

The **annual report** of
His Majesty's Chief Inspector
of Education, Children's Services
and Skills **2023/24**

Ofsted

The annual report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2023/24

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of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

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5 December 2024

The Rt Hon. Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT



Dear Secretary of State

The annual report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector 2023/24

I am very pleased to present my first annual report as His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills.

This report is based on Ofsted's work during the year September 2023 to August 2024. I began my appointment at Ofsted on 1 January this year. Since then, I have continued the work begun under my predecessor to evolve and improve the way we inspect and regulate. In the spring, we carried out the largest and most extensive consultation in Ofsted's history, the Big Listen, to further inform our plans.

The outcome of the Big Listen dovetailed with the election of your government in the summer. There was common ground between the response to the Big Listen and the manifesto commitments of the government – not least the determination to replace Ofsted's grading system with a more detailed report card. We will launch a consultation on our approach to education inspections in the new year.

For that reason, we have slimmed down this year's annual report. We have decided not to include analysis of the grade profiles, as in previous years. Instead, this report provides a commentary on England's education and children's social care services, informed by Ofsted's collected insights and research, as detailed in the bibliography.

I hope you find this report informative. I look forward to working with you and the Department for Education as we collectively strive to raise standards in education and social care, and improve the lives of children and learners – especially the most disadvantaged.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martyn Oliver". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Sir Martyn Oliver
His Majesty's Chief Inspector





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Introduction

This is my first annual report as His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills, having joined Ofsted in January 2024. It comes at a time of change. A change for Ofsted, certainly – but also a change of government and a new focus for wider education and social care policies.

My annual report reflects this period of change. Earlier this year, Ofsted undertook its largest ever consultation on the way we carry out our work. Called the Big Listen, it sought the views of the sectors we inspect and regulate, and the people for whom we work – parents, carers and, crucially, children and learners themselves.

In September, we published our response to the Big Listen, detailing the many changes we are making. Foremost among these changes, and in line with the pledges made by the new government, is the removal of the overall effectiveness grade from all of our inspection work.

In September, we removed overall effectiveness grades from our inspections of state-funded schools, as a first step to this wider reform. In the new year, we will formally consult on a new framework for all our education inspections – for early years and further education (FE) and skills providers, as well as schools. We will move away from our established grading measures to introduce a report card that will provide more detail and nuance about the institutions we inspect.

This will be followed, from 2026, by changes to the way we inspect social care, from local authorities to children's homes. Again, we'll be making sure we keep in step with changes to wider government policy, the children's social care system and, most importantly, the needs of children.

Our recent annual reports have focused on the aggregated grading judgements we have made for different types of providers, and on the performance of our inspection frameworks. This approach is less helpful in the current context of change and all of this data can be found in our official statistics publications on our website.

This year's report will instead summarise my observations, as a new HMCI, on the current position of education and children's social care in England. In this, I am informed and supported by the excellent work of my team: from the inspectors, to the policy analysts and researchers, as well as the wider support staff who make our work possible. I thank them all. The bibliography in this annual report summarises our published work this year, which provides the foundation to this commentary.



Sir Martyn Oliver
His Majesty's Chief Inspector

Priorities

Children, along with older learners, are at the heart of our work. So, we want to think about education and social care in the same way that they experience it: as interlinked stages in their life. This report will follow the phases of a child's life, considering all of the services they might come into contact with along the way to adulthood.

Ofsted is the only organisation that visits the individual providers responsible for a child's education, care and support, and is able to describe the state of the nation. We want to use our unique perspective to help make a difference for every child.

To make sure we achieve this goal, I have two major priorities as His Majesty's Chief Inspector, which I set out in my first speech in the role.¹

The first is about seeing the bigger picture of all the services that influence a young life. I want Ofsted to do more to draw the threads together: to identify the gaps in the system through which children might fall, and highlight the opportunities that exist to improve their life chances.

For example, in a recent joint targeted area inspection with partner inspectorates we looked at serious youth violence. We set out the need for joint working between multiple agencies to properly identify and respond to serious youth violence and to tackle the factors that fuel it. We were able to identify and share some strong practice.

1. Sir Martyn Oliver's speech at the 2024 ASCL Annual Conference, Ofsted, March 2024;
<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/sir-martyn-olivers-speech-at-the-2024-ascl-annual-conference>.

We want to encourage more cooperation and better regional and national planning. And, when something does go wrong, we want to make sure accountability lies in the right place, whether that's the governance of schools or the leadership of multi-academy trusts; the commissioning of services for children by local authorities; the management of nursery chains and college groups; or the funding of the entire education and social care system by the government.



My second priority is a relentless focus on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children. We should do that because it's morally right, and also because it is a great barometer for the overall quality of the education and social care systems. As I've said many times: if you get it right for the most vulnerable, you get it right for everyone.

So, we want to make sure every child has the best chances and opportunities, whether they're achieving highly and need to be stretched, or struggling and in need of support. We also want to make sure we do more to understand the context that providers are working in, and the unique challenges and opportunities they face. This is not about lowering standards in challenging areas – quite the opposite. We want every child to have a high standard of education, no matter their background. Understanding context will help us recognise excellence, not penalise postcodes. It will ultimately help raise educational standards for all.



Birth to school

For some children, interaction with services we inspect and regulate begins at birth. That's true for children who need protection or go into care at a very early age. This year, we carried out our first thematic inspection of six regional adoption agencies (RAAs).² We have a history of inspecting adoption services run by local authorities and others, but this was our first interaction with the regional model.

Adoption practice is considered a strength in children's social care and the RAAs generally did good work in recruiting adopters and matching them to children. But as with so many aspects of children's services, adoption remains an area where demand far outstrips supply, which hampers good work. The services also struggle to recruit and retain skilled staff, which again is a theme that comes up time and again across the areas we inspect and regulate.

Many children come into our line of sight when they go to a childminder or a nursery. Our responsibilities for children's social care and early years provision are both as the inspectorate and the regulator. In other words, we assess quality through inspection, and we are also responsible for registering new providers and for taking regulatory action when their work is sub-standard or unsafe – up to and including restricting a provider's ability to operate, or cancelling their registration altogether.



2. 'Regional adoption agencies: thematic inspection report', Ofsted, 26 March 2024; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regional-adoption-agencies-thematic-inspection-report>.

Childcare deserts and oases

Access to childcare is, rightly, a high priority for government. It can have great benefits for children, and for families by supporting parents back into work. We are concerned that many families struggle to access high-quality early childcare. This year, we undertook highly innovative work with the Office for National Statistics to analyse and map out childcare accessibility by neighbourhood across England.³

As well as allowing parents to look at the number of options available to them in their area, this work highlighted significant regional and local differences in access to high-quality early childcare, or ‘childcare deserts and oases’.

We did further analysis looking back in time.⁴ This showed that access to childcare in England has decreased, on average, in the past four years. But the change in access has not been evenly spread across the country. Some regions have been more affected – the North East, the East Midlands, and Yorkshire and The Humber were the worst affected.

Table 1: Neighbourhoods in local authorities with the highest proportion of deserts and oases, March 2020 to March 2024

Top five childcare deserts	Top five childcare oases
Torbay	Wokingham
Walsall	Wandsworth
Sunderland	Bromley
Slough	Richmond upon Thames
Hartlepool	Brighton and Hove

1. We tracked how childcare accessibility has changed from March 2020 to March 2024. Childcare deserts are neighbourhoods with ‘persistently low’ or ‘low and variable accessibility’. Childcare oases are neighbourhoods with ‘consistently high’ or ‘high and variable accessibility’.

What is particularly concerning is that, on average, there is a greater incidence of low incomes and high child poverty in ‘desert’ areas (with lower access to childcare) – in other words, neighbourhoods that might be described as disadvantaged. Conversely, the ‘oases’ tend to be better-off areas, where parents have higher qualifications and are more likely to be employed. This is worth noting because interventions such as government-funded entitlements to childcare may not be effective for families who simply find it much harder to get their children to a childminder or nursery in their local area.

We will continue with this work and build it into a new service we are developing to present everything we know about education and children’s services, by area. This will help decision-makers target efforts and resources towards the areas in most need. It will also allow Ofsted to better consider the local context when we inspect and assess the quality of provision. For example, if there is poor-performing primary education in a given area, the tool might show that this stems from local weaknesses in early education.

3. ‘Childcare accessibility by neighbourhood’, Office for National Statistics and Ofsted, June 2024; <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/articles/childcareaccessibilitybyneighbourhood/2024-06-04>.

