

Further education and skills inspection toolkit

This toolkit sets out the areas that will be evaluated and graded on inspections of providers of further education and skills under part 8 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It can also be used by leaders to support self-evaluation and continuous improvement.

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Gathering evidence

The inspection toolkit is based on statutory duties, non-statutory guidance, professional standards, research and inspection evidence. We will update it as required, usually on an annual basis, to reflect any changes.

Inspectors focus on the impact of the systems and processes that leaders use to support the continuous improvement and effective running of the provider.

Inspectors collect first-hand evidence of how the provider typically operates, mainly through professional conversation and joint inspection activity, often alongside leaders, to observe the day-to-day work of the provider. Inspectors are required to view specific documentation. This should be limited to documents relating to the provider's statutory requirements or documents that it produces as part of its normal business processes. Inspectors do not need information to be presented in any specific format, as long as it is easily accessible. We do not need leaders to produce documents specifically for an Ofsted inspection of their provider. This would create unnecessary workload.

Inspectors will be proportionate in weighing up the evidence they gather, balancing the extent of any strengths or priorities for improvement in each of the evaluation areas. This will support grading and allow specific features of practice, whether strengths or priorities for improvement, to be reported clearly.

Supporting evidence for the toolkit

We have published the statutory and non-statutory guidance, professional standards and relevant research that we reviewed to inform and develop the education inspection toolkits.

See the list of references: [Renewed education inspection framework: supporting evidence base](#).

Alternatively, scan the QR code below to see the full list of references:



Safeguarding (whole-provider level)

This evaluation area considers whether:

- the provider establishes an open and positive safeguarding culture that puts learners' and apprentices' interests first
- leaders take an effective whole-provider approach to safeguarding

Inspectors focus on the factors that statutory and non-statutory guidance, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to safeguarding. This is so that learners and apprentices who need help and protection receive high-quality support. (The statutory guidance applies to learners and apprentices under the age of 18; the 'Prevent' duty applies to learners and apprentices of all ages.)

The factors are:

- protecting learners and apprentices from maltreatment and harm, whether within or outside the home or online
- being open and transparent; sharing appropriate information with others and actively seeking expert advice when required; making sure all safeguarding decisions and records are accessible for appropriate scrutiny; and accepting challenge so that the right decisions are made
- being vigilant and recognising that safeguarding incidents might occur in any provision at any time
- ensuring that all those who work with learners and apprentices are well trained in supporting them to be safer, and are empowered to speak out and act when concerns are raised
- recognising that learners not attending their education (children missing education) might be an indication of safeguarding concerns, including neglect, sexual abuse or child sexual and criminal exploitation
- actively seeking and listening to the views and experiences of learners, apprentices, staff, employers, and parents and carers (who we will refer to as 'parents' throughout, for ease of reading), and dealing promptly with any concerns
- having appropriate safeguarding and child protection arrangements, which ensure that leaders and staff:
 - identify learners and apprentices who may need early help and be an active partner in multi-agency working
 - identify learners and apprentices who are at risk of harm or who have been harmed, including, but not limited to, through neglect; abuse, including emotional, physical and sexual abuse (including from their peers); violence; grooming; exploitation; online harm; and mental health issues that may develop into safeguarding risks (such as eating disorders, self-harm or suicide ideation)
 - identify learners and apprentices who need support for significant mental health issues
 - secure the help that learners and apprentices need and, if required, refer them to expert support in a timely way
 - are aware of and respond to some learners' and apprentices' increased risk of needing help and protection, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who do not communicate verbally
 - manage safer recruitment and allegations about adults who may pose a risk to learners and apprentices, and refer these to appropriate external agencies such as the local authority designated officer

- being aware of and responding to the additional safeguarding vulnerabilities that some learners and apprentices at the provider may face, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), those who receive high needs funding, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing
- acting in line with '[Working together to safeguard children](#)', '[Keeping children safe in education](#)' and the '[Prevent](#)' duty guidance
- being receptive to challenge, reflecting on and learning from the provider's practice, and continually reviewing the impact of safeguarding policies, systems and processes
- where applicable, maintaining a single central record of pre-appointment checks, in paper or electronic form

The safeguarding duties covered in the '[Care and support statutory guidance](#)' issued under the [Care Act 2014](#) apply to an adult who:

- has needs for care and support (whether or not the local authority is meeting any of those needs)
- is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect
- as a result of those care and support needs, is unable to protect themselves from either the risk of or the experience of abuse or neglect

Safeguarding vulnerable adults¹ is defined in the 'Care and support statutory guidance' as:

- protecting the rights of adults to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect
- people and organisations working together to reduce the risks of abuse or neglect, and to stop them where they are occurring
- people and organisations making sure that those adults' wellbeing is promoted including, where appropriate, taking fully into account the adults' views, wishes, feelings and beliefs in deciding on any action
- recognising that adults sometimes have complex interpersonal relationships and may be ambivalent, unclear or unrealistic about their personal circumstances and therefore about the potential risks to their safety or wellbeing

¹ The legal definition of a vulnerable adult is anyone over the age of 18 who may be unable to protect themselves from abuse, harm or exploitation, which may be by reason of illness, age, mental illness, disability or other types of physical or mental impairment.

Considering safeguarding in different provision types

When inspectors evaluate safeguarding across different further education (FE) and skills settings, they consider the context and the nature of the learners and apprentices, for example:

- the ages of learners and apprentices, and how age-appropriate the safeguarding topics covered with them are
- whether there are adults as well as young people at risk at the provider, and the effectiveness of procedures for keeping them safe from abuse, neglect and exploitation

Gathering evidence about safeguarding

Safeguarding culture

In gathering evidence about safeguarding culture, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- establish a culture in which staff, learners, apprentices, employers and parents feel comfortable raising and discussing concerns that relate to the safeguarding of learners and apprentices, and feel confident that appropriate action will be taken
- know and are assured that policies and procedures are understood and applied, and have a positive impact on learners and apprentices
- ensure that learners and apprentices know who to go to for support
- have established purposeful and appropriate links with outside agencies to support the provider's safeguarding procedures and practice
- work productively with multi-agency partners to get learners and apprentices the support they need
- have developed a learning culture around safeguarding, which includes carefully reviewing safeguarding incidents to improve their practices in order to protect learners and apprentices effectively

Safeguarding information for all staff to know and act on

In gathering evidence about safeguarding information for all staff to know and act on, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- ensure that staff know, understand and uphold their safeguarding responsibilities, including their role in implementing the 'Prevent' duty to minimise the risk of learners and apprentices becoming radicalised
- ensure that the provider has policies and procedures for reporting safeguarding concerns about staff, peers or visitors, poor safeguarding practices, and whistleblowing

Management of safeguarding

In gathering evidence about the management of safeguarding, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- ensure that learners and apprentices are taught how to stay safe and keep others safe, including online, and are kept safe through appropriate filtering and monitoring systems
- ensure that there is an appropriate senior member, or members, of staff in the role of the designated safeguarding lead(s), or a nominated person, or persons, to carry out the statutory duties of this role
- ensure that appropriate procedures are in place to protect learners and apprentices who are at greater risk of harm, including vulnerable adults

Safer recruitment

In gathering evidence about safer recruitment, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- have received suitable training in, understand and follow safer recruitment practices
- know and understand the checks required for all staff and all other adults in the provider, including visitors, volunteers and contractors
- ensure that risk assessments are carried out and managed effectively
- understand and complete the required checks for all staff and all other adults, including visitors, volunteers and contractors
- obtain written confirmation that appropriate safeguarding checks have been carried out on staff working at any subcontracted provision used by the provider
- ensure that the single central record, where appropriate, indicates that all required pre-appointment and vetting checks have been made

