by the Department for Education (DfE). Any institution with its own URN will be inspected in its own right.

If a school works in partnership with other schools but has its own URN, it will still be inspected as an individual school. This includes schools that work through federations, managed groups, chains or other collaborative activities. Schools that work on different sites or that have different provisions but share a single URN are inspected as one body and receive one [report card](#). We may try to coordinate the inspection of certain groups of schools, where this is possible.

When we inspect schools

We can inspect a school at any point from 5 school days after the first day that pupils attend in the autumn term. For example, if pupils return to school on a Tuesday, an inspection can take place as early as the following Tuesday (and we would notify the school on the Monday).

Full inspections normally last 2 days.

Schools are inspected approximately once every 4 years, except if they are in one of our monitoring programmes. The statutory timeframe requires all schools to be inspected within 5 school years from the end of the school year in which the

previous inspection took place.

Most schools should expect an inspection within this approximate timeframe. However, there are some circumstances where an earlier first inspection under the renewed framework may be needed:

Circumstance	First full inspection
Schools that were judged good or outstanding for overall effectiveness at their most recent graded inspection but whose last inspection was an ungraded inspection that: - took place before September 2024 - concluded that the lead inspector was not satisfied that the school would have received at least its current grade if it had received a graded inspection instead of an ungraded inspection	A full inspection around 2.5 years from the publication of its most recent ungraded or graded inspection report.
Schools that were judged good or outstanding for overall effectiveness at their most recent graded inspection but whose last inspection was an ungraded inspection that: - took place after September 2024 - concluded that aspects of the school's work may not be as strong as at the time of the previous inspection	A full inspection around 2.5 years from the publication of its most recent ungraded or graded inspection report.
Schools last inspected before September 2024 that were judged requires improvement for overall effectiveness at their most recent graded inspection.	A full inspection around 2.5 years from the publication of its most recent ungraded or graded inspection report.
Schools last inspected after September 2024 that were judged requires improvement for at least one key or provision judgement.	A full inspection around 2.5 years from the publication of its most recent ungraded or graded inspection report.
School with serious weakness as at end of October 2025.	Subject to monitoring (see monitoring operating guide for details)

Schools in special measures as at end of October 2025.	Subject to monitoring (see monitoring operating guide for details)
Schools with any 'needs attention' evaluation or that are placed in a category of concern from November 2025 onwards.	Subject to monitoring (see monitoring operating guide for details)

If a school receives a new URN due to a change in its status or after undergoing a significant change, it becomes a new school for inspection purposes. However, if the school retains its URN following a change, we treat it as the same school. We usually carry out a full inspection of a new school in its third year of operation.

The legal status of a school that merges with another school depends on whether the merged school has received a new URN. If the school has retained the URN of one of the merged schools, it is not legally a new school, but an existing school that has incorporated another school that has closed. If the merged school receives a new URN, it is legally a new school.

We might inspect a school at any time if we have any concerns.

Some new schools that are registered to teach pupils in a particular phase or key stage do not actually have pupils of that age range on roll when they open. When these schools begin to place pupils on roll for that phase or key stage, we do not regard this as a significant change because the school is already registered for that phase or key stage. It is only when schools change their registration to add a new phase or key stage that we regard it as a significant change.

The board of governors/trustees can also ask us to inspect their school by writing to the relevant Ofsted regional director. If we carry out a requested inspection, HMCI may charge the appropriate authority for its cost.

The inspection team

School inspectors are:

- His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), who we employ directly
- Ofsted Inspectors (OI), who are contracted to work for us part-time; they are

serving practitioners in a school, non-serving practitioners, or former HMI

The size of the inspection team depends on the number of pupils on roll and the type of school.

A lead inspector oversees the inspection. They are responsible for leading the inspection, making the notification and planning calls to the school, and writing the report card. Team inspectors support the lead inspector. They may be present for 1 or 2 days of the inspection.