This only includes registered childcare places at nurseries and other group settings, and childminders. It does not include school-based places.

4. ‘Changes in access to childcare in England’, Ofsted, October 2024; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-access-to-childcare-in-england/commentary-changes-in-access-to-childcare-in-england>.

The best start in life

The first few years of a young life are when the building blocks for all their future learning and development are laid. Getting that right can make a massive difference to a child's life chances and opportunities.

That's why we've recently published the final part of our 'Best start in life' research review, looking at best practice for children from birth to four, as well as our 'Strong foundations in the first years of school' report, focusing on Reception and key stage 1.⁵

Our reports identify some of the key factors of an effective early years education. These include a careful consideration of curriculum content and the use of assessment, and an understanding of how children learn and make connections. This is vital work. Early education is too important to be left to chance. A high-quality education benefits all children, particularly the most vulnerable.

Our inspections show that the vast majority of early years providers are doing a good job for children, developing them socially, emotionally and physically, improving communication and language skills, and preparing them well for school. Unfortunately, we know that some children do not get the start they deserve. The impact of that reverberates for years. Primary schools report that some children continue to lag behind with their language, communication and social skills by the time they start school. This has undoubtedly not been helped by the legacy of the pandemic lockdowns, but the disadvantage gap has long been a concern.

The widely recognised cracks in the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system also start to show in the early years. The limited amount of specialist support available makes the earliest education so vital to help prevent gaps from forming or widening. It's so important that nurseries, for example, support the development of their youngest children with the same vigour that they prepare their older children for school.

5. 'Best start in life part 3: the 4 specific areas of learning', <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-start-in-life-a-research-review-for-early-years>, and 'Strong foundations in the first years of school', <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strong-foundations-in-the-first-years-of-school> (both Ofsted, October 2024).

Recruitment and retention

A major barrier to increasing the supply of childcare and nursery provision, and to making sure it has the biggest impact for children, is the ongoing challenge of recruitment and retention in the early years sector.

High turnover and difficulty recruiting high-quality staff can present a significant or even insurmountable problem for nurseries. And the disruption and inconsistency that results from frequent changes in staff can also have a negative impact on children's learning and well-being.

Issues like high turnover and incomplete inductions can particularly affect the most vulnerable children. Staff may miss important information about a child's specific needs, gaps in a child's learning, or even signs of abuse. Children with SEND can struggle more than most with a lack of consistency in their key person.

Many of these challenges are exacerbated by the steady increase in unqualified staff in recent years. In nurseries, one in five staff (22%) do not have a level 2, level 3 or accredited graduate early years qualification. In 2018, the figure was 14%.⁶ Most of this increase can be attributed to a decline in the number of staff holding a level 3 qualification.

The government is introducing measures to make it easier for early years practitioners to take an experience-based route into the sector. It's important that the quality of training and development is not compromised. In the thankfully rare cases that we find ineffective safeguarding to be an issue at an early years provider, it's often because staff lack the basic understanding of how to respond to, and report, concerns about children.

Through our work, we have identified some of the ways these workforce challenges are evident, and what some providers are doing to mitigate the negative impacts.⁷ This includes prioritising specific training and development in areas like identifying additional needs, and safeguarding. However, as in so many areas of social care and education, recruitment and retention issues are a persistent drag on the improvement of services.

6. 'Education provision: children under 5 years of age', Department for Education, July 2024; <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/education-provision-children-under-5>.

7. 'Maintaining quality early years provision in the face of workforce challenges', Ofsted, May 2024; <https://earlyyears.blog.gov.uk/2024/05/13/maintaining-quality-early-years-provision-in-the-face-of-workforce-challenges>.





Growing up

As children reach school age and then progress through education, their background continues to shape their experiences. As the inspectorate of all state-funded schools, non-association independent schools, special schools and alternative provision (AP), we are able to see how children’s development is influenced not just by the education they receive, but by the wider aspects of their life. Some of these aspects – having SEND, being a child in care, entering the criminal justice system – have always been with us. But in recent years, and particularly since the pandemic, new pressures have emerged. Attendance issues have deepened, and education has become fractured and fragmented for too many children.

It’s important to highlight these issues, so they can be tackled, but we should not lose sight of the wider picture. We are no longer using overall effectiveness grades in state-funded schools, but we recently published our final set of official statistics that include the overall grade. These showed that 90% of schools held a good or outstanding grade at the point we stopped using them.

The responses to our Big Listen consultation earlier this year made it clear that there was significant scepticism about whether this national grade profile accurately reflected the strength of education across the country. That’s one of the reasons we are moving to a more detailed and nuanced way of reporting our inspections.

Be that as it may, what the figures clearly show is that the schools sector – along with the other sectors we inspect – is overwhelmingly strong and providing a good standard of education to children. This is no small feat, when set against the challenges that I will go on to describe. The role of schools has become harder and more complicated in recent years.

The importance of attendance

Decades of research shows that effective teaching is the single most important factor in school effectiveness and strongly influences pupils’ progress. Good teachers transform lives. High-quality teaching, in person, is crucial – and it’s most important for disadvantaged children. But no matter how good teachers are, if children are not in class with them, they will not benefit.

The absence rate has risen since the pandemic. The overall rate has hovered around 7% for the last couple of years; before COVID, it was consistently lower than 5%.⁸

What is particularly alarming is the increase in the number of children who are severely and persistently absent. The rate of persistently absent pupils (those who are missing more than 10% of their sessions) was over 19% in autumn and spring 2023/24, compared with 11% in 2018/19. The latest Department for Education (DfE) figures showed that around 158,000 children missed at least half their classes in the autumn and spring terms of the last academic year, classing them as severely absent.

The situation is even more acute for the most disadvantaged children. Based on recent figures, more than four in 10 children in need are persistently absent, as are around a third of children who receive free school meals.⁹

8. ‘Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn 2023 and spring 2024’, DfE, October 2024; <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-2023-and-spring-2024>.

9. ‘Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England’, DfE, April 2024; <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/outcomes-for-children-in-need-including-children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england>. Data is not yet available for autumn 2023 and spring 2024, so we used the 2022/23 academic year data.

It's also worth noting that this problem is not confined to small pockets of the country. Every part of England is affected. And although there had been signs of improvement to attendance, it remains a stubborn and damaging issue.