Safeguarding concerns or allegations

In gathering evidence about safeguarding concerns or allegations, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- have clear procedures in place to respond to a safeguarding allegation against a member of staff, visitor or other learners and apprentices, including the required processes for record-keeping (including for low-level concerns)
- recognise when they should work with outside agencies, including the local authority and the police, in response to an allegation against a member of staff, visitor or peer
- understand the harm threshold and apply this consistently to their response to any safeguarding allegation against a member of staff, including a supply teacher, volunteer, contractor or another learner or apprentice
- know the processes for making referrals to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and the Teaching Regulation Agency and follow these as required

Child-on-child violence

In gathering evidence about child-on-child violence, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- ensure that staff know and understand that early intervention is key to preventing harmful sexual behaviour from escalating, and the circumstances under which sexual harassment and sexual violence occur, including outside of the provider and online
- ensure that staff respond to all signs, reports and concerns about child-on-child violence, which includes (but is not limited to) bullying, physical abuse (including physical assault and harm, or the threat of harm, with a weapon), sexual violence and harassment, and domestic abuse in the intimate relationships of learners and apprentices (teenage relationship abuse)
- have clear and effective systems for reporting incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence, and sharing information and consulting with multi-agency safeguarding partners
- have appropriate risk assessments that are reviewed regularly
- give immediate consideration as to how best to support and protect the victim and the alleged perpetrator(s), and any other children involved or otherwise affected

Grading safeguarding

Not met	Met
The safeguarding standards have been developed from the requirements of ‘Keeping children safe in education’ and ‘Working together to safeguard children’. Safeguarding is likely to be ‘not met’ when any of the following apply: Serious and/or widespread failures in safeguarding practice lead to learners and apprentices, or particular groups of these, being unsafe. Leaders have not taken sufficient action to resolve issues following a failure of safeguarding arrangements that meant learners and apprentices, or groups of these, may not have been kept safe. Leaders are not open to challenge and/or do not learn from safeguarding issues or incidents. When learners or apprentices under the age of 18, particularly those who have barriers to learning and/or wellbeing, are absent from the provider or their workplace (whether long term, temporarily or for part of the day), leaders are either not clear where they are or have not taken appropriate steps to check that they are safe or find out whether they require safeguarding support. If learners aged 14 to 16 are on site (whether full or part time, or temporarily), leaders are either not clear where the learners are when absent or are not able to demonstrate that they have taken steps to safeguard them. This includes learners aged 14 to 16 absent from education and those attending inappropriate, unregistered or unmonitored alternative provision. Leaders do not ensure that learners and apprentices are safe in work placements or contracted provision, and they do not respond promptly to concerns that are raised. Learners and apprentices do not know how to report issues, and/or do not trust that their safeguarding concerns will be acted on.	The safeguarding standards have been developed from the requirements of ‘Keeping children safe in education’ and ‘Working together to safeguard children’. Safeguarding is ‘met’ when all the following apply: Leaders and those responsible for governance and/or oversight have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility. Learners and apprentices are kept safe and feel safe, including those who are not on the provider’s site (whether long term, temporarily or for part of the provider day). They know how to report safeguarding incidents and trust that leaders will address them. The provider works effectively with its multi-agency partners. Leaders have strategic oversight of all aspects of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of learners and apprentices of all ages. Learners’ and apprentices’ voices are heard. They are informed of the safeguarding support available. Teaching learners and apprentices in an age-appropriate way about how they can stay safe and when they may need help is embedded within the curriculum. Learners and apprentices, parents, employers and other stakeholders know who to go to for support. All staff are vigilant and carry out their responsibilities effectively to keep learners and apprentices safe. Staff understand signs of possible safeguarding concerns and respond by following the provider’s systems confidently and consistently. Leaders and those responsible for safeguarding fulfil their responsibilities in relation to child-on-child violence. Leaders, staff and those responsible for governance and/or oversight know and fulfil the relevant statutory requirements for safeguarding. These include managing safer recruitment, reporting, referrals, record-

Not met	Met
Learners and apprentices, or groups of these, have little confidence that the provider will tackle concerns about safety, including the risk of abuse. This is because leaders have not taken their views seriously and/or dealt with relevant concerns, so they do not feel safe. Leaders and those responsible for governance and/or oversight do not fulfil their responsibilities in relation to child-on-child violence. Leaders do not handle allegations of abuse swiftly and appropriately. This is likely to lead to learners and apprentices, or groups of these, being put at risk of significant harm. Leaders and those responsible for governance and/or oversight do not fulfil their responsibilities in relation to safer recruitment, reporting, referrals, record-keeping and the 'Prevent' duty. Leaders and those responsible for governance and/or oversight do not manage safeguarding concerns or allegations made about staff other adults or peers appropriately. Leaders do not follow local authority procedures in managing safeguarding concerns or allegations about staff. The provider does not fulfil its duty to refer allegations or concerns to the DBS. Where the legal duty to refer has been met, there is no evidence of a referral to the relevant bodies. Leaders have not ensured that staff have appropriate safeguarding training, which is likely to put learners and apprentices at risk of significant harm.	keeping and the 'Prevent' duty. The provider has clear and accessible policies and procedures that help to keep learners and apprentices safe and reflect current statutory guidance. Leaders keep learners and apprentices safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism in accordance with the 'Prevent' duty. Leaders, staff and those responsible for governance and/or oversight are receptive to challenge and are reflective about their practices. This means that the impact of safeguarding policies, systems and processes is continually monitored. Leaders and those responsible for governance and/or oversight ensure that staff are appropriately supervised, supported and monitored. Where the conduct and behaviour of staff are not appropriate, leaders take action. Leaders follow local authority procedures in managing safeguarding concerns and allegations about staff. They fulfil their duty to refer allegations or concerns to the DBS. Where the legal duty to refer has been met, there is evidence of a referral to DBS. Leaders and those responsible for governance and/or oversight have resolved any minor safeguarding incidents identified during the inspection or are taking steps to resolve them. Leaders ensure that staff carry out appropriate safeguarding training that is relevant to their roles and reflective of changes to current statutory duties.

Inclusion (whole-provider level)

This evaluation area considers how leaders and staff identify and support the needs of learners and apprentices. These include:

- disadvantaged learners and apprentices who face challenges that hinder their educational progress; the term 'disadvantaged' refers to learners and apprentices who have been eligible for free school meals in the past 6 years and those from low-income families
- learners and apprentices with SEND and learners who receive high needs funding; this includes learners and apprentices who receive additional support with their learning and those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan
- learners and apprentices who are known (or previously known) to social care, such as those who are under the age of 18 and in care, and care leavers
- learners and apprentices who are known (or previously known) to youth-justice services
- learners and apprentices who face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those who were previously not in employment, education or training (NEET)

Inspectors focus on the factors that professional standards, non-statutory guidance, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to inclusion.