Sometimes new inspectors, members of our non-inspection staff or other professionals may be present on site to observe an inspection. A Senior HMI or an experienced HMI may also attend the inspection, or monitor the inspection remotely, to make sure the inspection meets our quality assurance and consistency standards. We will notify the headteacher during the notification call if there will be additional people with the inspection team and explain their role.

Conduct

Throughout the inspection, we expect school leaders, staff and inspectors to act in line with our [code of conduct](#) and to show professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect at all times.

Approach to the trust on inspection

We recognise that trusts are a single legal entity and that it is not easy to separate decisions made by individual academies from those made by trust leaders. We also recognise that trusts retain overall legal responsibility for all matters in the school, even where these are delegated. Through reviewing the scheme of delegation and conversations with leaders, we identify the correct leaders in the individual academy and the wider trust we need to meet during the course of inspecting an individual school.

Approach to federations on inspection

Federated schools retain their own URN and are inspected as individual schools. Schools that belong to a federation have a single governing body that is responsible for overseeing the governance and strategic management of its schools.[\[footnote 1\]](#) We establish the school's governance and leadership structure and identify the correct leaders to speak to in the school. We recognise that leaders may be linked to other settings.

Provision for 2- and 3-year-olds

Schools that take 2- and 3-year-olds as part of their early years provision may not need to register that provision with us (see [Registering school-based childcare provision](#)). In these schools, we inspect provision for 2- and 3-year-olds when we carry out a full inspection. The lead inspector will make sure that the grading of early years provision includes an evaluation of the provision for 2- and 3-year-olds. Inspectors will also record if any children receive additional funding.

We consider any care that a school provides for children in the early years age range, before and/or after the school day or during the school holidays, as part of the evaluation of its early years provision.

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 inclusion. 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 pupils. Learning walks are important and allow leaders to share their context as they are showing inspectors around their school.

Inspectors work with leaders to build an accurate and typical view of the quality of the school. This includes knowing and understanding how well pupils:

- achieve – academically and personally
- belong – feel that they belong to, and are valued as part of, the school community, so that they attend, behave and contribute positively to what the school offers
- thrive – benefit from the right systems, processes and levels of oversight, so that they 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 ‘expected’ standard in each of the evaluation areas in the toolkit. These considerations underpin planning, shape evidence-gathering and guide our evaluation from preparation through to final reporting.

The foundations of our renewed inspections are:

- children and pupils first – high expectations with a focus on outcomes and experiences
- the care and wellbeing of those we inspect – through collaborative working with schools and building positive relationships with leaders and staff
- a school’s unique context – evidence is evaluated in the light of each school’s strengths, challenges and priorities for improvement, and how well it identifies and meets the needs of significant groups of pupils
- 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 pupils, reflected in the grading standards

Throughout the inspection, we give particular attention to the experiences and outcomes of disadvantaged pupils, pupils with special educational needs and/or

disabilities (SEND), pupils known or previously known to children's social care and those who face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. These groups are central to planning, inspection activity and evaluation.

Inspectors will engage with the SENCo (or their equivalent) and, in maintained schools and academies, the designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children. Inspectors will also consider engaging with other relevant leaders who have an inclusion role supporting these pupils, as appropriate.

What happens when a school is notified of an inspection

For full inspections, the lead inspector usually contacts the school by telephone between 9.30 and 10am on a Monday morning. Following a bank holiday, or in the first week after the Christmas, Easter or summer holidays, the lead inspector may contact the school on a Tuesday. This is because some time is needed after a longer holiday period to settle pupils back into school. If it is a previously deferred inspection, the lead inspector may notify the school on any day of the working week.

If inspectors are carrying out a full inspection without notice, the lead inspector will normally telephone the school about 15 minutes before they arrive. If it is a previously deferred inspection or a monitoring inspection, the lead inspector may notify the school on any day of the working week.

Once schools have been notified of an inspection, they will receive a letter by email to confirm the conversation between the lead inspector and school leaders. This includes links to the pupil and staff questionnaires and sets out the information that will need to be available at the start of the inspection (see the [Documents that schools must provide](#) section).

