

News release

STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01 TUESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2025

Raising standards for children, better for parents and fairer on professionals: Ofsted confirms changes to education inspection and unveils new-look report cards

- *New 5-point grading scale, including the new 'exceptional' grade, designed to raise standards, confirmed following support from parents.*
- *Parents and carers to receive the detailed information about nurseries, schools and colleges they've asked for, with strengths and areas for improvement highlighted.*
- *Schools and colleges with identified areas for improvement to receive additional monitoring inspections, to ensure swift improvements are made.*
- *Nurseries and childminders to be inspected more frequently, to ensure all children receive the best start in life.*
- *Disadvantaged and vulnerable children at the heart of reforms, with a focus on 'inclusion' in every inspection.*
- *Increased focus on professionals' well-being and workload through a more collaborative approach to inspection.*

From November, parents will be given more detail about their children's education with the introduction of new-look report cards, Ofsted has confirmed today.

Inspectors will award grades on a 5-point scale across a wider range of areas, providing parents with more granularity and nuance about a provider's performance and helping to raise standards for children and learners.

The very best practice across early years (EY), schools, further education (FE) and skills, and initial teacher education (ITE) will be recognised with a new 'exceptional' grade – indicating other providers could learn from it.

Independent polling from YouGov showed strong parental support for the new approach to grading. Almost 7 out of 10 of parents surveyed said they prefer the new-look report cards to Ofsted's current inspection reports. Just 15% said they preferred the old system. And nearly 9 out of 10 parents said the report cards are easy to understand.

Following feedback from parents and education professionals, the 5 grades have been renamed 'urgent improvement', 'needs attention', 'expected standard', 'strong standard', and the new highest grade of 'exceptional'.

As part of the suite of reforms to raise standards for children and learners, Ofsted has committed to monitoring inspections of schools and FE and skills providers where provision is not currently at the expected standard in all areas. This will

ensure that, where areas for improvement are identified, action is taken quickly to raise standards.

In the early years, Ofsted will increase the frequency of inspections from every 6 years to every 4. This increase will be twinned with an enhanced focus on the quality of education and care, ensuring every child is given the best start in life.

Since becoming Chief Inspector, Sir Martyn Oliver has expressed his determination to do more to highlight the experiences of disadvantaged and vulnerable children. Today, Ofsted has confirmed that every education inspection will focus on provision for disadvantaged children, those with a special educational need or disability (SEND), and those who are known to social care - through a specific grade for 'inclusion'.

The inspectorate has listened carefully to feedback from professionals, making a number of changes and improvements to its proposed approach following consultation.

Importantly, Ofsted has acted on concerns about workload and wellbeing. Alongside the consultation, Ofsted commissioned an independent review of wellbeing by Sinéad McBrearty, Chief Executive of Education Support, which is also published today. In response, Ofsted has set out measures to address her recommendations, including adding an additional inspector to school inspections.

Ofsted's revisions to education inspections will support its core purpose - to inspect schools, early years and education providers objectively, in the best interests of children, their parents and carers - while taking account of the needs and wellbeing of education professionals. The inspectorate hopes these measures will be welcomed and has committed to continue engaging with parents and professionals, learning from their feedback and listening to constructive criticism to improve.

His Majesty's Chief Inspector, Sir Martyn Oliver said:

"Ofsted exists to keep children safe and improve their lives.

"Children deserve the best possible education; their parents deserve the best possible information and education professionals deserve to have their work fairly assessed by experts. The changes we are presenting today aim to achieve all three of these things.

"Our new report cards will give parents a clearer understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement at the places where their children learn. We will work with the professionals in schools, early years and further education to help them showcase the best of what they do - and help them identify where they can improve."

More details:

The consultation

Following last year's [Big Listen](#), Ofsted set out an ambition to reset relationships with the professionals it inspects and regulates, while retaining the confidence of the children, parents and carers it works for. This included a commitment to revise the education inspection framework and introduce new report cards.

In February 2025, [a 12-week consultation set out a series of proposals for change](#), covering early years, state-funded schools, non-association independent schools, FE and skills, and ITE providers.

Ofsted received more than 6,500 responses to the online consultation from parents and education professionals. Feedback was also gathered through focus groups and roundtables; in-depth discussions with experts; test visits to volunteer settings, and independent qualitative and quantitative research.

The reforms

The reforms announced today are based on this rich and varied evidence. Alongside the consultation response, Ofsted has published the final versions of the education inspection toolkits and new operational guides, which describe how the revised methodology will change the look and feel of inspection.