These factors are:

- setting high expectations for all learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics
- establishing a culture in which early and accurate assessment of learners' and apprentices' needs is prioritised
- reducing barriers to learners' and apprentices' education, training and/or wellbeing to support their development, involving specialists where appropriate
- working closely and effectively with learners and apprentices, parents (where appropriate), professionals and staff, and ensuring that learners' and apprentices' views and aspirations are included in decision-making about the support they receive

Considering inclusion in different provision types

When inspectors apply this evaluation area for learners and apprentices with SEND in specialist settings, they:

- consider the contexts in which FE and skills providers operate and how these contexts shape leaders' approach to inclusion
- seek to understand whether leaders' and teachers' assessment and identification of the starting points of individual learners and apprentices with SEND are accurate
- keep in mind that, while there is no requirement for a provider to appoint a special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) or similar SEND specialist, it is likely that a member of staff will be appointed to coordinate provision and support for learners and apprentices with educational needs; where such a member of staff has been appointed, inspectors work closely with them throughout the inspection

Gathering evidence about inclusion

Identifying, assessing and meeting needs, and reducing barriers

In gathering evidence about identifying, assessing and meeting needs, and reducing barriers, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- have established a culture in which staff understand the range of barriers that learners and apprentices may face to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those specific to their community and context; they work quickly and accurately to identify learners and apprentices who are facing those barriers
- make sure learners and apprentices receive effective support, consult with external specialists and implement their advice as necessary, and ensure that appropriate reasonable adjustments are made in accordance with the [Equality Act 2010](#) and the SEND code of Practice
- ensure that any accessibility planning meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, and is implemented effectively and reviewed regularly
- make sure that the use of any alternative settings is suitable, safe and in learners'/apprentices' best interests
- where providers receive the inclusive mainstream fund for learners aged 16 to 19, leaders and governors have developed (and published, where necessary) plans and taken steps to strengthen inclusive practice to improve access, participation and outcomes across their provision

Supporting disadvantaged learners and apprentices

In gathering evidence about supporting disadvantaged learners and apprentices, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- have a secure understanding of their disadvantaged learners' and apprentices' needs and use appropriate evidence to inform their approaches to addressing these
- make sure that the delivery of their inclusion strategy, and any associated strategies and policies, is sustained and monitored effectively, including through training and support for staff
- continually monitor the impact of their approaches, including their inclusion strategy and any associated strategies and policies, and make helpful and proactive adaptations as appropriate
- ensure that their approaches, including to their inclusion strategy and any associated strategies and policies, have a positive impact on learners' and apprentices' achievement and/or wellbeing

Supporting learners and apprentices with SEND and high needs

In gathering evidence about supporting learners and apprentices with SEND, including those who receive high needs funding, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- have an appropriately experienced leader who ensures that the provider's support is effective in making a positive difference for learners and apprentices with SEND and those who receive high needs funding, and draws on specialists where necessary
- identify learners' and apprentices' emerging and changing needs quickly and accurately
- ensure that the 'graduated approach' (a continuous cycle of 'assess, plan, do and review' that helps to ensure that learners and apprentices receive an appropriate level of support) is used

in a way that is effective in meeting learners' and apprentices' needs, and that staff receive suitable training and support to implement it successfully

- ensure that their work improves the progress and achievement of learners and apprentices with SEND, and that they do not lower their expectations of them
- are committed to and understand their role in the local area partnership's strategy to improve the experiences of, and outcomes for, learners and apprentices with SEND and those who receive high needs funding; where appropriate, leaders ensure that the local partnership's strategies have a positive impact on learners and apprentices at the provider
- meet the needs of learners and apprentices with SEND, making reasonable adjustments to the environment and the provider's wider offer, which help to ensure that these learners and apprentices access education and training

Supporting learners and apprentices who are known (or previously known) to social care

In gathering evidence about supporting learners and apprentices who are known (or previously known) to social care teams, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- ensure that an appropriately experienced staff member has been designated to support learners and apprentices who are looked-after children
- ensure that learners and apprentices who are looked-after children receive high-quality support to improve their progress and achievement, and leaders and staff have regard to personal education plans, if any are in place
- ensure that the designated safeguarding lead and other leaders use their knowledge of the learner/apprentice to inform decisions about promoting their welfare, such as providing additional academic support or supporting them to maintain their wellbeing
- share information with the local authority, including for statutory assessments of learners' and apprentices' social care needs
- work with social workers, personal advisers and other professionals to provide effective multi-agency planning and support for learners and apprentices

Supporting learners and apprentices who face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing

In gathering evidence about supporting learners and apprentices who are facing barriers to their learning, progression, achievement and/or wellbeing, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- are alert to learners' and apprentices' emerging and changing needs and can quickly identify those who are at risk of not attending or engaging in their learning programmes as result of a change in their circumstances and/or those whose wellbeing is deteriorating
- sensitively approach learners and apprentices to offer support to ensure that they can continue with their learning programme(s) and maintain their wellbeing
- are knowledgeable and well informed about issues in their communities that might affect learners' and apprentices' wellbeing
- have access to specialist organisations that support them in reducing barriers that learners and apprentices face, and work with those organisations where appropriate

Grading inclusion

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
Inclusion is likely to be graded 'needs attention' when the expected standard has not been met. This may include when one or more of the following applies: • Leaders have only recently started to take appropriate action to identify and assess learners' and apprentices' needs and to reduce barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. • Leaders mostly take the right actions to support learners or apprentices, but weaknesses or inconsistencies in providing support have a negative impact on a particular group of learners or apprentices. • Leaders' decisions – including, for example, about the use of high needs funding to support learners and apprentices – do not have the positive impact that leaders intend. • Leaders have considered the training or development that staff require as part of their inclusive approaches but there are inconsistencies in how well staff put these into practice. • Leaders understand the needs of learners and apprentices but do not share well enough this information with staff at relevant subcontracted provision or work	Inclusion meets the 'expected standard' when all the following apply: Leaders and staff establish a culture in which learners' and apprentices' needs are met and learners and apprentices are welcome and, in most cases, feel supported to fulfil their potential, whatever their particular needs. Leaders and staff quickly and accurately identify learners' and apprentices' learning and support needs. When these emerge or change, staff adapt programmes and provide suitable support in order to meet the needs of learners and apprentices. Leaders take an appropriate 'graduated' approach (a continuous cycle of 'assess, plan, do and review' that helps learners and apprentices to receive an appropriate level of support), which generally meets learners' and apprentices' needs well. Staff receive suitable training and support to implement this approach. Where learners and apprentices face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, leaders take appropriate action for the period of need and do not reduce their high expectations of those learners/apprentices. Where the provider has a leader responsible for learners and apprentices with SEND, they are qualified and experienced and exercise sufficient	Inclusion meets the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and all the following apply: Leaders and staff establish strategies that consistently enhance the opportunities and experiences of all learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics. Leaders ensure that the barriers to learners' and apprentices' learning are reduced swiftly and consistently. They systematically review and adapt any support offered in a way that makes a significant difference to learners' and apprentices' experiences and opportunities. Leaders carefully monitor the progress of all learners and apprentices, in particular those groups listed above. Leaders make good use of data to understand the needs of their learners and apprentices. Leaders' work on inclusion is embedded in their organisational culture and practices and has a significant and consistent impact on learners' and apprentices' opportunities and experiences. Leaders consistently identify when additional learning support is no longer required or can be

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
and community placements, and/or do not monitor closely enough the support they receive. This has a negative impact on these learners and apprentices.	leadership to make a positive difference for those learners and apprentices. Leaders take the necessary steps to make sure that any use of alternative settings, such as work-experience placements and subcontracted locations, is suitable and meets the needs of learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their experiences and opportunities, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics. Leaders and other staff support learners and apprentices who are looked-after children to improve their learning and/or wellbeing. This includes having regard to personal education plans, if any are in place. Where relevant, leaders understand and perform their role in the local area partnership's strategy to improve the experiences and opportunities that learners and apprentices with high needs and SEND receive.	reduced, so learners and apprentices are well prepared to become more independent and to move on to the next stage of their learning and employment. Leaders make proactive and evidence-informed adaptations to their inclusion strategy, as appropriate, which have a consistently positive impact on these learners' and apprentices' education.