Figure 1: Persistent absence by local authority, autumn and spring 2023/24

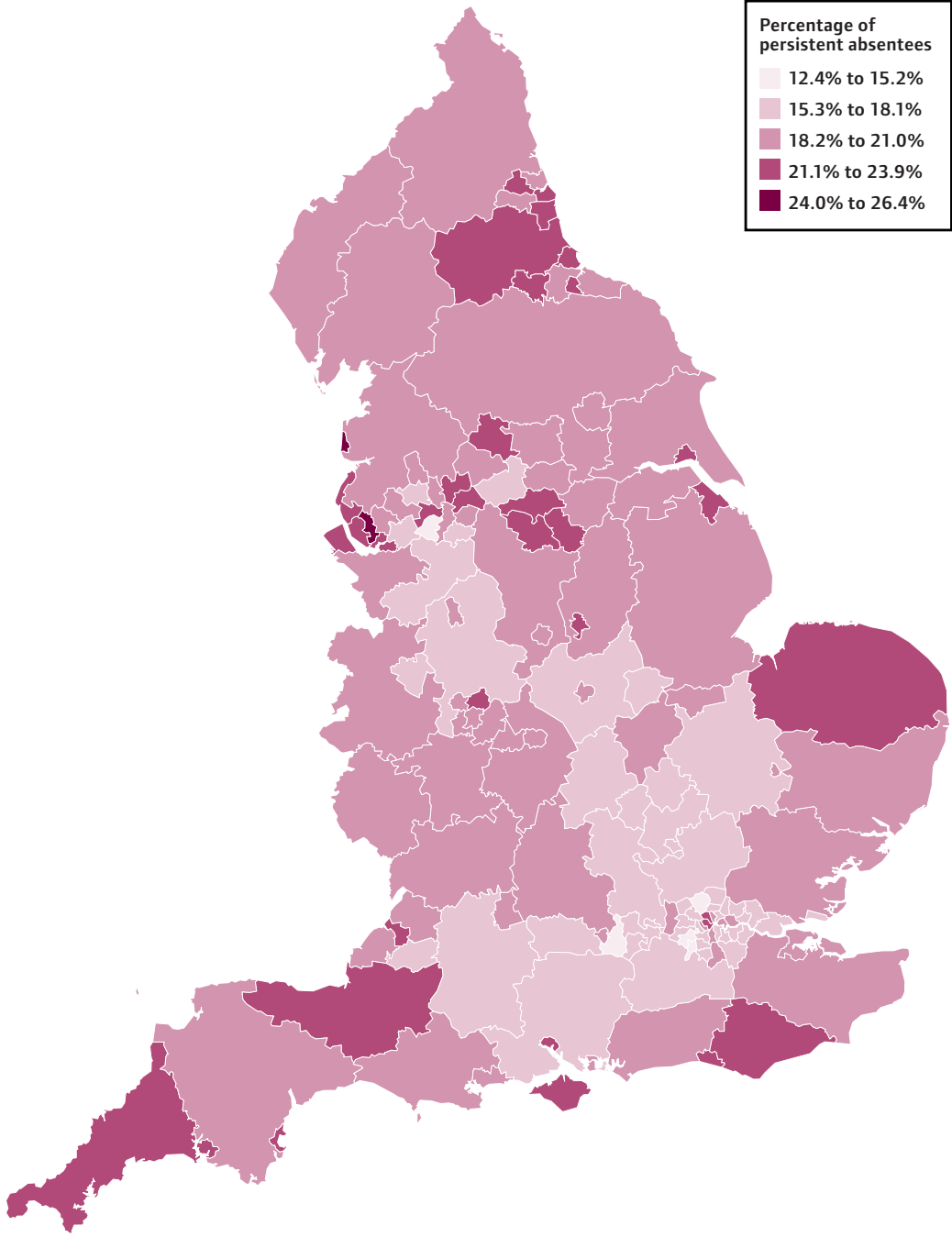


Table 2: Local authorities with the highest persistent absence, autumn and spring 2023/24

Region	Local authority	Percentage of persistent absentees
North West	Knowsley	26.4
North West	Blackpool	24.6
Yorkshire and The Humber	Bradford	23.9
North East	Middlesbrough	23.7
North East	Sunderland	23.6
South West	Bristol	23.5
South West	Torbay	23.2
South West	Plymouth	23.1
North East	County Durham	22.7
North West	Sefton	22.7
South West	Cornwall	22.7
South East	East Sussex	22.6
North West	Rochdale	22.5
North West	Liverpool	22.3
North West	Halton	22.2
South East	Isle of Wight	22.2
North East	South Tyneside	22.0
North East	Newcastle upon Tyne	21.8
North East	Hartlepool	21.8
Yorkshire and The Humber	North East Lincolnshire	21.7

1. Pupils are identified as persistently absent if they have missed 10% or more of their possible sessions. Data covers state-funded primary, secondary and special schools, for the combined autumn and spring terms 2023/24.

2. See 'Pupil absence in schools in England; autumn 2023 and spring 2024';

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-2023-and-spring-2024>.

These high levels of absence create a vicious circle. Missing education makes it harder to catch up and progress. This can easily dishearten children, and lead to further and more entrenched absences. And as with childcare deserts and oases, this is a national problem that bites particularly hard in more disadvantaged areas.

The absence figures also speak to a broader disruption and fragmentation of education for too many children. Alongside those who are missing significant parts of their education altogether, we are concerned about the number of children whose pattern of education is disjointed. Again, this phenomenon appears to have grown since the pandemic.

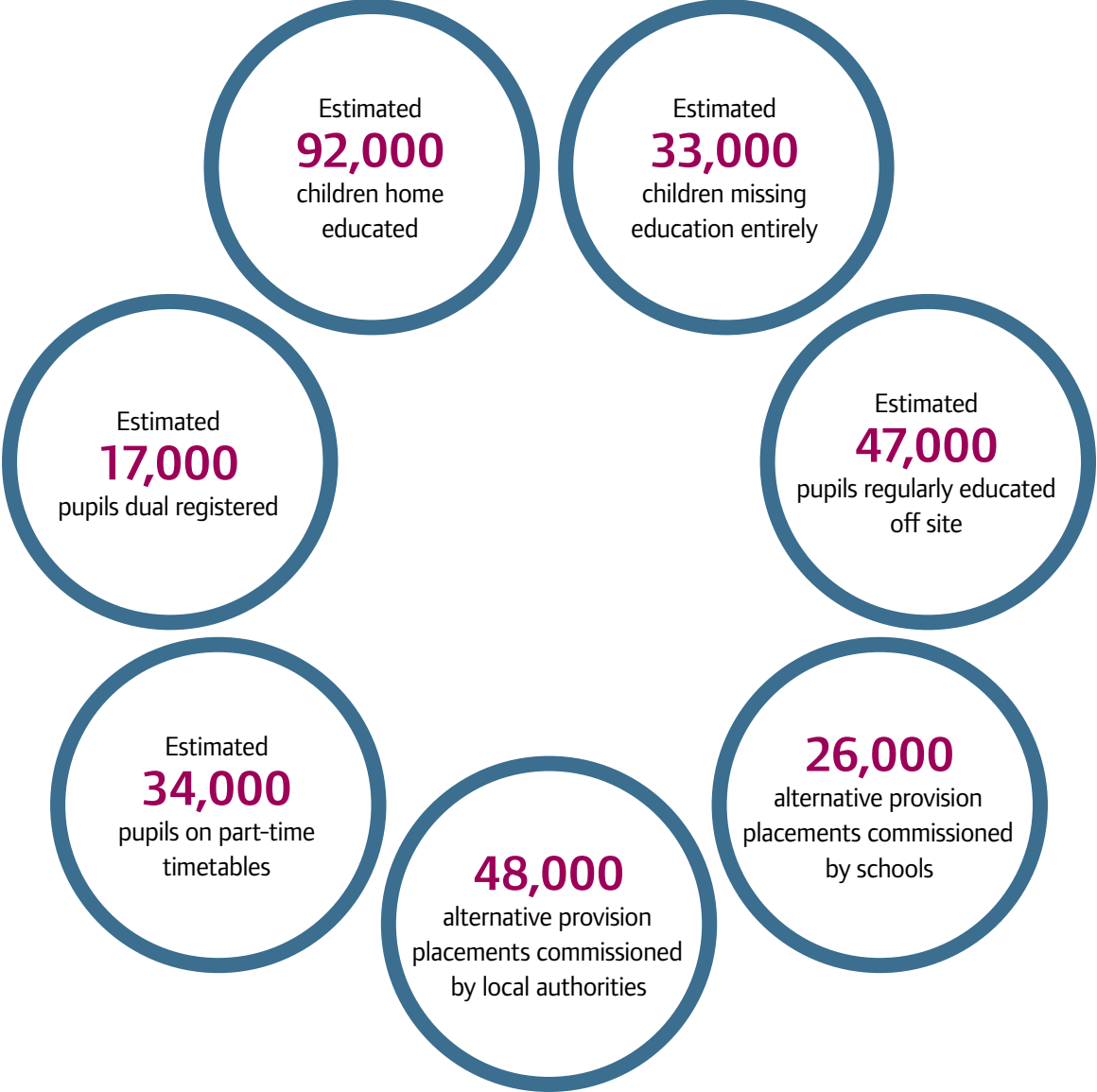
This group includes an estimated 34,000 children who are on part-time timetables. These children attend school for part of the week and the rest of the time they are at home. The use of part-time timetables has previously been an accepted tactic to help children back into school after illness, or a period of school refusal – a short-term measure with a clear goal. The spread of part-time timetables suggests they are becoming more readily used, which cannot be good.

There are also children who receive a mix of online and in-person education. This hybrid form of education is increasingly used for children with SEND and behaviour or health needs.

A small number of schools allow children to be flexi-schooled, where parents choose to home educate their children for part of the week. Schools record this as an authorised absence, so we cannot be sure how many children are flexi-schooled.

These numbers may not be huge. But alongside the tens of thousands of children who are home educated (many of whom receive a good education), as well as an unknown number attending illegal, unregistered schools, they represent a very significant number of children who have, one way or another, been opted out of more orthodox patterns of education.