When we notify a school about a full inspection, the law requires the school [to take any reasonably practicable steps](#) to notify the parents or carers (who we will refer to as 'parents' throughout, for ease of reading) of registered pupils at the school, including the parents of those who have been suspended, attend AP or are away from school. Schools are also [required by law to notify relevant bodies](#), including providers of AP.

Which leaders can attend the notification and planning calls

During the notification call, the lead inspector and headteacher of the school agree who will attend the planning call.

We encourage headteachers to have at least one other senior leader with them to assist and support them in all calls, including the remainder of the notification call, if they wish. Typically, this would be someone who usually deputises for them (or a member of the trust staff) and who can understand and discuss the educational content of the calls. This may be [the nominee](#), where applicable.

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

Information the lead inspector may ask for during the notification call

We ask the school to confirm:

- contact information, including:
 - the headteacher's full name and title
 - the general school email and phone number
 - the headteacher's direct email and phone number
 - the school's postal address
- contact information for those responsible for governance, including
 - the interim executive board (IEB), if one is in place
 - in an academy, the name and contact details for the chief executive officer (CEO) and chair of the trust board
 - in a maintained school, the name and contact details of the chair of governors
 - in a federation, the name of the federation and (where applicable) the names of those involved in decision-making and oversight of the school (such as an executive headteacher), and whether any of these are located at a different site
- in an academy, the trust scheme of delegation and who is involved in decision-

making and oversight of the school (such as the executive headteacher, director of education or local governance body)

- information about the school, including:
 - the school's designated religious character (where applicable)
 - the number of pupils on roll (and separately, where applicable, the number of pupils in the post-16 provision), and their sex and age range
- whether there is an inclusion base, including any specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND or other pupils, or any other alternative or designated units for pupils
- whether any pupils attend off-site AP
- whether any pupils attend an inclusion base, including a pupil support unit under the school's URN
- whether the school has any pupils on roll whose places have been commissioned by a local authority
- whether any pupils are currently on a part-time timetable, receiving flexi-schooling or being educated remotely
- whether the school directly leads and manages any nursery provision, before-and/or after-school care (for example, breakfast clubs) or holiday clubs
- whether the school operates from more than one site, for example whether it offers early years or post-16 provision on separate premises
- what early career framework the school is using for early career teachers (ECTs), if any
- any reason the inspection should not take place (for example, if the school is within 6 months of confirmed closure and this can be evidenced in a funding agreement)
- details of (and response to) any recent tensions in, or pressures from, the community
- the start and end date for the next school holiday
- any other dates when the school will be closed within the next 2 months, for example for a religious festival
- details (not personal information) of who lives on the school premises
- information about any other factors the school considers relevant to its current context, including:
 - any concerns, such as perceived conflicts of interest

- details of the nominee (where applicable)

Although most of this information is publicly available, it is still important that it is confirmed as part of the inspection.

The lead inspector also asks the school whether anyone who will be joining the planning call requires any reasonable adjustments due to a disability. They may also consider making other adaptations to the inspection process where those with other protected characteristics may be put at a disadvantage.

The lead inspector may ask for the following information during the planning call:

- if there are any pupils with SEND: the number of pupils, what their needs are, the type(s) of language and/or communication systems used (for example British Sign Language), and the staffing support they receive
- if any pupils are in off-site AP: information about the AP's name, address, registration status, URN (if registered), number of pupils that attend and for what reason, their start dates, and the hours they attend
- if any pupils are in any inclusion base, including a pupil support unit under the school's URN: information about its purpose, size, location, number of pupils attending, whether it provides for pupils from other schools or pupils whose place is commissioned by a local authority, and the timetables of the pupils attending
- if the school is an academy: information about any pupils who have been transferred to one of the trust's other academies acting as an AP and who may now be on roll there
- information about the number of pupils on a part-time timetable, being flexi-schooled or being educated remotely, and any elective home-education arrangements for pupils registered at the school
- information about any nursery provision, before- and/or after-school care (for example, breakfast clubs) or holiday clubs led and managed directly by the school, including:
 - whether this provision takes children aged 2 to 8
 - whether any pupils from the school attend this provision