Urgent improvement

Inclusion is likely to be graded 'urgent improvement' when any of the following apply:

- Leaders do not identify and assess learners' and apprentices' needs effectively, and/or this identification and assessment do not have a meaningful impact on the provision for learners and apprentices.
- Leaders do not take into account the needs of their learners and apprentices, or of one or more groups of learners and/or apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics.
- Leaders are not using dedicated funding to support the learners and apprentices it is intended for.
- Leaders do not meet statutory requirements for learners and apprentices who receive high needs funding, and this has a significantly negative impact on learners' and apprentices' learning and/or wellbeing and planned achievement.

Exceptional

Inspectors may consider leaders' work in inclusion to be 'exceptional' when the 'strong standard' has been met and all the following apply:

Exceptional standards of inclusion have been sustained over time so that barriers to learning and/or wellbeing for all learners and apprentices are reduced exceptionally well to ensure highly positive outcomes and experiences, in particular for those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics.

Leaders' actions have a transformational impact on how well all learners achieve and thrive and feel that they belong.

There are no significant areas for improvement that leaders have not already prioritised.

If this grade is awarded, leaders should use their exceptional success in this evaluation area to:

- support improvement across all aspects of their own provision and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other providers, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks

Leadership and governance (whole-provider level)

This evaluation area considers:

- how leaders and those responsible for governance collectively ensure that the provision enables every learner and apprentice to belong and thrive
- the commitment of leaders and those responsible for governance to raising standards of education and care to improve the lives of all learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and mathematics

Inspectors focus on gathering evidence relating to the factors that statutory and non-statutory guidance, professional standards, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to leadership and governance.

These factors are:

- leaders having high expectations of all learners and apprentices at the provider, and these being embodied in all staff's day-to-day interactions with learners and apprentices
- leaders understanding the strengths and areas for development in the provision, and taking effective action to improve and/or sustain high standards
- leaders and those responsible for governance and/or oversight understanding their respective roles and performing these in a way that enhances the effectiveness of the provider
- leaders engaging with relevant stakeholders to support learners' and apprentices' education and training, including (as appropriate) employers, local authorities and devolved agencies, community groups, parents, and subcontractors
- those responsible for governance and/or oversight taking into account the workload and wellbeing of leaders and, in turn, leaders taking into account the workload and wellbeing of their staff
- leaders taking decisions and acting in the best interests of learners and apprentices, prioritising the achievement and experiences of all learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics

Considering leadership and governance in different provision types

When inspectors evaluate leadership and governance across different FE and skills settings, they consider the context of the provider and the nature of the learners and apprentices, for example recognising that a high proportion of learners and apprentices are aged 18 and over.

Inspectors keep in mind that different contexts may need different approaches: for instance, a small education or training provider in comparison with a large, multi-site, national provider. Inspectors recognise that, in small providers, leaders may have multiple responsibilities, and the leadership team may be small and/or may draw on expertise or leadership from people who are not in the provider every day of the week.

Furthermore, inspectors are aware that providers will establish different approaches to governance and/or oversight based on their specific contexts and on guidance for their provider type; and that providers' approaches to developing relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders will vary, based on their curriculum offer and context.

Gathering evidence about leadership and governance

Strategic leadership

In gathering evidence about strategic leadership, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- have devised and are enacting a clear and ambitious vision, grounded in accurate self-evaluation and aligned to the needs of learners, apprentices and employers, and regional skills priorities
- make decisions in the best interests of all learners and apprentices, prioritising their experiences, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics
- take a strategic approach to improving the provision, identifying the correct priorities to ensure the best possible outcomes and experiences for learners and apprentices, and drawing on the best available evidence
- forge partnerships with stakeholders, local authorities and devolved agencies to inform their planning and enhance opportunities for learners and apprentices
- tailor their approach to the context of the provider
- allocate staffing, funding and professional learning and expertise effectively to build and sustain expertise for all provision types
- ensure appropriate quality across all provision models, including subcontractors, different provider sites, and courses taught online and in person

Governance

In gathering evidence about governance, inspectors evaluate the extent to which governors and/or those responsible for oversight:

- are knowledgeable about their statutory duties and carry them out effectively
- are strategic and select the most appropriate methods to assure themselves about the quality of provision, the impact of improvement actions, and the quality of the learner experience, so that learners and apprentices thrive and feel that they belong
- provide support and challenge to leaders and hold them to account for learners' and apprentices' progress and achievement; this includes all learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics
- understand their role in monitoring leaders' workload and wellbeing, and addressing any issues as appropriate
- maintain suitable oversight of subcontracted provision

Staff wellbeing and workload

In gathering evidence about staff wellbeing and workload, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- take action to ensure that staff's wellbeing is monitored and their workload is manageable
- do not create unnecessary burdens
- protect staff from bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- make sure that all staff feel valued and are supported to do their jobs to a high standard, ensuring that their time is used as effectively as possible to secure the best outcomes for learners and apprentices

Professional learning and expertise

In gathering evidence about professional learning and expertise, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- leaders establish a culture of continuous improvement, pursuing their own professional learning and expertise and acting as role models for staff
- the provider's professional learning and expertise programme enables staff to:
 - meet the demands of each subject/specialist curriculum, including staff who teach outside their subject specialism, and/or to develop the knowledge and skills to teach at a higher level in their subject specialism
 - implement appropriate strategies, reasonable adjustments and adaptations to support the needs of all learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics
 - fulfil the provider's expectations of the participation and development of learners and apprentices
- leaders provide effective support and development for staff who are new to teaching and those intending to progress in their careers
- staff continually seek to improve their expertise and maintain a high level of vocational or technical knowledge, drawing on appropriate evidence, the practice of others, links with employers, and other relevant stakeholders and coaching, and are largely successful in doing so

Stakeholder engagement

In gathering evidence about stakeholder engagement, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- leaders engage with stakeholders including, as appropriate, employers, community groups, parents and subcontractors, supporting learners' and apprentices' education and training
- leaders have a thorough understanding of potential barriers to high-quality engagement and work effectively to overcome these
- leaders work effectively with stakeholders, local authorities and devolved agencies in a climate of mutual challenge and support

Grading leadership and governance

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
Leadership and governance are likely to be graded 'needs attention' when the expected standard has not been met. This may include when one or more of the following applies: • Leaders broadly understand the context in which they work, but their analysis of the provision's strengths and/or areas for development lacks precision, and/or does not identify the root causes of the latter and find ways to mitigate these. • Leaders demonstrate the capacity to improve, are taking actions to bring about change and are largely focused on the right areas, but their work is not leading to sustainable improvements for learners and apprentices at a swift enough pace. • Governors and/or those responsible for oversight, while supportive of the provider's ambitions and vision, are inconsistent in the support and/or challenge they provide. Their approaches to assuring themselves of the impact of leaders' work lack precision. • Leaders' engagement with relevant stakeholders is limited and/or not targeted appropriately. It makes a minimal difference to learners' and apprentices' experiences, success or wellbeing.	Leadership and governance meet the 'expected standard' when all the following apply: Leaders understand the provider's strengths and areas for development. They largely take appropriate action to drive improvement and/or sustain high standards. Where an aspect of the provision falls short of the expected standard, this is dealt with quickly and effectively. Governors and/or those responsible for oversight make sure that leaders have a clear vision and strategy and manage resources well. They support and challenge leaders appropriately, giving due regard to their wellbeing and workload. Leaders, governors and/or those responsible for oversight make decisions that are in the best interests of learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics. Governors and/or those responsible for oversight have a generally accurate understanding of the quality of the curriculum, teaching and training, including any subcontracted provision. They work with	Leadership and governance meet the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and all the following apply: Leaders, governors and/or those responsible for oversight have a detailed insight into the provider's strengths and areas for development. This ensures that their strategic priorities are sharply focused, and that any remedial actions they take have a sustained impact on the quality of provision for learners and apprentices. Leaders are tenacious in their pursuit of high standards across the provision. Their excellent insight into what constitutes high-quality teaching and their high expectations of all learners and apprentices are evident across all aspects of the provision. Leaders and staff understand and are committed to their role in improving standards. They make a consistently positive contribution to sustaining and improving the quality of provision. Leaders and staff forge and maintain lasting partnerships with key stakeholders, which significantly enrich learners' and apprentices' experiences, promoting their wellbeing and maximising their chances of success.