Figure 2: Examples of arrangements for children educated outside mainstream schools and/or not in full-time education



1. Data is from a variety of sources, at different points in time, and some data is estimated. All numbers are rounded to the nearest 1,000. The numbers are not directly comparable, and children may be counted more than once. Data is provided to give a broad illustration of the different scenarios in existence in the schools sector. See individual sources for details and definitions. These numbers are relatively small in the context of the 9.1 million pupils in state-funded schools, independent schools, and hospital schools in January 2024 (see link in note 5).
2. 'Elective home education, Autumn term 2023/24', DfE, February 2024; <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/elective-home-education>.
3. 'Children missing education', DfE, February 2024; <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-missing-education>, Autumn term 2023/24. This is a new collection classed as 'official statistics in development', and the quality of the data is expected to improve over time. Children missing education are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school. Home-educated children should only be included in the data if their education has been deemed unsuitable.
4. 'How many pupils are educated off-site? An update', FFT Education Datalab, May 2024; <https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2024/05/how-many-pupils-are-educated-off-site-an-update>.
5. The figures on alternative provision commissioned by schools and local authorities are both taken from 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics', Department for Education, June 2024; <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>.
6. 'Can attendance data be used to identify pupils on part-time timetables?', FFT Education Datalab, June 2023; <https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2023/06/can-attendance-data-be-used-to-identify-pupils-on-part-time-timetables>.
7. Dual registration data is an estimate produced by Ofsted, using pupil-level data from the DfE's schools census of January 2023.

There has been a shift in attitudes since the pandemic lockdowns: the expectations of school attendance are now viewed more casually. With working from home now firmly established for many parents, the old family routines have been loosened. It's perhaps unsurprising that the absentee rates for Fridays outstrip the other days of the week.¹⁰

At present, there is no comprehensive national data about the number of children not in school full time and how they are being educated. The government has pledged to introduce a register, which we wholeheartedly support.

Inclusion

Countering absenteeism and encouraging attendance is a huge priority for everyone in education. We intend to include a criterion looking at inclusion as part of our reforms to inspections. We expect high standards for all children, especially those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable. We want schools to support children and make sure there are no barriers in place that can put potential pupils and families off school.

It's important that schools serve their community equitably – and that's a principle that can apply equally well to schools that select along lines of faith or academic ability as to non-selective schools. It's encouraging for the future that our inspections of initial teacher education (ITE) have found that the best institutions focus on understanding the locality and the issues at play when thinking about inclusion.

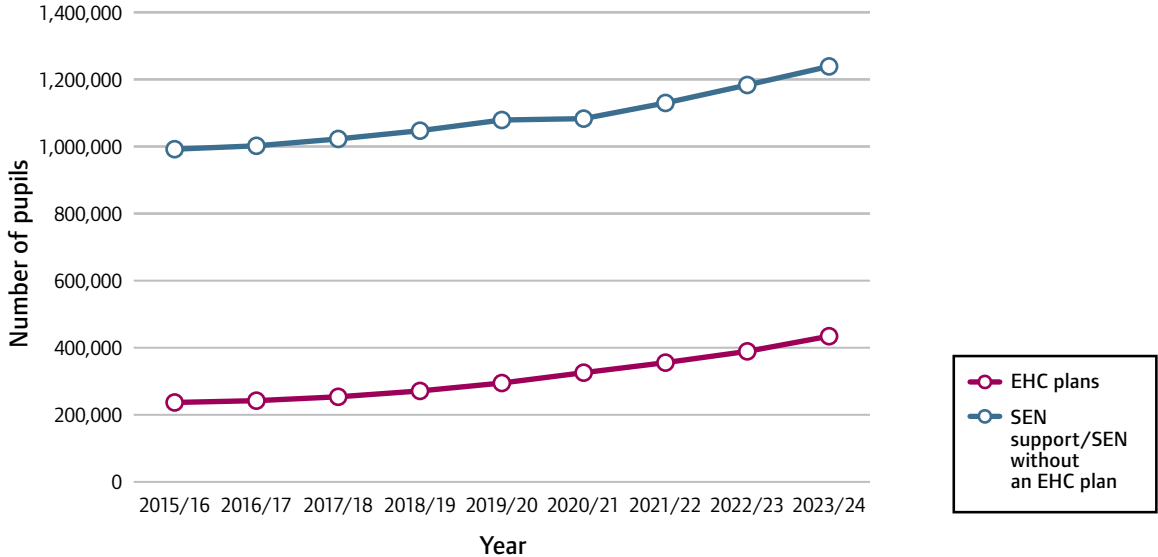
Putting a focus on inclusion is becoming ever more important as the number of children with SEND continues to increase.¹¹ There are several studies that shed light on the pressures and limitations of the SEND system. The National Audit Office's new report starkly described the challenges: a 140% increase in demand for education, health and care (EHC) plans over the last 10 years; more children with EHC plans attending mainstream schools, with limited resources available to meet their needs when they are there; and children entering primary school with speech and language delays.¹²

10. Data on days of the week available in the DfE's data dashboard:
<https://department-for-education.shinyapps.io/pupil-attendance-in-schools>.

11. 'Special educational needs in England', DfE, June 2024;
<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2023-24>.

12. 'Support for children and young people with special educational needs', National Audit Office, October 2024;
<https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/support-for-children-and-young-people-with-special-educational-needs>.

Figure 3: Pupils in all schools by type of SEND provision in England, 2015/16 to 2023/24



1. 'Special educational needs in England', DfE, June 2024; <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2023-24>.

Fifty-four per cent of children with EHC plans, and 91% of those with SEN support, are in state-funded primary and secondary schools. Appropriate support for these 1.4 million children with SEND in mainstream schools is critical to a well-functioning system for SEND.

It's clear the system is not there yet. Outcomes for children and young people with SEND are poor, and we have heard many heartbreaking stories of families' struggles against the system. New funding from the government, pledged in the recent budget, is very welcome. But there is a fundamental mismatch between the scale of demand and the level of resource. This will always leave some families disappointed, no matter how much additional money is forthcoming.

It's right to consider demand as well as supply; not all children with an identified need will (or should) receive an EHC plan. The needs of many children with SEND can and should be met in mainstream schools with high-quality targeted support. We should, collectively, look at the early interventions that can be made – for instance in the early years and key stage 1 – to stop needs escalating and becoming entrenched. If EHC plans are used too widely, the resources that follow them will always be stretched too thinly for those in most need.

And once again, we see the impact of recruitment and retention challenges in relation to SEND. According to the DfE's SEND code of practice, all schools should have a qualified teacher designated as a special educational needs coordinator. It notes the importance of the role in setting strategy alongside the headteacher and governors. Making sure this arrangement is uniformly in place could make a big difference for a lot of children.

When we look at area SEND arrangements, we continue to see inconsistencies and weaknesses. Many children with SEND do not receive the right support at the right time. This situation is aggravated where there is ineffective use of information across partnerships, and weak joint commissioning, governance and oversight. The arrangements for supporting children and young people during long waits for health assessment and services are often insufficient. In the more effective practice, we see education, social care and health leaders working together to decide how services are best coordinated in the interests of children and their families.

Unfortunately, we too often see AP used to fill the gaps in SEND provision. Almost one in four children in school-arranged AP placements have an EHC plan.¹³ AP can and does play an important role for children who, for many different reasons, are not able to attend mainstream schools. But it should be viewed as a fixed-term intervention not a long-term solution.

Much AP is offering a very good and valuable service, but not all AP is regulated and inspected. This can be legitimate, where it operates for limited hours a week and works with small numbers of children. But sometimes these rules are breached, tipping the provision into the same category as illegal schools.

Ofsted has long highlighted the scourge of illegal schools, and in some cases prosecuted them. Too many of the institutions we investigate do a poor job, sometimes in hazardous premises. The government is set to give us the additional powers we have long called for to help crack down on this wild west of education.

Children in care

The crucial childhood years are, of course, more difficult for those children not living in loving, stable families. The children's social care sector is huge, high cost and complex. We inspect and regulate a range of institutions, from small children's homes caring for one or two children, all the way up to local authorities with multi-million-pound budgets. In all these services, we see transformative, sometimes life-changing work being done for, and with, children and families. But it's not without pressures, challenges and shortcomings.

Sufficiency of provision in social care continues to be one of our biggest concerns. For many children in care, the best options are either living with wider family in a kinship care arrangement or living with a foster family. As our most recent statistics show, the overall number of fostering households is continuing to decline. One silver lining is that we see greater numbers of children in kinship care – half of new fostering placements are now made with family or friends.

For some children, kinship or foster care will not be possible, or their needs are better met in a children's home. The geographic distribution of children's homes and residential special schools too often bears little resemblance to the pattern of need or demand. The number of children's homes we register has sharply increased, but it is not solving the problem of having too many spaces in the wrong places. To illustrate this, a quarter of all children's homes in England are in the North West, which far outstrips local demand.

13. 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics', DfE, June 2024;
<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>.



Why is this? The housing market plays its part. Roughly 80% of children's homes are privately owned; over a quarter of all homes are owned by the 10 largest group operators. There is undoubtedly a financial motivation to keep acquisition costs down. The challenge for policymakers is how to redress the balance and prevent the need for too many children to be sent to homes far away from friends, families and the places they know.

