

Ofsted's response to its 'Big Listen' Consultation September 2024

Education Leadership Consultant, Claire Evans, helps leaders and governors to fly through the changes.



Ofsted's recent communication has set out how the inspectorate will reset its relationship with the education sector, whilst continuing to raise standards for children and learners. The response states that the following key areas are at its heart and that further consultation on creating a reformed inspection framework for schools will begin in early 2025. This will take the best of the current approach, such as the focus on curriculum, but account for lessons they have learned through the 'Big Listen'.

Remember, the aim is not to undertake developmental work in your school to prepare for an Ofsted inspection but instead to continually undertake improvement work as a school and prepare to tell an Ofsted inspector about its impact.

Key area	Key takeaways	Key prompts Use these prompts to reflect...
Changes to ungraded inspections	<p>The following changes to ungraded inspections will take place from the Autumn Term 2024:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Ofsted are emphasising the importance of professional dialogue between the inspection team and school leadership during inspection.The emphasis of ungraded inspections will be on providing school leaders with opportunities to demonstrate where you have improved and to discuss where you will have work to do.Inspections often place a significant burden on schools, particularly small Primary Schools. From the Autumn Term onwards deep dives will therefore no longer be carried out during ungraded inspections.Inspectors will now gather evidence more flexibly, in a way that is right for your school's context.	<p>Do you regularly incorporate opportunities for professional dialogue between leaders, governors and staff in your school?</p> <p>Do leaders and governors in your school monitor and evaluate where improvements have taken place and confidently discuss plans for future work?</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The extended phone conversation takes place the day before the on-site inspection and is to work out what the inspector will need to do to get the evidence they need. ▪ Headteachers are actively encouraged to have someone else with them, or indeed a few of the senior team so all of you can contribute to this important conversation. ▪ Ofsted have been transparent about the fact that some of the conversations that will take place during ungraded inspections may be challenging. But they will enable you to have a proper discussion, professional to professional, about your school's strengths and areas for improvement. ▪ The agreed areas of focus will influence what will happen during the inspection. At least a couple of these areas will be related to the Quality of Education but won't focus on one subject and won't be deep dives. Instead, inspectors will look at a group of subjects together. <p>Primary School example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus areas will be decided during the initial phone call and tailored to your school. - The inspection is likely to look at Early English and Early Mathematics together as a group to ensure the school is getting the important basics right. - A group of subjects from the wider curriculum might also be looked at. - Usually one or two other areas of focus related to personal development, behaviour, attendance or something including all of these. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ofsted plan to tailor the inspection process and criteria to the education provider, phase and type, where appropriate, to make sure that inspections focus on what really matters for children and learners in your setting. ▪ It is important for you to note that other elements of inspection, including the framework and inspection methodology are not changing. 	<p>In the call:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Talk to the Lead Inspector about some of the things that really matter in your school. ▪ Talk about your school's context. ▪ Talk about the things your school does well. ▪ Talk about the things that have improved since your schools last inspection. ▪ Discuss anything that leaders still need to tackle to make your school the best it can be. ▪ Answer questions from the Lead Inspector that they will have prepared from the data they will have seen in the IDSR, your school website and the school's previous inspection report. ▪ Agree several areas of focus for the inspection (this will be a mixture of areas that the inspector wants to look at and those that are particularly important for your school. For example, something you have been working on or something related to its particular context.)

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<p>Vulnerable children, children with SEND and those with disadvantaged backgrounds</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted plan to define what vulnerability means in their inspection and regulation context to help direct attention and resources to those with the highest need. Due to a widening of outcome gaps, there will be more of a focus on the needs of these pupils with socio-economic disadvantage. They expect to see schools breaking down barriers for disadvantaged and vulnerable children. Schools will not be penalised for using suspension and exclusion legitimately, but Ofsted will focus on whether behaviour policies and practices are appropriate and whether the school uses suitable, high quality, registered Alternative Provision. Ofsted will consult on introducing a specific focus and inspection criterion for inclusion within their new report cards. This will increase their scrutiny and evaluation on whether schools are providing high-quality support for disadvantaged and vulnerable children including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looked-after children. Children with SEND. Evidence based use of Pupil Premium funding and support for children in need. Ofsted's stance is that <i>'Inclusion should not be in tension with having the highest behavioural and academic expectations of children. We should break the barriers to opportunity down by raising standards up.'</i> 	<p><i>'The gap between the outcomes of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils was already widening before the pandemic and it is now at a scandalous level. Ofsted will be unapologetic about putting these children at the heart of our work.'</i></p> <p>Sir Martyn Oliver HMCI Ofsted Sep 2024</p> <p>How is your school breaking down barriers for disadvantaged and vulnerable children?</p> <p>Is your school's commitment to inclusion represented through your vision and values?</p> <p>Where is inclusion visible in your school?</p> <p>Does your school have clear leadership and governance of provision for disadvantaged and vulnerable children?</p>