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
• Leaders are conscious of staff workload, but do not do enough to manage it or to avoid unnecessary burdens. • Leaders have a programme of professional learning and expertise for staff, but it is overly generic or not well enough targeted, which limits its impact on the quality of the curriculum, teaching and training that learners and apprentices receive. • Where leaders subcontract provision, they review the quality of this provision but do not maintain thorough oversight of delivery, resulting in poor-quality provision, experiences or outcomes for learners and apprentices.	leaders to monitor and refine actions they have taken to make improvements. Leaders ensure that staff feel valued. They consider the wellbeing of staff and make sure workloads are manageable. They avoid creating unnecessary burdens. Leaders protect staff from bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation. Leaders and staff collaborate with stakeholders to help enhance learners' and apprentices' experiences and/or to maintain their wellbeing. Leaders ensure that programmes of professional learning and expertise are generally well planned and implemented and meets the needs of staff. Leaders largely monitor the quality of subcontracted provision carefully to ensure that the courses offered meet the intended curriculum standards. They hold subcontractors to account for any weak performance.	Staff benefit consistently from highly tailored and focused programmes of professional learning and expertise that allow them to develop their industry and pedagogical knowledge and skills to a high standard. A culture of continuous improvement is embedded across the provision. Leaders secure and maintain consistently strong standards across all provision, including any subcontracted provision, or are rapidly improving any areas where this is not the case.

Urgent improvement

Leadership and governance are likely to be graded 'urgent improvement' when any of the following apply:

- Leaders do not identify and/or prioritise the right issues, or they take very limited action to deal with these, in directly offered and/or subcontracted provision. Any actions they have taken have had little or no impact on learners'/apprentices' experiences.
- Leaders do not have a track record of improvement at the provider or, since being appointed, have not made anything other than minimal improvements.
- Where an employer, local authority or governing body (the responsible body) has statutory duties for leaders' wellbeing, it does not fulfil these duties. Leaders are not supported.
- Leaders make poor decisions, which have a negative impact on learners and apprentices. These might include, but are not limited to, falsification of records, inappropriate use of subcontracting, or use of unsafe premises.
- Leaders impose unsustainable workloads on staff, which undermine morale and performance.
- Bullying and harassment go unnoticed or unchallenged.
- Professional learning and expertise programmes have little or no impact on improving the quality of the curriculum or on teaching and training.

Exceptional

Inspectors may consider leadership and governance to be 'exceptional' when the 'strong standard' has been met and all the following apply:

Exceptionally high standards of leadership and governance have been sustained. Governors and/or those responsible for oversight, other leaders at all levels, and all staff make a strong, positive contribution to the provider's strategic priorities, leading to continued improvement and/or sustained high standards in all areas of the provider's work.

Leaders' actions have a transformational impact on the progress, development and wellbeing of all learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics.

There are no significant areas for improvement that leaders have not already prioritised.

If this grade is awarded, leaders should use their exceptional success in this evaluation area to:

- support improvement across all aspects of their own provision and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example, with other providers, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks

Contribution to meeting skills needs (whole-provider level for FE colleges, sixth form colleges and designated institutions only)

This evaluation area considers:

- how well leaders engage with employer, civic, community and education stakeholders to understand local, regional and/or national skills needs, and offer curriculums that contribute to meeting these needs
- how effectively leaders involve stakeholders in designing and delivering curriculums at subject level
- how well skills-related aspects of curriculums are planned and taught
- how well leaders develop partnerships with stakeholders that make a positive contribution towards meeting local, regional and/or national skills needs

Inspectors focus on the factors that statutory and non-statutory guidance, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to meeting skills needs.

These factors are:

- engaging with stakeholders to understand skills needs and to build partnerships
- involving stakeholders in curriculum design and delivery
- planning and delivering the curriculum to contribute to meeting skills needs

Considering contribution to meeting skills needs in different provision types

Inspectors focus on what is typical for learners and apprentices at the provider.

When inspectors evaluate the contribution to meeting skills needs across different FE and skills settings, they consider the context of the provider, the curriculum(s) the provider offers, and the nature of the learners and apprentices.

Furthermore, inspectors are aware of how the focus on skills needs may vary between different providers, as well as between different courses. For example, inspectors keep in mind the differences between learners planning to progress to university and those planning to progress into employment or further vocational training, and the different skills focus that these require. They are also aware of the context of the region(s) in which the provider operates.

Gathering evidence about contribution to meeting skills needs

Engagement with employers and other relevant stakeholders

In gathering evidence about engagement with employers and other relevant stakeholders, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- work with an appropriate range of stakeholders to understand local, regional and/or national skills needs
- use information they receive through their stakeholder links to design curriculums and support all learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics

Involvement of stakeholders in curriculum design and delivery

In gathering evidence about the involvement of stakeholders in curriculum design and delivery, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders involve relevant stakeholders in designing and contributing to subject-level curriculums to benefit learners and apprentices.

How curriculum planning and delivery contribute to meeting skills needs

In gathering evidence about how curriculum planning and delivery contribute to meeting skills needs, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- ensure that the skills-related curriculum is designed (the intent) and taught (the implementation) effectively so that learners and apprentices achieve their intended outcomes (the impact)
- contribute, through the curriculum, to meeting skills needs
- where appropriate, have a positive impact on those who are disadvantaged, or furthest from education, training and work, whether locally, regionally and/or nationally

Inclusive contribution to meeting skills needs

In gathering evidence about the provider's inclusive contribution to meeting skills needs, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- in their partnership working with key stakeholders, leaders and managers promote inclusivity, respect for diversity, and awareness of the needs of all groups of learners and apprentices
- learners and apprentices benefit from inclusive opportunities to develop skills, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics

Grading contribution to meeting skills needs

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
Contribution to meeting skills needs is likely to be graded 'needs attention' when the 'expected standard' has not been met. This may include when one or more of the following applies: • Leaders engage with employers and other stakeholders to understand the skills needs of the local, regional and/or national economy, but these partnerships are underdeveloped. Leaders partially understand these local, regional and/or national needs, but there are notable gaps in their knowledge. • Although leaders understand the skills needs of the local, regional and/or national economy, they have not planned their curriculums well enough to meet these needs, except in a few cases. • Although they have developed useful links with relevant stakeholder groups, leaders have not made sure that the knowledge and expertise of these stakeholders are used well enough across subject-level curriculums. While learners and apprentices in some subjects benefit from stakeholder involvement, there are notable gaps in this input in other curriculum areas. As a result, some learners and apprentices are underprepared for future employment, training or study.	Contribution to meeting skills needs meets the 'expected standard' when all the following apply: Leaders typically engage well with employers and other stakeholders, and this enables them to have a sound understanding of the skills needs of the local, regional and/or national economy. Leaders plan a relevant curriculum to meet those needs. Leaders and managers involve employers and other relevant stakeholders effectively in designing and contributing to subject-level curriculums. Learners and apprentices generally learn well from stakeholders' knowledge and expertise, which (where relevant) helps prepare them for future independence, employment, training and/or study. Leaders largely make sure that, at subject level, skills-related curriculum content is planned and taught well. Where applicable, learners and apprentices typically develop useful skills for employment, further training or study.	Contribution to meeting skills needs meets the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and all the following apply: Leaders engage widely and consistently with employers and/or other stakeholders. They have a thorough understanding of the skills needs of the local, regional and/or national economy, and they contribute highly effectively to meeting these. Leaders plan relevant stakeholders' involvement in designing, and contributing to, subject-level curriculums carefully. This input results in learners and apprentices developing extensive new knowledge and expertise. The skills-related curriculum is planned and taught to a consistently high quality. Leaders forge strong and highly effective partnerships with stakeholders from a range of community, civic, education and employer groups, as appropriate to the curriculum and learners' and apprentices' destinations. Through these partnerships, leaders accurately identify and consistently contribute to meeting a broad range of local, regional and/or national skills needs. Across curriculum areas, learners and apprentices significantly increase their knowledge, skills and professional behaviours because of these partnerships.