The reforms will come into effect in November 2025. Key changes include:

- A **new inspection report card** to highlight excellence and identify areas for improvement - driving high and rising standards. The report card will provide more nuance for parents and providers, combining at-a-glance grades with narrative summaries of strengths and areas for improvement. Following extensive feedback and user testing of February's proposed version, the report card has been redesigned to make it more accessible, particularly on mobile devices.
- A **new 5-point grading scale** to set high expectations, while encouraging improvement where it is needed. In response to feedback from professionals and parents about the proposed terminology, the final set of grades has changed to:
 - Urgent improvement
 - Needs attention
 - Expected standard
 - Strong standard
 - Exceptional

- A **wider range of evaluation areas** than in current reports. But following feedback, the number of core evaluation areas has been streamlined.
- A new **'exceptional' grade to identify the very best provision in the country**. In a change from the initial proposals, providers will not be asked to submit case studies for approval. Instead, inspectors will evaluate 'exceptional' practice by applying the toolkit, subject to the usual quality assurance and consistency checking.
- A new **'inclusion' evaluation area to help break down barriers to learning and well-being**. Inspectors will evaluate whether education providers are providing high-quality support for *all* children and learners, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those who have SEND, and those who are known to children's social care.
- **New inspection toolkits for grading providers**. In response to feedback, the definitions of grades have been tightened to more clearly differentiate between them. The standards covered in the toolkits have also been slimmed down to provide greater clarity on the evidence inspectors will assess.
- A **new inspection methodology to reduce workload for the education workforce**. The toolkits are designed to assess the professional standards, statutory and non-statutory requirements already placed on schools, early years and FE and skills providers. New operating guides set out the times at which inspectors can arrive on site and the suggested latest times they should be departing, to cap the length of inspection days.
- **Evaluation of providers' work to support and promote leader and staff well-being**. This will be considered as part of the leadership and governance evaluation area.
- Inspection findings to be **grounded in a clear understanding of each provider's unique circumstances**. The new operating guides set out how leaders and inspectors will reflect on a provider's context and priorities.
- A **new online insights platform: 'Ofsted - Explore an Area'**, giving parents key information about the education and care services in their local area.
- A **new system for monitoring schools where improvement is needed**, to offer reassurance to parents and carers. These inspections will allow providers to improve 'needs attention' grades and have improvements recognised more quickly.
- To drive **consistent and fair inspections**, school, independent school, and FE and skills **inspections will be led by full-time His Majesty's Inspectors**. These experienced inspectors will oversee the inspection, building a professional relationship with the leaders (including any nominee)

to deliver a more collaborative experience. In addition, Ofsted will introduce a programme of work to assess consistency in school inspections, including having a senior inspector shadow a sample of live inspections to guide and advise the inspection team. Post inspection, any initial differences between the senior inspector and the team will be analysed.

- **Increased resource and training for inspection teams will drive quality and consistency:** an additional school inspector will add capacity to the team, allowing the lead inspector to spend more time with leaders (including any nominee), as well as overseeing and quality assuring the inspection.

As part of the revised approach, inspectors will put more emphasis on parental engagement – particularly in schools.

Jason Elsom, Chief Executive of Parentkind, the UK's largest parent charity, said:

"Ofsted has shown that it is listening to parents. When Sir Martyn Oliver became Chief Inspector, he promised reform - and today we are seeing Ofsted begin to deliver on that promise.

"We know that strong partnerships between home and school make a huge difference to children's wellbeing and outcomes. Yet, too often, resource-stretched schools have been unable to prioritise parental engagement when other performance measures have taken precedence.

"The new inspection framework for schools in England changes that. For the first time, parental engagement is given clear priority: no school will be able to achieve top marks unless it demonstrates that it has got this right. This is a significant step forward.

"Ofsted deserves credit for making space for parents in its new framework, and schools will now be expected to reflect this in their work. Above all, this move will go a long way towards rebuilding trust between schools and parents."

Sir Jon Coles, Chief Executive of United Learning, England's largest academy trust, said:

"It is important to our school system, to parental confidence and ultimately to the success of children that there is high quality, trusted, independent and rigorous reporting to parents about the quality of their local schools. I am pleased that the new inspection framework looks set to provide this."

Timeline

The reforms will take effect from 10 November 2025 for early years, state-funded schools, and FE and skills inspections. For ITE and non-association independent schools, inspections will commence under the renewed framework from January 2026. There will be no routine inspections of state-maintained schools and FE and skills providers in the first half of the autumn term, as the previous cycle of inspections was completed in July.

When inspections of state-funded schools begin in November, Ofsted has agreed with the Secretary of State to prioritise schools that volunteer for inspection. Routine inspections will be introduced on or after 1 December, depending on the number of schools that volunteer. There will be no routine inspections during the week before Christmas, to allow for inspector training.

The implementation and impact of the reforms will be tested through a continual programme of evaluation, which will include an externally commissioned review of the operation of the renewed framework.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

1. Links to inspection toolkits and operating guides
 - Early years: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-inspection-toolkit-operating-guide-and-information>
 - State-funded schools: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-toolkit-operating-guide-and-information>
 - Non-association independent schools: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-school-inspection-toolkit-operating-guide-and-information>
 - FE and skills: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-and-skills-inspection-toolkit-operating-guide-and-information>
 - ITE: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-education-ite-inspection-toolkit-operating-guide-and-framework>
2. In 2024, Ofsted conducted the largest ever consultation in its history, designed to hear from parents, carers, children and professionals to hear how it should change and improve. Findings can be accessed here: [Hearing feedback, accepting criticism and building a better Ofsted: the response to the Big Listen - GOV.UK](#)
3. YouGov conducted a survey of parents' views of the proposals for report cards. More information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/independent-research-shows-high-parent-support-for-ofsteds-report-card-proposals>