

Nursery Management

Ofsted

## The latest Ofsted inspection summary 2025: 11 things nursery managers should know

by [Louise Jackson](#) | 9 min of reading | 07 February 2025



Ofsted has released new information about how schools and early years providers will be inspected in 2025 and beyond. Ofsted's consultation period started on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February and will end on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April, lasting 12 weeks.

The latest changes result from the response to the [Big Listen](#) and the need for system reform. The Department for Education (DfE) has been clear about managing expectations that the whole system won't be changed overnight. The latest Ofsted changes are focused on 'evolution, not revolution.'

**In this article, we share the 11 key changes to be aware of as a nursery manager or owner.**

### IN THIS ARTICLE:

- 11 things nursery managers should know about Ofsted's inspection changes
  - 1. New Ofsted Report Cards
  - 2. Ofsted's 5-point colour scale
  - 3. A child's experience in your setting
  - 4. No more ungraded Ofsted inspections
  - 5. Early years education inspection toolkit for Ofsted
  - 6. Safeguarding is a separate category
  - 7. No more Ofsted deep dives
  - 8. No formal lesson observations and individual gradings
  - 9. The new EYFS inspection framework
  - 10. Ofsted local area considerations
  - 11. A single point of contact for early years in Ofsted

# 11 things nursery managers should know about Ofsted's inspection changes

## 1. New Ofsted Report Cards

In 2024, we saw [big changes in how Ofsted inspects schools and nurseries](#). The most notable changes were removing single-word judgements and introducing the [latest Ofsted school handbook](#).

Ofsted report cards will replace the single-word grade we've been used to for many years. Schools and nurseries will no longer be known as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' but will be given a detailed report card after their inspection, where each judgement area will be graded on a 5-point colour scale.



The proposed use of report cards aims to highlight in more detail what a school and nursery do well and specific areas for improvement. The government wants greater quality (and quantity) of information for parents and older learners to help decide when choosing an educational provider.

**So, what will an Ofsted report card look like? We're glad you asked.**

The report card will include an overview of the nursery and what it is like for a child attending the setting. There will be more information about the local area and characteristics of the children enrolled, like disadvantaged numbers, SEND characteristics, and school attendance information.



**Reminder:** For now, these changes will only apply to maintained schools and nurseries attached to schools. However, the aim is for all educational settings, from nurseries to further education colleges, to have the same reporting systems soon.

The judgement areas used to be quality of education, personal development, leadership and management and behaviour and attitudes.

The four key areas for inspection will be replaced by evaluation areas. Under [the new Ofsted guidance](#), schools have nine evaluation areas, nurseries have eight and through settings that include early years and sixth forms have 11.

### Ofsted's latest evaluation areas for early years (and schools):

- Leadership and governance
- Curriculum
- Developing teaching
- Achievement
- Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines
  - For schools, this is just Behaviours and Attitudes
- Children's welfare and well-being
  - For schools, Personal Development and well-being
- Inclusion
- Safeguarding
- Schools also have:
  - Early years in schools (where applicable)
  - Sixth form in school (where applicable)