It is perhaps the most vulnerable group of children who are served least well by a lack of appropriate provision. Changes in the criminal justice and mental health systems mean that far fewer children are in custody or detained in a hospital.

While this may be a welcome trend, community-based provision for children who pose a risk to themselves or others has not been created. The failure to do so is resulting in an increase in the number of children now placed in the community who are subject to court-imposed deprivation of liberty (DoL) orders. Last year, there were over 1,200 DoL applications made, similar to the previous year.¹⁴ The number of applications has doubled since an estimated 580 were made in 2020/21.¹⁵

Alongside rising domestic demand for places in care, the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arriving in the UK has grown in recent years. As of March 2024, there were 7,400 such children being cared for across England, an increase of 43% since pre-pandemic 2019 levels.¹⁶

Without the right homes in the right places, too many children are placed in unregistered or unsuitable homes, without any regulatory oversight. Unregistered homes are a growing issue for us. Over the last year, we looked into over 1,000 potential uses of unregistered children's homes. We found that nearly nine out of 10 should have been registered and were therefore operating illegally.

Against this context, we must go about our work as regulator with care. Most children's homes perform well, and we are satisfied that they are doing a good job for the children who live there. But as the regulator, we must take action when children are at risk of harm. We are well aware that restricting a home's ability to take in new children or cancelling its registration altogether leaves children having to move, in a market that is already overstretched – particularly for children with multiple needs. So when we take this action, we make sure it's proportionate.

Most often, we set improvement actions and monitor progress when services are not up to standard. We escalate to restrictions or suspensions only where necessary. And sometimes it is necessary. For example, this year we issued an urgent suspension on a home where children had been exposed to online sexual exploitation without appropriate action being taken; where there was inadequate control of medicines and a child had been given inappropriate medication; and where there were enduring leadership concerns and significant staff shortages. Children were moved to another home and the provider is no longer operating.

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14. For this year, see: 'Family court statistics quarterly', Ministry of Justice, September 2024; <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-court-statistics-quarterly-april-to-june-2024>; for last year, see: 'National deprivation of liberty court: Latest data trends – June 2023', Nuffield Family Justice Observatory, June 2023; <https://www.nuffieldfjo.org.uk/resource/national-deprivation-of-liberty-court-latest-data-trends-june-2023>.
 15. 'Children subject to deprivation of liberty orders', Nuffield Family Justice Observatory, September 2023; <https://www.nuffieldfjo.org.uk/resource/children-subject-to-deprivation-of-liberty-orders>.
 16. 'Children looked after in England including adoptions', DfE, November 2024; <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions>.



Preparing for adulthood

Our education inspections follow children as they move through the final stages of their school years and into further education or training, preparing for the workplace. We also assess adult education, which supports older learners to retrain or develop new skills. In social care, we now have a greater focus on the transition of young people as they prepare to move on from care and look forward to living independently.

The skills agenda

FE and skills providers train and educate an estimated 2.5 million learners annually. Skills training is rightly held up as an engine of the economy.

We have seen substantial improvements in the quality of ITE for FE and skills since 2020, which bodes well for the future of the sector. For example, trainees in the best mathematics courses prepare to teach maths to learners at entry level up to degree apprenticeships. They learn how to teach the principles of maths appropriately in a variety of courses, from beauty therapy to software design.

The number of apprentices has declined over time but the quality of apprenticeships is improving. High-quality and well-planned apprenticeships, which match the needs of the local economy and provide a viable pathway into work, will hopefully translate into growth in the sector.

Colleges are tasked with tailoring their offer to meet skills needs, and we've seen some very strong examples of this in many places. We often see curriculums that are well planned, based around industry skills needs and backed with thoughtful assessment.

As young people with SEND move into FE and skills provision, they continue to need support to access good opportunities that will help them into employment. Where this works well, learners can take advantage of good partnership working with local employers to develop their independence, employability and communication skills. A good experience at college, for example, can really help develop the confidence and self-esteem of young people with high needs.

Overall, though, we know that young people with SEND are less likely than their peers to be in education, employment or training. It's particularly important that these young people receive effective and impartial careers guidance at an appropriate time to highlight the different avenues open to them.



Leaving care

For those children who have spent some or all of their life in care, the transition to adulthood can be particularly challenging. We now put a greater emphasis in our inspections of local authorities on how they support care leavers during this transition. The voice of care leavers themselves plays an important part in how we reach our judgements. We are pleased that this move has been broadly welcomed by the sector.

The views of care-experienced young people also helped us develop our inspection framework for supported accommodation.¹⁷ This is a new area of regulation and inspection for Ofsted. Supported accommodation is intended to provide a greater degree of independence for 16- and 17-year-olds who are leaving care. It has developed, unregulated, for many years. Shocking instances of young people living in caravans or other unsuitable accommodation proved the need for formal oversight.

As we have begun to register providers of supported accommodation for 16- and 17-year-olds, we have identified some children who are not ready for this level of independence or for whom it is inappropriate given their care needs. As we have made clear, supported accommodation must not just be the default option for all 16- and 17-year-olds in care.¹⁸ Some of the older children we encounter through our work are clearly in need of a higher level of care than supported accommodation can, or should, provide.

Secure estate

It's appropriate to close by repeating concerns raised over many years by Ofsted about education for children and adults in the secure estate. In a recently published joint report with His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, we highlighted 10 years of decline in the education received by children in young offender institutions (YOIs).¹⁹ Adult prisoners fare no better; prison education remains weak, almost without exception.

There is intense pressure on places in prisons and YOIs, with policymakers facing unpalatable choices around how that pressure can be relieved in the short term. We know that reoffending rates are high. We know that education has a transformative effect. Now would be a very good time to improve prison and YOI education to help reduce reoffending, ease the pressure on prisons and help more convicted children and adults turn their lives around.

17. Social care common inspection framework (SCCIF): supported accommodation, Ofsted, October 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-care-common-inspection-framework-sccif-supported-accommodation>.

18. 'Supported accommodation – it can be right for some older children, but not for all', Ofsted, August 2024; <https://socialcareinspection.blog.gov.uk/2024/08/22/supported-accommodation-it-can-be-right-for-some-older-children-but-not-for-all>.

19. 'A decade of declining quality of education in young offender institutions: the systemic shortcomings that fail children', Ofsted and HM Inspectorate of Prisons, October 2024; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/thematic-review-of-the-quality-of-education-in-young-offender-institutions-yois>.





In conclusion

The education and children's social care sectors are fundamental to the future success of this country. The influence they have on the lives of children cannot be overstated. Our work allows us to see this influence up close. For the vast majority of children, the outcome is a positive one: the education and care they receive is of a high standard, and their future is brighter because of it.

My priority is to make sure that all children share this positive experience. We know that for the most vulnerable children, life and learning can be more difficult. That is very rarely down to the services they receive, but it can be down to the services they do **not** receive.

The education and care systems are, like so many public services, under pressure. Those pressures, more often than not, come down to an imbalance between supply and demand: not enough qualified staff in the classrooms, nurseries, colleges or care settings; not enough children's homes or foster carers in the right parts of the country; not enough SEND support to meet rising demand.

There are no silver bullets (and there will never be enough silver to go around) but many of the problems can be mitigated through joined-up thinking and partnership working. We have seen some effective work between partners on SEND provision, across multi-academy trusts to share resources, and between FE and skills providers and local employers.

Since joining Ofsted, I have developed a much deeper appreciation for the interplay between social care and education for some of our most vulnerable children. Having a better understanding of the context within the communities we serve is vital, not just to help us make better-informed and more nuanced judgements about services for children, but ultimately for supporting those children more effectively.

This is particularly true for the most vulnerable children – those without the advocacy and support that so many take for granted. Ofsted plays a part in advocating for them by drawing attention to the services under most pressure, the cracks in the system, or the providers that are not meeting their needs.

That's vital work, but it sits alongside another duty: to recognise excellence, innovation and exemplary practice; to enable those working hard and diligently in education and social care to learn from the best; and to reassure parents and carers that the education and care their children receive is of a high standard. As we introduce changes to the way we work, we will not shy away from calling out unacceptable education or care. But we will also highlight and champion great work and positive outcomes.

There are plenty of reasons to be positive about the future – not least because the services we inspect and regulate employ thousands of committed and talented people, doing their best for children and learners every day. They deserve all our thanks.