Documents that schools must provide

Schools must make the following information available to inspectors by 8am on the

first day of the inspection:

- strategic documents about the school, including:
 - anything that sets out school improvement priorities or the longer-term vision for the school, such as the school, federation or trust strategy
 - for maintained schools, minutes from the meetings of the governing body and other relevant strategic documents about governance
 - for academies, minutes of the board of trustees' meetings and other strategic documents about the trust
 - reports from any external evaluation of the school
- records and analysis about behaviour and attendance, including:
 - an up-to-date analysis of the attendance of all groups of pupils
 - any pupils taken off roll, including the reasons why (see [Ofsted's definition of off-rolling](#))
 - suspensions and permanent exclusions, incidents of poor behaviour and any use of internal isolation
 - information about the school's use of AP
 - information about any pupils directed off-site and/or pupils on managed moves
 - any bullying, harassment, or directly or indirectly discriminatory or prejudiced behaviour, including that which is racist, sexist, ableist, based on religion or belief, homophobic, biphobic or transphobic, or any use of derogatory language
 - any sexual harassment and/or sexual violence
 - any restrictive physical intervention
 - inclusion information for case sampling, including: a list of disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, those known (or previously known) to children's social care and those who face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, for example, young carers
- operational documents, including:
 - Wi-Fi details, if the school has it, so that inspectors can connect to the internet
 - map of the school buildings and other practical information
 - the school timetable
 - the current staff list (indicating ECTs, mentors and induction tutors)
 - details of any staff absence

- times for the school day, including any planned interruptions to normal school routines during the inspection, and whether any lesson(s) or teacher(s) should not be visited for any reason (for example, if a teacher is subject to capability procedures)
- safeguarding information (with secure access), including:
 - the single central record and any other records regarding disqualification under the Childcare Act 2006
 - a list of any referrals made to the designated safeguarding lead in the school and any that were subsequently referred to the local authority, along with brief details of the resolution (a very short summary of how the school dealt with the matter and assurance that pupils have received the appropriate help)
 - any referrals made to the local authority designated officer regarding staff or other adults
 - a list of all pupils who have open cases with children's services or social care and all pupils who have a multi-agency plan (to ensure the school knows who these pupils are, and can meet requirements); inspectors may speak with some of these pupils as part of their inspection activity to make sure the school is doing what is required by the [Keeping children safe in education](#) guidance

A school may choose to share a safeguarding audit with inspectors, but this is not a requirement.

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

If any of this information is available before the inspection begins, schools can upload it onto the inspection portal. We provide instructions for using the portal in the inspection notification letter that we send to the school.

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

- any information beyond what we ask for
- information in any specific format (as long as it is easily accessible for inspectors)
- written evidence of oral feedback to pupils
- predictions of attainment and progress scores
- performance and pupil-tracking information

- any specific document or plan in relation to the pupil premium

Role of the nominee

Schools are invited to nominate a senior member of staff to support planning, communication and engagement throughout the inspection. Their involvement helps the inspection to run smoothly.

In particular, the role of the nominee is to:

- attend the planning call alongside the leader
- where delegated by the appropriate authority, inform relevant stakeholders about the inspection
- make sure that children, pupils, parents and staff are informed about how they can give their views through the online questionnaires
- brief staff about inspection arrangements
- provide information for the lead inspector to support inspection planning
- provide insight into the school's context
- liaise with the lead inspector and make sure that documents and other information are available, and that staff can attend meetings
- attend regularly planned meetings with inspectors to review evidence and discuss emerging findings and grades
- act as the link between the lead inspector and the school leader if the school wants to raise any issues and concerns or to clarify anything about the inspection
- keep other leaders up to date on the progress of the inspection
- join the lead inspector for inspection activities, where appropriate
- suggest to the inspection team where additional evidence could usefully be gathered
- coordinate feedback arrangements, in particular at the end of the inspection

Further information about the nominee

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

The nominee should have thorough knowledge of how the school operates on a day-

to-day basis.