Urgent improvement

Contribution to meeting skills needs is likely to be graded 'urgent improvement' when any of the following apply:

- Leaders have a limited understanding of the skills needs of the local, regional and/or national economy. They do not engage with employers and other stakeholders to enable them to understand these. They do not consider – or give only very limited consideration to – these skills needs or those of learners and apprentices when they design their curriculums.
- Leaders do not involve stakeholders, or involve them only minimally, in designing and contributing to subject-level curriculums. Learners and apprentices gain little meaningful knowledge from employers and/or stakeholders.
- At subject level, skills-related curriculum content is very limited or does not exist. Learners and apprentices gain very little to prepare them for independence, employment, further training or study.

Exceptional

Inspectors may consider leaders' work in contributing to skills needs to be 'exceptional' when the 'strong standard' has been met and all the following apply:

Leaders spearhead the creation of highly beneficial partnerships that have a significant and sustained influence on learners and apprentices. Their work makes an exceptional contribution to meeting local, regional and/or national skills needs.

Leaders make sure that, at subject level, skills-related curriculum content is planned expertly and taught highly effectively in all subjects.

Learners and apprentices thoroughly and securely develop a wide range of skills that prepare them exceptionally well for independence, work, further training and/or study.

There are no significant areas for improvement that leaders have not already prioritised.

If this grade is awarded, leaders should use their exceptional success in this evaluation area to:

- support improvement across all aspects of their own provision and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other providers, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks

Curriculum, teaching and training (provision-type level)

This evaluation area considers:

- how effectively leaders design a high-quality and ambitious curriculum for all learners and apprentices
- how well teachers, trainers and staff ensure that the curriculum is implemented effectively for all learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics

Inspectors focus on the factors that statutory and non-statutory guidance, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to the curriculum, teaching and training, thereby giving learners and apprentices the greatest possible opportunity to access high-quality education and training.

These factors are:

- having an ambitious curriculum that equips learners and apprentices with the knowledge, skills and behaviours that are essential for their next steps
- ensuring that the curriculum is planned and sequenced so that the end points are clear, and it builds on what learners and apprentices already know and can do
- ensuring that teachers, trainers and staff have expert knowledge and experience of the curriculums that they teach
- ensuring that teachers, trainers and staff teach the intended curriculum, and do so effectively, focusing on the knowledge and concepts that are most important for learners and apprentices to know, and presenting information clearly
- teachers, trainers and staff making effective use of assessment to check learners' and apprentices' understanding, and adapting their teaching and training as necessary, ensuring that learners and apprentices fully absorb key concepts, and use their knowledge and skills fluently

Considering curriculum, teaching and training in different provision types

When inspectors evaluate curriculum, teaching and training across different FE and skills settings, they consider the context of the courses/programmes that providers offer and the nature of learners and apprentices, for example:

- educational programmes for young people, apprenticeships, adult learning programmes and provision for learners with high needs
- providers who teach learners and apprentices online or in person, including how these providers use technology and digital platforms to provide teaching and learning
- providers who are geographically spread out and staff who work mostly remotely
- the model of delivery that providers use, including mentoring and coaching, self-directed learning, and learning on the job
- learners and apprentices on courses from pre-entry levels to level 7 apprenticeships, part-time or short courses, full-time and long courses, and learners who follow courses without external accreditation
- learners and apprentices who need substantial additional support on vocational and academic study programmes, apprenticeships, supported internships, pre-vocational courses and personal development courses
- learners and apprentices with specific learning needs and/or disabilities

Gathering evidence about curriculum, teaching and training in different provision types

The leadership of the curriculum, teaching and training

In gathering evidence about the leadership of the curriculum, teaching and training, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- have a comprehensive understanding of the curriculum and the quality of teaching and training for the provision type
- assure themselves that the curriculum is being taught well
- identify priorities for improvement and take effective and timely action to address these

Curriculum design to ensure that learners gain the knowledge, skills and behaviours to be successful now and in the future

In gathering evidence about the curriculum design to ensure that learners and apprentices gain the knowledge, skills and behaviours to be successful now and in the future, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders construct a curriculum that:

- is ambitious and designed and sequenced appropriately
- reflects the needs of the local, regional and national context
- prepares learners and apprentices with the knowledge, skills and professional behaviours needed for their next steps
- allows enough time for teaching and training, practising and revisiting content, and addressing any gaps in learners' and apprentices' knowledge
- includes employers (where relevant) in the design of the curriculum
- includes (where relevant) work experience, work or industry placements, and/or work-related learning to enhance the curriculum

High-quality teaching, training and learning

In gathering evidence about high-quality teaching, training and learning, inspectors evaluate the extent to which trainers and teaching staff:

- are subject experts and (where relevant) have current industry experience and expertise
- communicate and explain up-to-date vocational, academic and technical subject knowledge that (where relevant) reflects expected industry practice and meets employers' needs
- plan learning logically and systematically, sequencing content so that new concepts build on prior learning, and long-term retention of key knowledge is supported
- select the most appropriate teaching and training strategies to maintain learners' and apprentices' interest, explain new ideas in ways that learners and apprentices understand, build on their prior knowledge, and maximise learning
- allow time for learners and apprentices to practise and consolidate their learning
- use assessment to check learners' and apprentices' understanding, development and progress

- recognise and record learners' and apprentices' progress and achievement accurately, taking into account their starting points

Inclusive curriculum, teaching and training practices

In gathering evidence about inclusive curriculum, teaching and training practices, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders ensure that teachers and trainers:

- know how to reduce barriers to learning and promote the wellbeing of the learners who they teach
- draw on appropriate evidence to adapt the teaching and training of the curriculum for all learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics
- where appropriate, collaborate with external specialists, employers and families to design and make reasonable adjustments or adaptations to the curriculum and to support learners and apprentices to progress to the next stages of education, employment and/or training