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Greater focus on pupil outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted will base their assessment of quality on the development, experience and outcomes of your pupils and learners, especially those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable. They want their assessments to support a cycle of continuous improvement, so that everyone connected with schools demands high standards. They will therefore be maintaining the most effective parts of the education inspection framework, such as their focus on the quality of curriculum and teaching. 	<p>In your school improvement planning for 2024-2025, what is your strategy for improving pupils' outcomes?</p> <p>Do your plans outline how the school will improve the development, experience and outcomes of pupils who are disadvantaged or vulnerable?</p> <p>Has your school got an embedded cycle of evaluation and improvement in place that is used by leaders and governors?</p>
Safeguarding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safeguarding will be a key part of the new reviews. A separate safeguarding criterion will be introduced in the report cards that will be separate to Leadership and Management to signal how important it is that all staff should be proactive about it. Ofsted are piloting the following approach for graded inspections from September 2024: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If Safeguarding concerns are identified in a school that appears to be doing well in all other respects, where they consider that leaders are capable of resolving the issues within 3 months, they will withhold their judgement and revisit the school within 3 months to complete the inspection having given the school time to remedy the issues. In these cases, they will send a letter to schools to share with parents the safeguarding failings. 	<p>Does your school have clear leadership and governance of provision for safeguarding?</p> <p>What arrangements does your school have in place for regular internal and external monitoring of safeguarding practice?</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ofsted want to help schools better understand the regulatory requirements so that this anxiety and uncertainty is reduced. They will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make it clearer what inspectors are looking for when they review a school's Single Central Record. - Update their Inspection Handbook to explain the statutory expectations set out in the DfE's Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance. - Consult on having a separate Safeguarding criterion in the new report card. This will be distinct from Leadership and Management to emphasise that all members of staff should be proactive about safeguarding and so that they can show more clearly how the school is keeping children safe. ▪ In line with the upcoming legislation to introduce a 'children not in school' register, Ofsted will be working with the government to introduce a new annual safeguarding, attendance and off-rolling review to ensure children are kept safe and learning wherever they receive their education or care and examine how schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meet their duties around safeguarding - Work to increase attendance - Clamp down on off-rolling 	<p>In your school improvement planning for 2024-2025, what is your strategy for improving pupils' attendance?</p>

The following key areas are a summary of the changes to inspection structure and approach that Ofsted are committing to through their response.