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

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

Training for nominees is available but not compulsory.

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

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

Requesting a deferral or to pause an inspection

If the school needs to ask for a deferral, it should do so as soon as possible after it is notified of the inspection, or, in unannounced inspections, after the inspector's arrival. The decision whether to grant a deferral will be made in accordance with our [deferral policy](#).

If the leader of the school thinks an inspection should stop once it has started, we will consider the request under our [pausing policy](#).

Next steps following our inspection findings

At the end of the inspection, inspectors provide feedback to the school, including their final evaluation of its strengths and priorities for improvement. They also let leaders know if we have decided to suspend the inspection or the implications of the school being placed in a category of concern. More detail is available in our [operating guide for schools inspections](#).

Meetings

To ensure that all meetings are practical and constructive, the lead inspector will manage the number of attendees and the conduct of all attending.

Inspectors will ask leaders to confirm who will attend the end-of-day reflection and grading meetings and will set out the expectations for these. Inspectors will explain that there is flexibility as to who attends, as long as providers agree with them who is attending before the meeting takes place.

Who can attend the final feedback meeting

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

- the headteacher
- for an academy, the CEO (or equivalent) or delegate
- for a federation, where applicable, the executive headteacher
- any appropriate person the headteacher or CEO wants to be present to assist and support them
- for maintained schools, the chair of the school's board of governors and as many governors as are available; the clerk to the governors (or equivalent), or their delegate, may also attend to take notes (if necessary, there may be more than one note-taker)
- for academies, the chair of the board of trustees, or their delegate, and as many trustees as are available; the clerk to the board (or equivalent), or their delegate, may also attend to take notes (if necessary, there can be more than one note-taker)
- a representative from the local authority (always for maintained schools and all schools if we have told the school that we are likely to grade safeguarding as 'not met')
- a representative from the sponsor and/or the diocese

The lead inspector seeks to ensure the meeting is practical and constructive by managing the number of attendees and the conduct of all attending. They will make sure that leaders know that their input in this meeting is valued.

The lead inspector will make sure that the inspection team has connected the evidence gathered and reflected on it proportionately, which will help leaders to understand the final feedback.

Attendance at the meeting is voluntary. The [operating guide for schools](#) gives further information about what the lead inspector will discuss during the feedback meeting.

Gathering additional evidence

In some circumstances, we may carry out another visit to the school to gather additional evidence. Please see our [gathering additional evidence protocol](#) for further information.

Monitoring schools

We will usually monitor a school if:

- we have graded any evaluation area as ‘needs attention’
- we have placed it in a category of concern

Categories of concern

If we place a school in a category of concern, the school is eligible for support and intervention, as set out in the DfE’s guidance for [Support and intervention in schools](#). As required by law, maintained schools and PRUs that are placed in a category of concern are subject to a directive academy order.

When Ofsted makes a provisional decision to place a school in a category of concern, the decision must then be reviewed by our internal Enhanced Consistency and Moderation Hub (ECaM). This hub is made up of experienced inspectors who

review all the evidence to make sure it supports the provisional decision and that it has been assessed in line with our published guidance.

ECaM can:

- confirm the provisional decision
- recommend changes to one or more grades, or
- decide that more evidence is needed

If ECaM recommends a grade change, or that further evidence is needed, the matter is then passed to the relevant regional director. The regional director may accept the recommendation or could instead refer the decision to the national director. The national director would then make the final decision, although they may consult the national consistency panel (a regular meeting of senior Ofsted leaders, including HMCI).

Appointment of early career teachers in schools in special measures

The [Education \(Induction Arrangements for School Teachers\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) state that ECTs (not including trainee teachers already appointed on employment-based training programmes) may not be appointed to maintained schools or PRUs in special measures, unless HMCI has given permission in writing.

We do not have similar powers in relation to academies in special measures. But, in our report card, we may strongly recommend that an academy should not appoint ECTs.