Grading curriculum, teaching and training

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
Curriculum, teaching and training are likely to be graded 'needs attention' when the 'expected standard' has not been met. This may include when one or more of the following applies: • Leaders' ambitions for the curriculum, teaching and training are appropriate, but weaknesses in implementation mean these have a limited or inconsistent impact on learners and apprentices. • Leaders have only recently started to take action to improve the curriculum, teaching and training. While their actions are appropriate, they are at an early stage and it is too soon to see the impact. • Although leaders understand the principles of effective curriculum planning, the effectiveness of their planning is variable. Curriculums may not be ambitious enough or fully matched to learners' and apprentices' needs. • While learners' and apprentices' progress is assessed, assessment is not typically used well to improve the curriculum and inform teaching. • Leaders do not routinely make sure that the curriculum is accessible and appropriately adapted for learners and apprentices, such	Curriculum, teaching and training meet the 'expected standard' when all the following apply: Leaders typically have an accurate understanding of the quality of the curriculum, teaching and training. When necessary, they address any areas of concern in a timely and effective way. Leaders have largely ensured that the curriculum is well sequenced and builds on what has already been taught and learned. This equips learners and apprentices with the essential knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need to achieve well, and prepares them well for their next steps. Learners and apprentices follow a curriculum designed around well-planned outcomes and experiences, such as those in their EHC plans or individual learning plans. Leaders make sure that the curriculum is, in the main, relevant to local, regional and national employment and training priorities. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is accessible, allowing learners and apprentices to participate in learning and study the intended curriculum, including those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND, those with high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, or those who may face any other barriers to their	Curriculum, teaching and training meet the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and all the following apply: Leaders have developed a consistently high-quality curriculum, with expert teaching and training across all courses and delivery models. Decisions about what to teach, when and how are highly effective and tailored to the context of the provision, the course type and learner needs. The curriculum is regularly updated to support each learner and apprentice, based on their needs and goals. Teachers and trainers help them build the key knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to succeed. The curriculum offers significant, meaningful additional learning opportunities and goes beyond the planned outcomes. Teachers and trainers skilfully teach difficult and/or complex topics to learners and apprentices, connecting new ideas with existing knowledge so that they can grasp, retain and apply that knowledge automatically and confidently. In the 16 to 19 study programmes, leaders ensure that the curriculum, teaching and training are of high quality. Teachers choose highly effective activities and tasks that meet

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
as those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND, those with high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face any other barriers to their learning or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics. The reasonable adjustments or adaptations they make are not well matched to learners' and apprentices' needs. • In adult learning programmes, leaders understand the need for adult learners to develop their personal, social and employability skills, but their actions to enable this have limited or inconsistent impact. • In apprenticeship programmes, leaders understand the principles and requirements of apprenticeships, but they do not ensure that they are routinely fully met. • For learners with high needs, while leaders understand the importance of preparing learners well for their next steps, including the need to put in place effective support arrangements, these learners are not sufficiently prepared for their next steps, and/or do not typically receive the specialist support that they need.	learning or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics. Leaders ensure that teachers and trainers have the knowledge, skills and resources they need to teach learners and apprentices. They are supporting them to quickly gain the relevant expertise and knowledge, where they do not have these, through professional learning and expertise. Learners and apprentices are taught well. Teachers use appropriate strategies to help them understand and remember what they have learned. Teachers and trainers mostly ensure that enough planned time is built into the curriculum to teach, practise, assess and close any gaps in learners' and apprentices' knowledge, skills and behaviours. Teachers and trainers largely have the expertise to prioritise and teach the vocabulary, both spoken and written, required for the specific courses/subjects that they teach. Teachers and trainers largely use assessment well to provide constructive feedback to learners and apprentices, and to refine their approach to teaching and training. Teachers and trainers generally explain vocational, academic and technical subject knowledge well. They select appropriate teaching and training activities and resources to	subject and learner needs. As a result, learners excel, including those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND, those with high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face any other barriers to their learning or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics. In adult learning programmes, leaders ensure that the curriculum, teaching and training are of consistently high quality. The curriculum meets employers' and stakeholders' needs and the relevant local, regional and national priorities consistently well. As a result, adult learners excel in the development of personal, social and employability skills. In apprenticeship programmes, staff work closely with employers to plan and implement on- and off-the-job training seamlessly, so that apprentices can practise and master their skills consistently well. Disadvantaged learners and apprentices and those groups listed above receive high-quality, tailored support. This ensures that they can access and succeed across the full curriculum. Leaders coordinate specialist support, enabling these learners and apprentices to thrive. Learners with high needs follow programmes that meet their individual needs consistently well. Teachers and trainers collaborate with a wide range of appropriate specialists so that

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
	support learners' and apprentices' development of new knowledge, skills and behaviours. Leaders ensure that 16 to 19 study programmes meet the principles and requirements. Leaders ensure that the curriculum for full-time 14- to 16-year-olds meets statutory requirements. In adult learning programmes, the curriculum is aligned to the funding authority, employer and stakeholder needs, and the relevant local, regional and national priorities. The curriculum is planned and tailored to help adult learners develop the personal, social and employability skills that they need to succeed. Leaders ensure that the principles and requirements of apprenticeships are met. Staff and employers co-plan and implement on- and off-the-job training so that apprentices can apply and practise newly taught knowledge, skills and behaviours at work. In provision for learners with high needs, learners follow tailored programmes that meet their individual needs. Teachers and trainers collaborate with external partners so that learners are well prepared for their next steps in learning, training or employment.	learners are consistently well prepared for their next steps in learning, training or employment.

Urgent improvement

Curriculum, teaching and training are likely to be graded 'urgent improvement' when any of the following apply:

- The curriculum lacks ambition, structure and coherence. Leaders have not considered the curriculum content sufficiently.
- Leaders lack an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching, training and learning.
- Leaders fail to tackle weaknesses in the education or training that learners and apprentices receive.
- Teachers' and trainers' expectations of all learners and apprentices, or of specific groups, are too low.
- Weak assessment practice means that the teaching and training fail to ensure that learners and apprentices achieve as well as they should.
- Leaders and staff do not identify learners' and apprentices' specific and individual needs or make appropriate reasonable adjustments or adaptations to meet them adequately. Learners and apprentices with specific needs may include those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND, those with high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face any other barriers to their learning or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics.
- The principles and requirements of the 16 to 19 study programme are not met.
- Statutory curriculum requirements for full-time 14- to 16-year-olds are not met.
- While planning their curriculum for adult learning programmes, leaders have not considered the priorities set by the funding authority.
- In apprenticeship providers, staff do not sufficiently consider the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship.
- Learners and apprentices with high needs do not receive the specialist support they need and/or reasonable adjustments are not being made for them.

Exceptional

Inspectors may consider leaders' work in curriculum, teaching and training to be 'exceptional' when the 'strong standard' has been met and all the following apply:

Leaders inspire and motivate staff to design and teach an exceptionally high-quality curriculum that inspires learners and apprentices, and promotes their interest and engagement. Teaching and training across all programmes and learning environments enable learners and apprentices to master the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they require.

Leaders' actions have a transformational impact on the learning of all learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics. As a result, learners and apprentices are exceptionally well prepared for current and later learning, and for the next steps in their education, employment and/or training.

There are no significant areas for improvement that leaders have not already prioritised.

If this grade is awarded, leaders should use their exceptional success in this evaluation area to:

- support improvement across all aspects of their own provision and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other providers, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks.

Achievement (provision-type level)

This evaluation area considers the extent to which:

- learners and apprentices develop knowledge, skills and professional behaviours as they progress through the curriculum
- learners and apprentices achieve their individual learning goals and qualifications
- learners and apprentices are ready to progress to their next step in education, training or employment, and go on to destinations that reflect their interests and meet their career goals and aspirations
- all learners and apprentices make progress and achieve; in particular, those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics

Inspectors focus on the factors that statutory and non-statutory guidance, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to achievement, thereby giving learners and apprentices the greatest possible opportunity to achieve, including through gaining qualifications where appropriate. They focus on what is typical for learners and apprentices at the provider.

These factors are:

- leaders' actions to secure learners' and apprentices' development of new knowledge, skills and professional behaviours, relative to their starting points and in relation to the ambitious end points of the provider's curriculum
- leaders' actions to secure learners' development of English, mathematical and digital skills to help them access learning, make progress towards level 2 mathematics and English qualifications, and take their next steps
- learners' and apprentices' practical and theoretical work being of a high standard, and appropriate to the level they are studying at
- leaders' actions to ensure that learners acquire the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to take their next steps in education, training or employment
- learners and apprentices having relevant personal targets and/or individual learning goals

Considering achievement in different provision types

When inspectors evaluate achievement across different FE and skills settings, they consider the context of learners and apprentices in relation to the standards of their achievement, and the specific nature and needs of the provider's learners and apprentices. They consider the many ways in which positive standards of achievement can be demonstrated, and the varying importance of these to different contexts.