## 2. Ofsted's 5-point colour scale

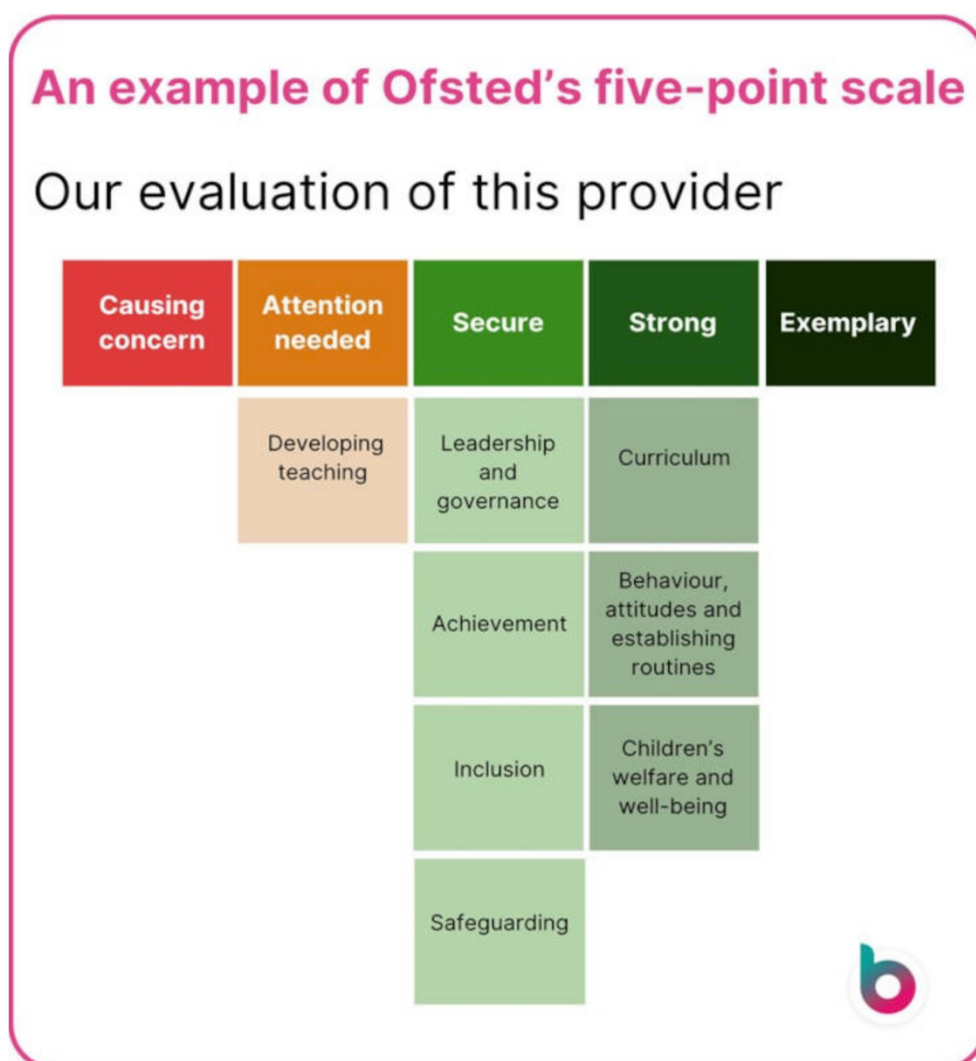
The new 5-point scale for Ofsted inspections aims to give a clearer, more balanced view of how schools and nurseries are performing. Moving away from the current ratings of outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate, the 5-point scale splits up the most commonly graded 'good' category.

77% of schools are in the 'good' category. In reality, one school could be just out of the 'requires improvement' category, while another is on the cusp of 'outstanding'.

When Ofsted analysed the feedback from the [Big Listen](#) about the current inspection process, several options were considered. One was a binary 'met/have not met' system.

However, with the intention of driving high standards and celebrating the first signs of improvement, the 5-point system allows all school stakeholders a visual overview of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.

**Below is an example of how the 5-point colour scale would look on the new report cards.**



### 3. A child's experience in your setting

Following the response from children and learners in the Big Listen survey, Ofsted is focusing on the concept of **'What is it like to be a child in this school or nursery'**.

They'll be looking at the provision planned and delivered in your setting, still using [the 3Is \(intent, implementation and impact\)](#) to create the provision you offer.

**You should consider how children from different economic backgrounds, children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and other characteristics are supported in your setting.**



### 4. No more ungraded Ofsted inspections

Section 8 inspections ran for one day and were used as a 'top-up' inspection for schools that have previously been identified as providers delivering a high standard of education. Section 8 ungraded inspections were used to 'check' if the school is still performing at a high level.

**To clarify the expected inspection window and ensure consistency across all schools and nurseries, all inspections going forward will last the full 2 days.**

Where practice is consistently secure across the school, all children and learners are supported and progress well in all areas. The term that should be recognised here is 'working above and beyond the legal and professional standards expected of them'.

#### Secure

The majority of schools are expected to fall within this category. It has been thought that the secure rating is the new 'good' rating. The standard of education at this level is secure, including meeting the legal standards and following non-statutory guidance.

#### Attention needed

Inconsistency of standards and outcomes will lead to a rating of 'attention needed.' If impact is limited or legal requirements are not securely met, schools and nurseries can expect to fall into the attention needed category. This area might also include those evaluation areas showing the first signs of improvement but are not yet secure.

#### Causing concern

This is the lowest grading possible, it highlights urgent action where the Department for Education (DfE) will step in to provide immediate support for school improvement.