Sir Martyn Oliver
His Majesty's Chief Inspector



Bibliography

An annotated list of our publications for the reporting period 1 September 2023 to 31 August 2024. We either published these during the reporting period or they contain data from the period.

Early years and childcare

Research and analysis

'Best start in life part 2: the 3 prime areas of learning', 8 September 2023;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-start-in-life-a-research-review-for-early-years>.

The second publication in our 'best start in life' research review series supports practice in the three early years foundation stage (EYFS) prime areas of learning. The review highlights how the prime areas underpin children's future learning and development as well as success in life, and notes the crucial role practitioners play in extending children's knowledge and skills through high-quality interactions. You can find parts 1 and 3 of the series at the same link.

'Maintaining quality early years provision in the face of workforce challenges', 13 May 2024;

<https://earlyyears.blog.gov.uk/2024/05/13/maintaining-quality-early-years-provision-in-the-face-of-workforce-challenges>.

This blog post describes the challenges early years providers face around recruitment and retention. It highlights how these challenges affect children and what some providers are doing to lessen any negative impact. The biggest risks are to safeguarding and the quality of learning and development, particularly for vulnerable children and those with SEND. It describes how some settings prioritise staff training and well-being to reduce the impact on children.

'Childcare accessibility by neighbourhood, England', 4 June 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childcare-accessibility-by-neighbourhood-england>.

We carried out joint analysis with the Office for National Statistics to compare access to registered childcare across England. There is wide variation in access to places. Households in areas with lower levels of access to childcare were more likely to have lower disposable incomes, and more likely to have a higher proportion of children living in poverty. Access to childcare is crucial for parents and carers who want to return to work, increase their hours or enter the labour market for the first time. This publication includes an interactive tool to compare childcare accessibility by postcode. We also published the methodology we used in this analysis: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childcare-accessibility-by-neighbourhood-england-ofsteds-methodology>.

'Changes in access to childcare in England', 16 October 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-access-to-childcare-in-england>.

This statistical commentary analyses changes in access to registered childcare places from March 2020 to March 2024. It shows a steady decline in access to childcare across England. This decline is not evenly spread across all parts of the country. The rate of decline since 2020 has been greatest in the North East, East Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber. London is the only region where there has been an increase in access to childcare. Areas with persistently low access to childcare tend to be deprived, with lower-than-average incomes. We also published the methodology we used in this analysis:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-access-to-childcare-in-england/methodology-changes-in-access-to-childcare-in-england>

Statistical releases

'Early years and childcare statistics';

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/early-years-and-childcare-statistics>.

We publish official statistics for early years and childcare twice a year. The latest official statistics were published on 20 November 2024. They include a summary of the main findings for the 2023/24 academic year. The number of childcare providers registered with Ofsted has fallen by 1,030 (2%) since 31 August 2023. However, the number of childcare places offered by providers registered on the Early Years Register increased by 12,100 (1%) to 1.28 million. On 31 August 2024, 98% of childcare providers were judged good or outstanding at their most recent inspection: a one percentage point increase compared with 31 August 2023.

At the same link, we publish management information on providers, places and inspection outcomes that have taken place within the current academic year. This is published twice a year and shows the latest inspection outcomes for all providers in scope for inspection.

Schools

Research and analysis

'Getting our bearings: geography subject report', 19 September 2023;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/subject-report-series-geography>.

This report is one in a series of subject reports that explore the state of each national curriculum subject. Each report identifies the things that influence quality and makes recommendations for policymakers and providers.

The report says that although the geography curriculum has improved, there is still a lack of coherent curriculum planning from the early years to the end of key stage 5. In many schools, topics are taught in isolation. This makes it difficult for pupils to apply skills and knowledge learned in one topic to later topics. Few schools we visited for this report had considered how fieldwork should be taught.

‘Levelling the playing field: the physical education subject report’, 20 September 2023;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/subject-report-series-pe>.

This report found that although some schools provide a broad and balanced physical education (PE) curriculum, others focus too narrowly on specific sports or activities. This can limit pupils’ overall physical development and enjoyment. The report also identifies a lack of emphasis on promoting physical fitness and developing lifelong healthy habits.

‘Striking the right note: the music subject report’, 21 September 2023;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/subject-report-series-music>.

This report found that although primary schools give pupils enough time to learn music, this was not the case in key stage 3 at nearly half of the secondary schools we visited. Opportunities to learn an instrument have been reduced by competing priorities in schools’ budgets and schools ending their links with local music hubs that provide subsidised instrument lessons. This means fewer opportunities for disadvantaged children.

‘Independent review of careers guidance in schools and further education and skills providers’, 29 September 2023;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-careers-guidance-in-schools-and-further-education-and-skills-providers>.

This research review, commissioned by the DfE, investigated the quality of careers provision in schools and FE and skills providers. It found that effective careers advice needs school leaders who think strategically about careers and make sure all staff have the knowledge and experience to support all pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. We also found that schools need to give pupils unbiased guidance balanced between academic and technical routes to future careers.

‘Telling the story: the English education subject report’, 5 March 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/subject-report-series-english>.

The English subject report found that too many schools are confused about the purpose of English as a curriculum subject. English is not always recognised as a subject in its own right rather than as a medium for teaching other subjects. The report showed that although the teaching of reading has improved markedly, the curriculum that underpins writing and spoken language is less well considered. Schools need clearer national guidance and investment in teacher professional development.

‘Deep and meaningful? The religious education subject report’, 17 April 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/subject-report-series-religious-education>.

The religious education (RE) subject report highlights a lack of clarity around expectations, staff training, assessment and resourcing that affects the quality of RE in many schools. Schools and leaders need updated guidance and clarity from the government about statutory expectations and what is taught in RE, and when and where it should be taught.

Statistical releases

'State-funded schools statistics';

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/maintained-schools-and-academies-inspections-and-outcomes-official-statistics>.

We publish official statistics for maintained schools and academies twice a year. The latest official statistics were published on 26 November 2024. They include a summary of the main findings for the 2023/24 academic year. This is the last year that inspections included a judgement on overall effectiveness. In 2023/24, we carried out 6,930 inspections, including 4,023 graded inspections, 2,662 ungraded inspections and 245 monitoring or urgent inspections. On 31 August 2024, 90% of all schools were judged good or outstanding at their most recent inspection: a small increase compared with 31 August 2023.

At the same link, we publish monthly management information on the inspections and outcomes that have taken place within the current academic year. This shows the latest inspection outcomes for all schools in scope for inspection.

'Non-association independent schools statistics';

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/independent-schools-inspections-and-outcomes>.

This collection of statistics covers inspections and outcomes of non-association independent schools in England and data on unregistered schools investigations.

We publish official statistics for non-association independent schools once a year. The latest official statistics were published on 14 November 2024. They include a summary of the main findings for the 2023/24 academic year. Between 1 September 2023 and 31 August 2024, we carried out 446 standard inspections and 369 additional inspections of independent schools. Of the standard inspections, 83 schools that were inadequate or required improvement at their previous inspection improved to good or outstanding this year. On 31 August 2024, 82% of non-association independent schools were judged good or outstanding for overall effectiveness at their most recent standard inspection: a seven percentage point increase compared with 31 August 2023.

At the same link, we publish management information on non-association independent schools inspections and outcomes three times a year. This shows inspections that have taken place within the current academic year and provides the latest inspection outcomes for all schools in scope for inspection.

We also publish management information on unregistered schools investigations twice a year. The latest management information was published on 10 October 2024. This includes all activity since we began investigating unregistered and suspected illegal schools on 1 January 2016. We have carried out 1,388 investigations and 879 inspections since January 2016. In the 2023/24 academic year, we carried out 192 investigations and 112 inspections.

‘OEAS quality assurance commissions: management information’;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/oeas-quality-assurance-commissions-management-information>.

We publish management information for the online education accreditation scheme (OEAS) on an ad-hoc basis. The latest release was published on 3 October 2024. This gives the number and outcomes of the OEAS quality assurance visits we have carried out. At 31 August 2024, we had received 27 quality assurance commissions from the DfE. We had commenced suitability checks on 14 providers and carried out seven accreditation visits. All seven providers that received an accreditation visit met the relevant standards for accreditation.

Teacher development

Research and analysis

‘Independent review of teachers’ professional development in schools: phase 2 findings’, 17 May 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-professional-development-in-schools>.

This research review reports on phase 2 of a study commissioned by the DfE to investigate the quality of training and development opportunities for teachers and leaders. Teachers who were part of a specific training programme, such as early career teachers and those studying for a national professional qualification (NPQ), were generally positive about training and development opportunities. Outside these programmes, too many teachers do not have opportunities for high-quality professional development, particularly in schools where there is no long-term strategic planning and/or investment in teacher development.