When a school requires special measures, inspectors consider whether the school should, from that point on, be permitted to appoint ECTs. If they consider that the school can give ECTs the support they need, the lead inspector will include one of the following statements in the inspection report card:

- For maintained schools – ‘Having considered the evidence, the school may appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.’
- For academies – ‘Having considered the evidence, we are of the opinion that the school may appoint early career teachers.’

Otherwise, they will include one of the following statements:

- For maintained schools – ‘The school may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.’
- For academies – ‘We strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.’

We will consider the position again during any monitoring inspection that we carry out. The report of the monitoring inspection will contain similar wording.

At any other time, a school requiring special measures may write to HMCI to ask them to reconsider the position. A letter is sent if permission is granted.

Junior, middle, studio schools and university technical colleges

Some schools start and stop at non-standard ages for pupils, and inspectors will take this into account.

While pupils at junior schools tend to have similar attainment scores to other primary schools, they tend, on average, to have lower progress scores. This may be for a variety of reasons, and inspectors should take this into account when comparing their results with those of pupils in schools that start education from the beginning of key stage 1.

Pupils at middle schools, on average, have lower progress scores at the end of key stage 2 than pupils at primary schools. Due to the age range of pupils at middle schools, pupils have only attended a middle school for a short time before they take their key stage 2 tests and will still have a number of years left at the school. Inspectors take this into account when comparing pupils’ results to those of schools that start educating their pupils from the beginning of key stage 1.

The [Progress 8 accountability measure](#) is not the most appropriate performance indicator for UTCs and studio schools. These establishments generally start educating pupils at age 14 and focus on preparing pupils for their future careers. Inspectors will instead consider other measures, particularly pupils’ destinations when they leave the UTC or studio school.

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 pupils, 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 school's work, its context, and areas for further exploration.

We do not expect schools to have completed any formal self-evaluation using the toolkit. Leaders will not be at a disadvantage if they do not have a written self-evaluation. In the planning call, we will ask leaders about their perceived strengths and areas for development, using the toolkit as a common focal point. This is to help inspectors plan what inspection activities need to be carried out to gather the necessary evidence to:

- celebrate what leaders have identified as strengths
- validate the priorities leaders have identified for improvement, and whether they have an effective plan to bring about the desired impact
- highlight where there is more to do to ensure that all pupils achieve, belong and thrive

Curriculum

The DfE is responsible for setting the rules about what must be in a curriculum. We do not have additional or separate rules.

We evaluate schools that take radically different approaches to the curriculum fairly. Inspectors evaluate a school's curriculum favourably if they have built or adopted a

curriculum with appropriate coverage, content, structure and sequencing, and implemented it effectively.

Inspectors consider the extent to which the curriculum reflects the breadth and ambition of the national curriculum, and how inclusive the curriculum, culture and practices are. This is the case whether the school has devised its own curriculum or uses, for example, commercial or local schemes. It is up to leaders to determine the school's practices and to justify these on their own merits.

Planning, teaching and assessment

We do not prefer any particular method of planning (including lesson or curriculum planning), teaching or assessment. We do not expect a specific format for curriculum planning.

We do not require schools to show us individual lesson plans or previous lesson plans.

We do not grade individual teachers or lessons.

We do not evaluate individual workbooks or expect workbooks to be compiled solely to provide evidence for inspection.

We do not use work scrutiny to evaluate teachers' marking.

We do not specify the frequency, type or volume of marking and feedback.

We do not require schools to make sure that work in pupils' books or folders is of a specific quantity or done at a particular frequency.

We do not require leaders to carry out a specified amount of lesson observation.

Safeguarding

Our safeguarding expectations are those that the DfE has set out in [Keeping children safe in education](#) and [Working together to safeguard children](#).

We do not expect or require the school to apply retrospectively for Disclosure and

Barring Service (DBS) checks and other pre-employment checks for staff who were appointed before DBS requirements were introduced and who have been employed continuously since then.

Evidence/recordings

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

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

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

Artificial intelligence

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

There is no expectation that a school 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.