## 5. Early years education inspection toolkit for Ofsted

For years, early years providers, and other specialist settings like special schools, have raised concerns that the inspection process is a one-size-fits-all system. Inspection frameworks (and inspector knowledge) should mirror the provider phase and type.

Provider phase and type [inspection toolkits](#) have been developed to clarify to school leaders and nursery management what the inspection will be specifically focusing on.

**There are 25 evaluation areas in the early years education inspection toolkit, with a further 5 areas in safeguarding.**

These operating guides are designed to help inspectors apply their judgements effectively to the provider they are assessing.



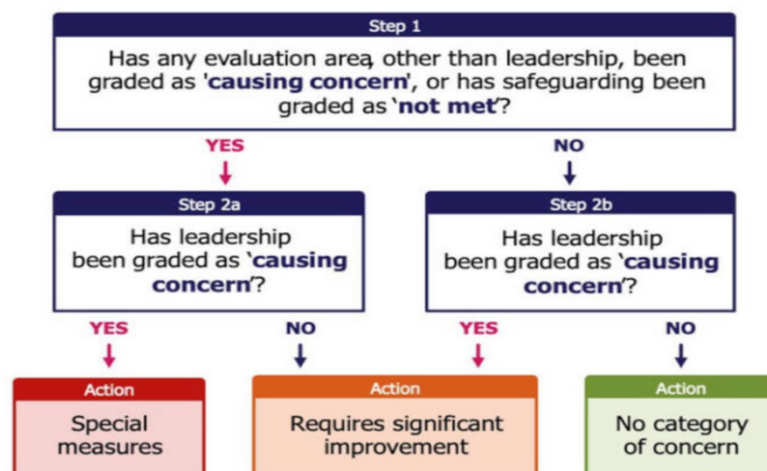
## 6. Safeguarding is a separate category

Historically, safeguarding has been threaded through all judgement areas, coming under the health and safety umbrella.

Under the latest Ofsted updates, safeguarding will become a separate category. The evaluation process for assessing a school or nursery's safeguarding provision is binary, and the setting will be deemed to have 'met' or 'not met' the legal and expected standard of safeguarding.

This changes [how Ofsted inspects safeguarding provision in early years](#). Although safeguarding has always been a priority, if it is now found to be 'not meeting the legal and expected standards', it will automatically place a setting into 'special measures' or 'requires significant improvement'.

**Figure 1: Placing a school into a category of concern**

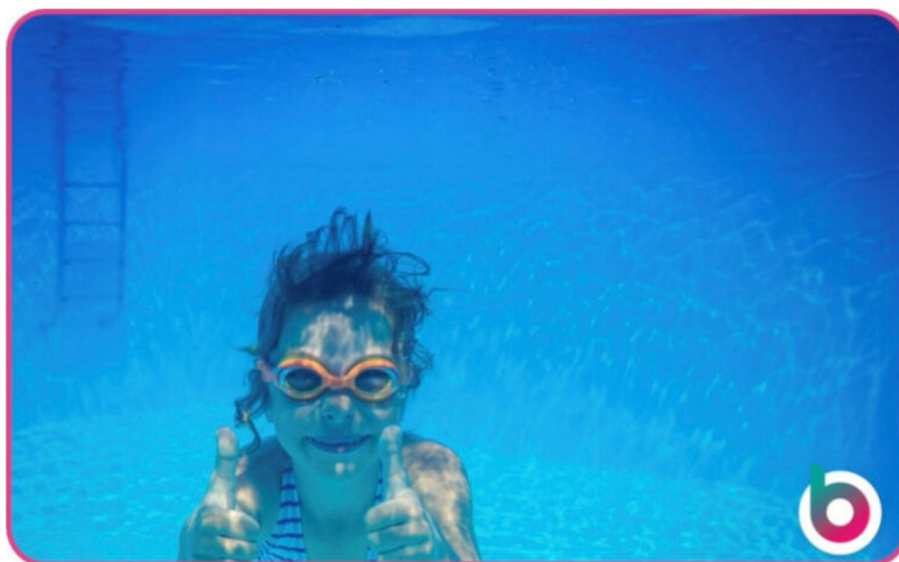


## 7. No more Ofsted deep dives

The announcement that Ofsted will no longer do deep dives in school inspections might be met with a mixed response. When a school has a significant strength in a subject, the chance to have a deep dive in this area might be welcomed.