Statistical releases

‘Teacher development statistics’;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/initial-teacher-education-inspections-and-outcomes>.

We publish official statistics for teacher development providers annually. This includes initial teacher education (ITE) provision, and early careers framework and NPQ lead providers. The latest official statistics were published on 14 November 2024. They include a summary of the main findings for the 2023/24 academic year. Between 1 September 2023 and 31 August 2024, we inspected 125 ITE phases. On 31 August 2024, 97% of all ITE phases were judged good or outstanding for overall effectiveness at their most recent inspection: a one percentage point increase compared with 31 August 2023. We also inspected nine providers delivering NPQ courses, all of which were judged good or outstanding for overall effectiveness and in all key judgements.

At the same link, we publish management information on initial teacher education inspections and outcomes that have taken place within the current academic year. This is published once a year and shows the latest inspection outcomes for all providers in scope for inspection.

Alternative provision and SEND

Research and analysis

'Alternative provision in local areas in England: a thematic review', 1 February 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision-in-local-areas-in-england-a-thematic-review>.

This report describes how AP is used and commissioned to meet the needs of children and young people. We found a lack of national standards and no clarity around who is responsible for commissioning AP. This leads to inconsistent outcomes for children and a lack of oversight of children in AP. We recommend improving the commissioning and oversight of AP at an area-wide level. This requires better guidance explaining the purposes of AP and how it can be used effectively.

'Independent review of careers guidance in specialist settings', 22 February 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-careers-guidance-in-specialist-settings>.

The second phase of the review of careers guidance commissioned by the DfE reports on provision for 11- to 19-year-olds and for young people up to age 25 with a current EHC plan in special schools, independent specialist colleges and pupil referral units. The providers we visited had a personalised approach that met learners' aspirations, needs and interests. However, they did not always give parents, carers and employers enough support and information about learners to make sure there was a smooth transition into FE, training or employment. The report also highlights the need for more work experience opportunities.

Statistical releases

'Area SEND statistics';

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/area-send-statistics>.

We normally publish official statistics for area SEND once a year. The latest official statistics were published on 5 June 2024. They include the main findings for the 2023 calendar year and all inspection outcomes up to 31 December 2023. We carried out 26 full inspections in local areas across England. In nearly one third (eight) of these local areas, there were widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences of, and outcomes for, children.

At the same link, we publish management information on local area SEND inspection outcomes twice a year. This provides the latest inspection grades for local areas that have had a full inspection.

Further education and skills

Research and analysis

‘Independent review of careers guidance in schools and further education and skills providers’, 29 September 2023;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-careers-guidance-in-schools-and-further-education-and-skills-providers>.

This research review, commissioned by the DfE, investigates the quality of careers provision in schools and FE and skills providers. It highlights that there are several ways providers give careers guidance depending on the course learners are following and whether this is a vocational course or part of a taught curriculum subject.

‘Further education and skills report: business education’, 31 October 2023;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-and-skills-report-business-education>.

This research report looks at what makes a high-quality business education curriculum. High-quality curriculums include the mathematics, communication, digital and interpersonal/personal knowledge and skills that learners need to understand the content in the individual topics that make up the business education curriculum. They also recontextualise relevant knowledge from other disciplines, such as economics, accounting, law and human psychology.

Statistical releases

‘Further education and skills statistics’, 3 December 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/further-education-and-skills-inspection-outcomes>.

We publish official statistics for FE and skills providers annually. The latest official statistics were published on 3 December 2024. They include a summary of the main findings for the 2023/24 academic year. On 31 August 2024, there were 1,967 FE and skills providers publicly funded and delivering education, training and/or apprenticeships recorded on our systems. Between 1 September 2023 and 31 August 2024, we carried out 454 full inspections, 40 short inspections and 152 new provider monitoring visits. On 31 August 2024, 82% of FE and skills providers were judged good or outstanding for overall effectiveness at their most recent inspection: a four percentage point increase compared with 31 August 2023. On 31 August 2024, 82% of prison and young offender institutions were judged requires improvement or inadequate for overall effectiveness of education, skills and work provision.

At the same link, we publish monthly management information on the inspections and outcomes that have taken place within the current academic year.²⁰ This provides the latest inspection outcomes for all providers in scope for inspection.

20. We do not publish management information in October due to the small number of inspections that have taken place and been published at that point in the academic year.

Social care

Research and analysis

'Children's social care questionnaires 2024: what children and young people told Ofsted', 17 October 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-questionnaires-2024-what-children-and-young-people-told-ofsted>.

This annual survey of children and young people who live in social care settings asks whether children feel safe where they live and about their relationships with the adults and other children who live there. Nearly all children who responded said they feel safe. Children living in residential special schools were the most likely to say that they did not get along with their peers, but they were also the most likely to spend time with people who are important to them. Nearly all children living in supported accommodation said that they felt safe where they lived, but they were least likely to spend time with the people who are important to them.

'The multi-agency response to children and families who need help', 7 November 2023;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-multi-agency-response-to-children-and-families-who-need-help>.

This report looks at targeted multi-agency early help in five joint targeted area inspections. The report describes areas of good practice and areas for improvement. The main finding is that it is harder to prioritise early help because of limited resources and an increase in the number of families needing help. The report details what the reforms to children's social care, proposed by the previous government, should address.

'Good decisions: children with complex needs in children's homes', 16 January 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/good-decisions-children-with-complex-needs-in-childrens-homes>.

This research report on what 'complex needs' means to local authority staff and those working in children's homes looked at how local authority and children's home staff support children with complex needs. The term 'complex needs' is ambiguous, and this can complicate communication among professionals in the sector. People often use it as an umbrella term for a variety of different needs or to refer to children who are 'difficult to place'. The report suggests moving away from using this umbrella term and describing children's individual needs and the support they need.

'Supported accommodation for looked-after children and care leavers aged 16 and 17: a report on the responses to the consultation on our inspection proposals', 29 February 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposals-for-inspecting-supported-accommodation>.

This publication explains how we responded to what people told us during our consultation from July to September 2023 on how we should inspect supported accommodation. A majority of respondents agreed with each of the three proposals around outcomes, notice periods and the main features of effective supported accommodation.

‘Inspecting supported accommodation: our response to the children and young people’s consultation’, 29 February 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/children-and-young-peoples-consultation-inspecting-supported-accommodation>.

This publication describes our response to what children and young people told us about how we should inspect supported accommodation. We used the feedback from children and young people to develop the criteria inspectors use to help them reach a judgement when inspecting supported accommodation.

‘Supported accommodation review: what matters most for children’, 29 February 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supported-accommodation-review-what-matters-most-for-children>.

This review shares the evidence that informed our consultation and guidance on how we will inspect providers of supported accommodation for looked-after children and care leavers aged 16 to 17. It explored the needs, experiences and outcomes of those living in supported accommodation to make sure the new guidance was evidence-informed.

‘Regional adoption agencies: thematic inspection report’, 26 March 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regional-adoption-agencies-thematic-inspection-report>.

This report describes the findings of a thematic review, commissioned by the DfE, following visits to six RAAs. The review found that day-to-day adoption practice by RAAs is strong, but many challenges remain. There is a national shortage of adopters and RAAs often do not have the resources to support families and individuals. The review recommends that any plans to increase the level of scrutiny of RAAs should be informed by its findings. At the moment, we cannot directly inspect or regulate RAAs.

‘Start for Life services: thematic review,’ 7 May 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/start-for-life-services-thematic-review>.

This report is a thematic review of the Start for Life programme, commissioned by the DfE and jointly carried out by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission. In the six areas visited, we found that postnatal services are more established than services for expectant parents. The home learning element of the programme for under twos is less well developed in all areas. The report makes recommendations to improve families’ experiences of Start for Life services and how they are provided through the family hub.

Statistical releases

'Children's social care statistics';

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/childrens-social-care-statistics>.

This collection of social care statistics includes official statistics, research and commentaries, and transparency data.

We publish official statistics for children's homes and other social care providers, fostering, inspections of local authority children's services, and regulatory activity once a year.

'Children's social care in England 2024', 9 July 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childrens-social-care-in-england-2024>.

The latest official statistics on children's social care providers include a summary of the main findings for the inspection year between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024.

