

11th June 2025

Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Dear Secretary of State,

RE: Education inspection reform

I am writing to update you on the recently closed consultation on proposed changes to Ofsted's education inspections. As I set out in the first line of our consultation:

Ofsted works in the interests of children, learners, parents and carers. Our aim is to help raise standards in education, skills and children's social care and therefore improve the lives of children and learners – particularly the most disadvantaged.

I know this mission to raise standards for all children, especially the most disadvantaged, is a shared one. You have been clear that you expect high and rising standards for all children, in every corner of the country.

Our consultation has provided us with a great deal of information to consider. We have had over 6,500 responses from parents, education professionals and representative bodies. We have also been testing inspection methodology and gathering feedback from the education providers who took part in well over 200 test visits, as well as from our inspectors. Taken together this represents a wealth of insight on our proposals which we must now properly analyse before we can respond to the consultation.

As you know, our intention had been to respond formally to the consultation within the summer term. I am writing to inform you that I no longer believe it is possible to do this, given the scale of feedback we have received.

I said from the start that this is a meaningful consultation and that our proposals were not set in stone. We fully intend to make improvements to the proposed inspection framework, based on what we have heard, but we need a little more time to complete our analysis of the responses we have received. I am also convinced that our final approach will be improved by further testing of these refinements before the summer.

I am therefore proposing that we publish our full response in early September.

This delay is regrettable, but I firmly believe it will result in a better and more effective inspection regime that will help the committed professionals in the education sector to raise standards for children and learners.

After we publish our response, we will begin a comprehensive training programme for inspectors and an extensive programme of engagement and preparation for those we inspect. This will allow us to introduce the revised framework in November as planned. I will say more about this below.

Ofsted Consultation

In support of the government's school accountability manifesto commitments, we consulted on changes to how Ofsted reports as well as a raft of proposed revisions to how we inspect. We did so having first considered carefully the response to our Big Listen consultation which closed at the end of May last year. These revisions included the introduction of 'report cards', new toolkits and a range of methodological changes to ensure the consistency of inspection and to improve the experience of inspection for professionals working in education.

How we inspect

While analysis is still ongoing, we recognise that we can improve several aspects of our plans.

The changes we are making must support the drive for high and rising standards, without encouraging providers to 'do things for Ofsted'. Inspections should align seamlessly with the day-to-day operations of providers.

We have heard feedback on the toolkits and we know we have some work to do to improve their clarity – particularly in how we define the grades and the boundaries between them.

The consultation responses that have been analysed so far have also raised concerns about the number of evaluation areas to be considered on inspection. Insights from our test visits also suggest there is merit in streamlining the number of evaluation areas to make inspections more workable both for inspectors and for those being inspected. We are considering how best to do this, while still meeting the objective of providing parents with more granular detail about strengths and areas for improvement.

Consistency has been a significant theme from the feedback analysed to date. To further improve consistency of inspections, we have already launched the Ofsted Academy to design and oversee all inspector training, as well as other changes to

our quality assurance processes. We are developing further measures on the management and oversight of inspections as part of our formal response.

How we report

Our proposals for new report cards, with a five-point grading system applied across a wider set of evaluation areas has attracted significant comment. Some representatives within the sector argue that grading itself should be abandoned, or limited to only evaluate whether providers achieve a set of minimum expectations.

However, to do so would ignore the views of parents. Alongside the consultation we commissioned YouGov to undertake polling and focus groups of parents on our proposals for report cards. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

Two thirds of parents said they support Ofsted continuing to give grades as part of our reports – the principle that underpins our proposals for report cards.

Almost 7 out of 10 of the parents surveyed said they prefer the new-look report cards to our current inspection reports. Nearly 9 out of 10 parents said the proposed report cards are easy to understand and 84% thought that the proposed use of colour-coding is helpful.

Report Cards are primarily to advise parents and carers about the care and education of their child, so as we consider the full range and detail of feedback on our proposed report card, their views must be given due weight.

We are, of course, extremely mindful of education professionals' wellbeing and we are considering carefully the input from our stakeholders on how we can best manage inspections to minimise pressure. We will include alongside our response an independent wellbeing impact assessment of our proposals, alongside an assessment of the workload impact.

Responding to the consultation and ongoing engagement

We will conduct sector-facing webinars, which are always heavily subscribed, and we will continue to make our inspector training publicly available, in the interests of openness and transparency.

Delivering Inspections in 2025/26

By the end of this summer term all schools will have received at least one inspection under the Education Inspection Framework. In September, we will maintain urgent inspection and regulatory activity in schools, early years and further education. This will include emergency inspections to keep children and learners safe, but also

monitoring inspections of providers that are in a category of concern, and those currently graded 'requires improvement' that are due a visit.

This approach will allow us the time and space to train and induct our inspectors fully on the revised approach to inspections. During this period, we will conduct a series of pilot inspections, giving inspectors the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the approach in practice. In early years, where we are the regulator, our work must continue - with careful arrangements made to prepare inspectors for the introduction of the revised framework.

Routine inspections under the revised framework will resume in November in schools, early years and further education. Inspections in Initial Teacher Education will resume in January 2026, in keeping with our usual timetable for ITE inspections.

Conclusion

Thank you again for your continued support and the close working of our officials on our joint endeavour to raise standards for all children, especially the most disadvantaged. I look forward to meeting again shortly to discuss the development and finalisation of the proposals.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martyn', with a stylized, cursive script.

Sir Martyn Oliver
His Majesty's Chief Inspector