What we mean by off-rolling

Off-rolling is where leaders take any of the following decisions, and do so in the interests of the school, rather than of the pupil(s) in question:

- removing a pupil from the school roll (such as by moving them to AP) without a formal, permanent exclusion (this may be an unlawful exclusion) or intentionally not following regulations when carrying out a permanent exclusion

- preventing a pupil on the school roll from attending school normally without a formal suspension, for example by sending them home or placing them on a part-time timetable (this may be an unlawful suspension)
- placing pressure on a parent to remove their child from the school roll
- placing pressure on a post-16 student not to continue with their course of study
- not allowing a pupil to attend school normally, without a formal permanent exclusion or suspension

Managed moves and off-site direction can both be effective tools in breaking a cycle of poor behaviour. Neither of these actions are considered off-rolling when they are genuinely made in the pupil's best interests and within the requirements of the statutory guidance. Similarly, a pupil might transfer to the roll of their AP, be dual-registered or dual-coded across 2 schools or providers, or use AP while they remain registered at the school. As long as this is genuinely in their best interests, it is not off-rolling.

If a school removes a pupil from the roll due to a formal permanent exclusion for legitimate reasons, and following the proper processes, this is not off-rolling. The school should refer to the DfE's [school suspensions and permanent exclusions](#) guidance to be clear what processes they must follow and what is permissible.

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 school.

If a school has any concerns during an inspection, including about inspectors' conduct or any potential or perceived conflicts of interest, they should raise these with the lead inspector at the earliest opportunity, to try to resolve issues before the on-site inspection activity is completed.

If leaders cannot resolve their concerns with the lead inspector 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 school or trust should follow the steps set out in our [complaints process](#).

We respond to any complaints before we finalise and send the report card to the school. If the school has highlighted some minor points about clarity or factual accuracy in the draft report card, 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 school after moderation, quality assurance and consistency checking. In most circumstances, this will be within 18 working days of the end of the inspection.

Schools have 5 working days to comment on the draft report card. A school can highlight minor points relating to clarity and/or factual accuracy. If a school submits 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 and other bodies. This takes place only after moderation, quality assurance and consistency checking.

A school can also [submit a complaint](#) seeking a review of the inspection process, including grades given or concerns about inspectors' conduct.

Leaders should share the inspection findings with all governors/trustees, and whoever else 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 parents until the school receives the final report card.

We do not normally issue draft or final report cards to schools or publish final report cards on our website during school holidays.

Once a school receives its final report card, it must make sure the parents of each registered pupil at the school receive a copy within 5 working days. This duty is set out in [section 14\(4\)\(c\) of the Education Act 2005](#). A school may wish to meet the requirement by sharing it digitally through emails to parents and/or by putting a link to it on the school's website. It may also consider whether it needs to provide hard copies for some parents.

We normally publish the final report card on our [reports website](#) 5 working days after

sending it to the school.

How to provide feedback about the inspection

We invite all schools to take part in a voluntary post-inspection survey. We send a link to the survey with the final copy of the report card. This is to help us improve our inspection work.

How we handle evidence and personal information

Inspectors have powers of entry and a right to inspect, as set out in [section 10 of the Education Act 2005](#). Individuals and organisations are legally required to give inspectors access to information required for inspection. Regulations also enable the DfE to share information with us about individual pupils where this information is relevant to school inspections.

Our [privacy policy](#) sets out what personal information we collect in order to inspect a school, 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 and young people, such as registers and lesson plans. They may take notes from, or copies of, this type of supporting information before returning it to an appropriate staff member at the end of the inspection. They may take photographs of pupils' 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

Schools that we judged to be outstanding or good for overall effectiveness before September 2024 can continue to use the specific Ofsted outstanding or good logos until their next full inspection. Once they receive 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 is 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 the 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 also invite schools to take part in research visits (separate from inspections) at other times.

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- 1. The DfE’s [federations guidance on the governance processes](#) sets out the governance process for federations and the leadership structure options, including executive headteachers. [↩](#)

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