Measures to
reduce
teacher stress
and anxiety

- Ofsted will pilot the following new approach over the Autumn Term 2024 for **graded** and **ungraded notification periods**:
 - All routine inspections will be announced on a Monday, unless an inspection has previously been deferred.
 - Inspections will then take place over the following 2 days.
 - This pilot approach will not apply to monitoring visits or emergency inspections.
- This means leaders will know by Monday afternoon if their school is being inspected that week, helping to reduce the stress of waiting for a notification while the inspection period is open.
- A new policy and clear process has been introduced to allow inspectors to pause an inspection, including when they have concerns about the well-being of a leader / staff member.
- Professionals told Ofsted that they want inspections to be **more constructive, more transparent** and **more manageable**. Ofsted will introduce rubrics that offer clear criteria for inspections, can support leaders to self-evaluate their practice and help empower providers to improve. They will make clearer what providers should improve but not tell them how to improve, recognising leaders' expertise and professional freedom to do what they think is best for their children, while not compromising their role as inspectorate.
- They aim to develop an 'evidence required / to be considered' grid on the back of each rubric as part of their education inspections to help show what is and is not needed for inspection. This should help reduce the workload burden inspection is causing for leaders.
- Ofsted will make the inspection process more collaborative, using the detailed rubrics to guide conversations between inspectors and providers about their strengths and areas for improvement.
- Ofsted is aiming to reduce the burden on subject leaders. Inspectors will still have conversations with them, but these will be less intensive. The inspectors will focus more on a dialogue between headteachers and their senior leaders.
- Ofsted want to better share the evidence that underpins their reports directly with leaders to help them to understand how they reach their conclusions and aim for this to be part of the reforms to the inspection framework that they will be consulting on later this academic year. In schools, they will do user research to look at recording and transcribing the final feedback meetings to share with leaders.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ State-funded Faith schools often face a situation of concurrent, additional inspections and so Ofsted are going to reduce this risk for those with a faith ethos by working with the Section 48 inspectorates to avoid Section 48 and Ofsted inspections taking place concurrently, wherever possible. ▪ Ofsted have implemented the following inspection workforce developments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ofsted have updated their Code of Conduct. - Between January 2024 and March 2024, the entire inspection workforce received mental health awareness training to help them to respond to signs of stress and anxiety. - Ofsted has worked with Mental Health First Aid England to make a bespoke induction package on mental health which now forms part of their general induction for all inspections. - Ongoing training and updates will build inspector's mental health awareness and ensure they know how to embed this in inspection practice throughout their career. - If a provider has concerns they can contact the helpline to speak to a senior person in Ofsted during or immediately after an inspection. A national team has been set up for inspectors and providers to help with any wellbeing concerns and an 'inspection welfare, support and guidance hub' has been established to provide real-time support and other information for inspectors and providers during inspection.
<p>Using a new report card in place of a 'single word judgement'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The single word, overall effectiveness judgement for inspections will be removed from September 2024 and Ofsted will replace it with a report card, or a similar tool, across all the sectors they inspect from September 2025. Schools receiving a graded inspection in the meantime will continue to receive a judgement for each of the remaining areas of quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, personal development and leadership and management. ▪ The new report cards will report on all the areas inspected and will allow for variation, enabling a more nuanced and detailed assessment of the provider's work. ▪ The report card will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Show what a school is doing well. - Tell the school what it can improve on so that leaders can raise standards. - Incorporate area insights of the experiences all children have in their local area to inform parents and carers of the quality of local schools in an easy-to-understand way. - Introduce a new inclusion criterion (consultation).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ofsted have made it clear that, moving forward, they will continue to hold schools to account, clearly identifying those that need to improve or who need support. However, they will improve the way that they describe how schools are performing, removing unnecessarily negative terminology like 'inadequate' and will instead focus on how schools can be better in the context they are working in. ▪ Children told Ofsted that their top 5 priorities were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How happy pupils are at school. - How their school keeps pupils safe and well. - How well teachers teach. - How pupils behave at school. - How well pupils with SEND are supported at school ▪ In response to children's feedback through the consultation, report cards will also include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How schools are supporting children's happiness and well-being. - How all providers in a community collaborate to provide children and learners with a rich and fulfilling experience.
<p>Other changes for Ofsted's structures and ways of working.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ofsted are using the consultation outcome to make changes to their structures and ways of working to ensure greater consistency across their work and to transform the way they recruit and train inspectors. ▪ The development of an Area Insights Service sharing local data that illustrates what it is like to be a child in any given area. This will enable them to better account for the context that a provider is working in and to recognise where providers are achieving in particularly difficult circumstances. ▪ They aim to be more transparent by launching an Ofsted Academy that will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support a positive learning culture and embed Ofsted's values of professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect across its organisation. - Share best practice from teachers and make its own training materials and processes more visible. - Develop an 'insight library' sharing exemplary practice in the sector and publish Ofsted's own 'Areas of research intent'. - Introduce secondment for inspectors to spend time working in providers to ensure that their practice remains current.

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Their regional model has created some inconsistency, so they are now setting up 6 national hubs that will specialise in specific parts of their work:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Complaints about Ofsted (improvements have been made to this process)- Inspection welfare, support and guidance- Quality assurance and professional standards- Enhanced consistency and moderation- Regulation and delivery prioritisation- Provider intelligence and area insights▪ These will be led by experienced regional directors to ensure a consistent, centralised approach. On Fridays, Ofsted's Deputy Chief Operating Officer (Delivery) and National Director will lead a rigorous consistency review of inspection findings.▪ Ofsted want to inspect groups of schools and will be working with the government on upcoming legislation to allow them to inspect MATs, possibly expanding to cover all school groups. Their belief is that inspection should align with the governance structure of schools and the bodies responsible for supporting leaders.▪ Ofsted have set up 7 external reference groups to give them independent advice and challenge from leading experts across the full breadth of their work:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Curriculum, teaching and assessment- Behaviour and attendance- Inclusion- Well-being of leaders and staff- Early years regulation and social care- Insights and evidence (education)- Insights and evidence (social care)▪ Ofsted will be publishing the new inspection handbooks in September and will produce some informative webinars expanding on the information provided so far.▪ The current School inspection handbook (updated 5 April 2024) provides clarification of the differences between 'graded' and 'ungraded' inspections. |
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This information has been collated using information taken from the following articles which can be accessed and read in full online:

[Gov.UK Ofsted](#)

[Hearing feedback, accepting criticism and building a better Ofsted: the response to the Big Listen \(Beyond Schools, the full article includes similar update information on: Children's social care, Special educational needs and disabilities and alternative provision, Early years, Further education and skills and Teacher professional development and education\)](#)

[Updated 3 September 2024](#)

[3 September 2024 Press Release](#)

[Building a better Ofsted: the response to the Big Listen](#)

[17 July 2024 Blog Post](#)

[Changes to ungraded inspections](#)

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Claire Evans is an experienced Headteacher and Governance Professional who provides help and support through her Education Leadership Consultancy 'Ethically Led'. Her work is vision led, encouraging, enabling and empowering all leaders to fly. Whether you're new, established or even considering leadership or governance within education, bespoke services are specially designed with regard to your unique context and cover **training, mentoring, appraising, consulting, wellbeing and governing**.

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