However, for the subject leaders (including early years leaders), deep dives placed enormous pressure on their shoulders, and along with it, some significant paperwork preparations.

**Ofsted inspectors will now use the time previously spent on deep dives to learn the setting's context and tailor the inspection to their needs.**



## 8. No formal lesson observations and individual gradings

There will still be no formal lesson observations that take place on an Ofsted inspection. Formal lesson plans are not required to be provided. The inspector should gather evidence through observations, conversations with children and discussions with the nursery team.

## 9. The new EYFS inspection framework

More attention has been paid to early years structures (funding, qualifications, and inspections) than in the last ten years. The government's stance on education is that 'children only get one chance at an education'.

'All children deserve to be safe, happy and cared for. That is the bare minimum. But we should strive for more.'

Noticed in the [common Ofsted inspection themes for 2024](#), communication and language and numeracy skills are high on the agenda for 2025 and beyond.

The government's international research '[Best start in life](#)', highlights the need for communication and language and early Maths skills for all children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

We can expect to see a new early years inspection framework released, building on the current principles underpinned by the EYFS statutory framework but allowing more flexibility due to the nature of the nursery setting.

Ofsted inspection practices in nurseries are expected to be adapted to be 'bespoke and proportional to the size of the setting and the number of hours they care for children.'

## 10. Ofsted local area considerations

Along with concerns about the suitability of the current inspection framework for specialist settings like nurseries, educational professionals feel Ofsted inspections can miss key contextual information when inspecting the settings.

Ofsted has stated they will consider more local area information when inspecting schools and nurseries. School and local area information will be included on the Ofsted report card.

As shown in the example below, parents can see key school and nursery information like capacity figures, age ranges, address, characteristics of SEND children, disadvantaged children figures and attendance information (for state-funded schools).

The screenshot displays an Ofsted report card for a 'Secondary School'. At the top, a dark blue header contains the school's name, its Unique reference number (URN) EG12345, and its address: School Lane, Old Town, Home County, HC4 5DF. Below this, the main section is titled 'School information and reports'. It includes a note that the inspection took place on 24 June 2023, with a link to 'Download the full inspection report'. A section titled 'What is it like to attend this school?' provides a narrative overview of the school's performance, mentioning increased ambition for pupils, improved learning, and support for SEND pupils. To the right, a sidebar lists key school details: Type (Secondary comprehensive), Category (Academy converter), Age range (11 to 18), Pupil gender (Mixed), Sixth form student gender (Mixed), Local Authority (Home County Council), and Multi Academy Trust (Example School Trust). A map is visible at the bottom of the sidebar.

**Secondary School**  
Unique reference number (URN): EG12345  
Address: School Lane, Old Town, Home County, HC4 5DF

**School information and reports**

This inspection took place on 24 June 2023. [Download the full inspection report](#)

**What is it like to attend this school?**

Over recent years, leaders and staff have increased their ambition for pupils at secondary school. Pupils study a wide range of subjects, and many enjoy doing so. They are attentive to their learning and eagerly participate in lessons. Pupils' achievement is improving but this is not fully reflected in their performance in national assessments and qualifications.

Leaders ensure that pupils who are falling behind receive the help they need to catch up. The school's improved support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) means the achievement of these pupils is improving also.

**Secondary School**  
Unique reference number (URN): EG12345  
Type: Secondary comprehensive  
Category: Academy converter  
Age range: 11 to 18  
Pupil gender: Mixed  
Sixth form student gender: Mixed  
Local Authority: Home County Council  
Multi Academy Trust: [Example School Trust](#)

## 11. A single point of contact for early years in Ofsted

As we know, [the government has plans](#) to introduce 3,000 more nursery provisions on primary school sites. With the increase in early years provision, there will now be an early years point of contact in Ofsted.

With new initiatives possibly in the pipeline (like supporting childminders to run without domestic premises), the need for a contact point is apparent. The point of contact will join up the early years regulation and inspection work under one post.

Although many educational professionals might be dubious about the proposed changes, there is potential for the inspection process to become more streamlined and simple. Nurseries may find the transparency of the new 5-point colour-coded system celebrates their unique areas of strength. In turn, these recognition points can attract more prospective parents.