The number of new children's homes in England continues to rise across all regions. On 31 March 2024, there were just under 3,500: up from 3,100 the previous year. A higher proportion of children's homes were judged outstanding or good compared with the previous year. Residential family centres have seen a large proportional increase again this year, with a 26% increase in the number of settings and a 20% increase in potential capacity for the number of families.

'Fostering in England 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024', 7 November 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2023-to-31-march-2024>.

This statistical release covers the numbers of foster carers and foster places and placements, in both local authorities and independent fostering agencies (IFAs). It includes data relating to types of foster care, and registration and deregistration. The number of mainstream fostering households continues to decrease. Over the last year, there has been a 5% decrease in the number of mainstream local authority households, and a 2% decrease in IFA households. However, the number of applications for mainstream fostering has increased since last year, from 8,000 in 2022–23 to 8,500 in 2023–24.

'Local authority inspection outcomes as at 31 March 2024', 30 August 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-inspection-outcomes-as-at-31-march-2024>.

These official statistics for inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) outcomes include a summary of the main findings for the 2023–24 inspection year. The overall quality of local authority children's services in England has improved over the past few years. The proportion of local authorities judged good or outstanding at their most recent ILACS inspection has risen from 53% in 2022 to 60% on 31 March 2024. However, the quality of children's services showed substantial variations at a regional level and there was some variation in quality across the different judgement areas.

'Inspection outcomes of the largest children's social care providers,' 8 August 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspection-outcomes-of-the-largest-childrens-social-care-providers>.

These releases cover the largest chains that provide children's homes or fostering places in the private and voluntary sectors. We publish a data commentary on the inspection outcomes of these providers once a year. In the 2023–24 inspection year, the 22 largest companies owned 968 homes. This represents 35% of all private children's homes and 28% of all children's homes. Of the 276 privately owned independent fostering agencies, three in five were single providers (164: 59%). These findings are similar to previous years.

'Regulatory activities in all kinds of children's homes', 9 July 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-activity-in-all-types-of-childrens-homes>.

This commentary and transparency dataset covers regulatory activity in all types of children's homes and other children's social care settings in the 2023–24 inspection year. It includes data on: complaints and child protection concerns, enforcement activity, incident notifications, registered manager vacancies and unregistered provision, and providers not subject to routine inspections.

'Fostering recruitment and retention', 25 March 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-recruitment-and-retention>.

This commentary and transparency dataset cover the recruitment and retention of foster carers in mainstream fostering between March 2022 and March 2023. During this period, there was a net decrease in the number of fostering households for the second year in a row as more foster carers deregistered (5,125) than were approved (4,080). The number of initial enquiries from people interested in becoming a foster carer was 9% lower than the previous year.

Other statistical releases

'Five-Year Ofsted Inspection Data', 3 December 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/five-year-ofsted-inspection-data>.

This shows inspection outcomes for all open providers on 31 August over the last five years. It covers early years, state-funded schools, non-association independent schools, initial teacher education providers, FE and skills providers and social care providers. It shows performance of providers by remits, provider types, local authority areas, overall effectiveness and sub-judgements.

'Inspection outcomes in each parliamentary constituency', 19 July 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspection-outcomes-in-each-parliamentary-constituency>.

We published transparency data on the inspection outcomes for providers in the new parliamentary constituencies introduced in July 2024. This dataset shows the number of providers on the early years register, state-funded schools, FE and skills providers and children's social care providers and, where available, their most recent inspection outcomes.

'Ofsted Parent View management information', 14 November 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ofsted-parent-view-management-information>.

This management information provides the results of our survey of parents and carers on their views about their child's school. We publish Parent View data for non-association independent schools and state-funded schools inspected by Ofsted three times a year. The latest release covers the period from September 2023 to September 2024.

'Responses to post-inspection surveys', 28 June 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/responses-to-post-inspection-surveys-inspections-and-visits-between-1-april-2023-and-31-march-2024>.

We published official statistics in development on the survey response that we receive after inspections and visits to state-funded schools, non-association independent schools, FE and skills providers, early years providers and social care providers between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024.

Correspondence (published for transparency and information)

'Statement from His Majesty's Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman', 7 December 2023;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-from-his-majestys-chief-inspector-amanda-spielman>.

A statement from the previous Chief Inspector on the conclusion of the Coroner's inquest following the death of Ruth Perry. It describes some of the changes to inspection Ofsted introduced following the inquest.

'Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI): annual Ofsted report letters', 29 November 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-schools-inspectorate-isi-annual-ofsted-report-letters>.

This report fulfils our legal duty to prepare and send an annual report to the Secretary of State for education on the inspection work by the ISI.

'Prevention of Future Deaths report (Regulation 28): Ofsted's response', 19 January 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevention-of-future-deaths-report-regulation-28-ofsteds-response>.

Our formal response to the Prevention of Future Deaths report describes what we have done to address each of the Coroner's concerns following the inquest into the death of Ruth Perry.

'Ofsted's response to the Education Select Committee', 11 March 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsteds-response-to-the-education-select-committee>.

This sets out our response to recommendations from the Education Select Committee in its report 'Ofsted's work with schools'. The document describes our changes to policy and practice as well as inspector training.

'Ofsted's approach to artificial intelligence (AI)', 24 April 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsteds-approach-to-ai>.

This policy paper outlines how we will use AI and sets out our position on the use of AI by education and social care providers. It addresses the risks and benefits of AI for our work. In the coming year, we will build our understanding of how providers use AI.

Consultations

‘Changes to Ofsted’s post-inspection arrangements and complaints handling: report on the responses to the consultation’, 24 November 2023;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-ofsted-post-inspection-arrangements-and-complaints-handling-proposals-2023>.

This reports the outcomes of the consultation on proposed changes to our post-inspection arrangements and how we handle complaints. At least three quarters of respondents supported each of the proposals. We have put these proposals in place by formalising feedback arrangements and removing the internal review of complaints.

‘Ofsted Big Listen’, 24 March 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/ofsted-big-listen>.

The Ofsted Big Listen asked for views across our work, from schools and children’s social care to teacher training and early years. We wanted to explore four areas: reporting – how we report on our education and regulatory inspections; inspection practice – the shape of our education and regulatory inspections, our ways of working and the craft of inspecting; culture and purpose – the conduct of our inspections and the way we work; and impact – the consequences of our inspections for children, professionals, institutions and parents’ choices. The consultation ran from 8 March to 31 May 2024.

‘Hearing feedback, accepting criticism and building a better Ofsted: the response to the Big Listen’, 3 September 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/ofsted-big-listen/outcome/hearing-feedback-accepting-criticism-and-building-a-better-ofsted-the-response-to-the-big-listen>.

This report sets out our response to the feedback we received from the Big Listen consultation. During the consultation, we heard from parents and carers, members of the public, professionals, Ofsted staff and children and young people. The report describes what we will do to make inspections more collaborative and supportive. It also describes some of the changes we will make to ensure greater consistency in our inspections and in how we train and recruit inspectors. The report includes several annexes with the full write-up of the responses we received from different stakeholders.

‘Ofsted Big Listen: supporting documents’, 3 September 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-big-listen-supporting-documents>.

This page shares evidence from activities that formed part of the Big Listen: report detailing results of the public consultation; public consultation data tables; independent report, written by IFF Research, into the views of the professionals we work with; IFF Research’s data tables; independent report, written by NatCen, into the views of the parents and carers we work for; NatCen’s data tables; report detailing results of our children’s consultation; internal Big Listen: responding to our people; independent learning review led by Dame Christine Gilbert; and Ofsted’s response to Dame Christine Gilbert’s independent learning review.

Other publications

'Ofsted Annual Report 2022/23: education, children's services and skills', 23 November 2023;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-202223-education-childrens-services-and-skills>.

This was the last annual report of the previous Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, before her tenure concluded at the end of December 2023.

'Ofsted: gender pay gap report and data 2023', 30 November 2023;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-gender-pay-gap-report-and-data-2023>.

This report gives the gender pay gap data in Ofsted on 31 March 2023. The gender pay gap is the difference between the average earnings of men and women, expressed relative to men's earnings. The Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017 require all employers with 250 or more employees to report publicly on their gender pay gap. This year, Ofsted's mean gender pay gap has increased to 5.0% favouring men whereas our median pay gap has moved to 0% favouring neither men nor women. Both our mean and median gender pay gap is lower than the wider Civil Service.

'Ofsted corporate annual report and accounts 2023 to 2024', 18 July 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-corporate-annual-report-and-accounts-2023-to-2024>.

This report includes a summary of our performance and financial statements for the financial year 2023–24. It highlights important achievements, challenges and progress towards our objectives and targets for each remit we inspect and/or regulate.







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