Valuable sources of evidence for standards of achievement include:

- qualification achievement rates
- 'value-added' scores
- timely achievement of qualifications
- rates at which high grades are achieved
- EHC plan targets
- personal targets for those learners on non-accredited courses
- development of new knowledge, skills and professional behaviours against curriculum goals and starting points
- contribution to workplace activities
- progression to positive destinations

Inspectors do not review providers' internal data. However, they may discuss with leaders how they use internal assessment data, what it tells them about learners' and apprentices' achievement, and the decisions that leaders make as a result.

Gathering evidence about achievement in different provision types

Inclusive achievement: attainment and progress

In gathering evidence about achievement of qualifications and progress from starting points, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- enable learners and apprentices to make substantial and sustained progress from their starting points
- create an environment that supports learners and apprentices to meet their individual learning goals and achieve their qualifications
- improve and sustain qualification achievement for learners and apprentices
- reduce barriers to achievement so that disadvantaged learners and apprentices achieve planned outcomes; these include those with SEND, those with high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face any other barriers to their learning or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics
- check learners' and apprentices' progress towards their individual learning goals and qualifications
- enable learners and apprentices with SEND and/or high needs to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need for success in education, work and independent living, including, where relevant, ambitious outcomes such as those in their EHC plans

Inclusive achievement: progress through the curriculum

In gathering evidence about learners' and apprentices' development of knowledge, skills and behaviours as they progress through the curriculum, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- enable learners and apprentices to gain the knowledge, skills and professional behaviours outlined in the planned curriculum
- enable learners and apprentices to produce work that consistently meets or exceeds the requirements of their qualifications, individual learning goals and/or industry standards
- support learners and apprentices to gain the relevant English, mathematics and digital skills they need for their studies and future progression

Preparation for next steps and positive destinations

In gathering evidence about preparation for next steps and positive destinations, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- ensure that learners and apprentices acquire the qualifications, skills and knowledge they need for success in future study, work and, where applicable, in the community
- ensure that learners and apprentices are fully prepared for their next stage, helping them to avoid being NEET
- support learners' and apprentices' progression to positive destinations linked to their studies

- provide appropriate support to ensure that learners and apprentices have equal opportunities to succeed, including those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face any other barriers to their learning or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics

Grading achievement

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
Achievement is likely to be graded 'needs attention' when the 'expected standard' has not been met. This may include when one or more of the following applies: • Leaders are taking action to improve the achievement of learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics. However, too many of these learners and apprentices do not make the expected progress from their starting points. Achievement rates are inconsistent or limited progress is evident for learners and apprentices. • Although many learners and apprentices achieve well, too many do not securely develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to achieve the aims of the curriculum. There are gaps in their knowledge, and they lack the confidence to apply what they have learned. • While some learners and apprentices produce work in line with the standard	Achievement meets the 'expected standard' when all the following apply: Learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics, typically make appropriate progress from their starting points and/or achieve well. They largely achieve relevant standards and qualifications within the anticipated timeframe. Learners and apprentices generally develop the intended new knowledge, skills and behaviours as they progress through the curriculum, and they can apply these effectively. They produce work of the standard expected for the level of course they are studying. Learners and apprentices broadly develop the English, mathematical and digital skills they need to study the curriculum and achieve their learning goals, including making progress towards level 2 mathematics and English qualifications. Learners and apprentices are usually ready for the next stage of education, employment or training, and/or for greater independence in the community. They mostly go on to destinations	Achievement meets the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and all the following apply: Learners and apprentices consistently make extensive progress from their starting points and/or achieve well. Achievement rates, where applicable, are high or have improved significantly, especially for disadvantaged learners and apprentices, those with SEND, those with high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face any other barriers to their learning or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics. Learners and apprentices develop a thorough and secure understanding of new concepts. They apply their extensive academic, technical or vocational knowledge, skills and behaviours expertly, fluently and automatically. Learners and apprentices produce theoretical and practical work that is of a consistently high standard. Through the knowledge, skills and behaviours gained, learners and apprentices are very well prepared for advanced study or further training/employment.

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
expected for their level of study, too many do not. - Learners and apprentices do not develop English, mathematical and digital skills well enough for their learning goals or qualification. - While many learners and apprentices are equipped to progress to high-quality destinations that meet their interests, career goals and aspirations, this is not consistent and too many are not well equipped. - Too few 16 to 19 study programme learners who re-sit examinations in English and/or mathematics improve their qualification grades. - While some learners with high needs make suitable progress towards their planned outcomes, too many do not. - While some adult learners achieve their personal targets and goals, too many do not make the progress planned for them.	that reflect their interests and meet their career goals and aspirations. Learners on 16 to 19 study programmes who take level 2 qualifications in English and mathematics typically make positive progress in English and mathematical knowledge, skills and behaviours, compared to their starting points. Learners with high needs typically make at least the planned progress towards ambitious outcomes, such as those identified in their EHC plans. Adult learners achieve the personal targets and goals set for them to help them build confidence and/or improve their health and wellbeing, prepare for further learning or employment, improve essential skills, develop stronger communities, and equip them as parents to support their children's learning.	Adult learners make extensive progress from their starting points and consistently achieve ambitious personal learning targets and goals.

Urgent improvement

Achievement is likely to be graded 'urgent improvement' when any of the following apply:

- Learners and apprentices do not develop the expected knowledge, skills and behaviours, in particular learners and apprentices who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics. As a result, they make very slow or minimal progress and produce poor-quality work.
- Achievement rates for learners, apprentices and adults (as applicable) are consistently very low and show little improvement.
- Learners and apprentices make insufficient progress on their programmes of study and apprenticeships. They cannot progress in their courses and qualifications because they do not gain the necessary English, mathematical or digital skills.
- Learners with high needs make very limited or no progress towards their planned outcomes. The support provided is not effective in helping them achieve these goals.
- Adult learners and apprentices fail to develop the personal, social and employability skills they need to progress. As a result, they are poorly prepared for future employment and/or further learning.

Exceptional

Inspectors may consider leaders' work in achievement to be 'exceptional' when the 'strong standard' has been met and all the following apply:

All learners and apprentices develop exceptionally high levels of subject knowledge and skill in relation to their starting points, in particular learners and apprentices who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics. This is demonstrated in the theoretical and practical work they produce.

Leaders' actions have a transformational impact on the readiness of learners and apprentices for their future careers, study pathways or greater independence.

There are no significant areas for improvement that leaders have not already prioritised.

If this grade is awarded, leaders should use their exceptional success in this evaluation area to:

- support improvement across all aspects of their own provision and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other providers, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks.

Participation and development (provision-type level)

This evaluation area considers:

- how leaders ensure that learners and apprentices are supported to attend and participate well in their studies, including those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, such as young carers and those without level 2 English and/or mathematics; this includes support for those at risk of becoming NEET
- the support that learners and apprentices receive to develop and demonstrate appropriate professional behaviours in their sectors, in their studies and/or when at work
- how leaders create a learning environment that supports learners and apprentices with their studies, ensuring that they meet the principles and requirements of the course or programme that leaders are providing
- the support that learners and apprentices receive to help them plan their next steps
- how the curriculum supports learners' and apprentices' wider development and wellbeing, ensuring that they thrive and feel that they belong

Inspectors focus on the factors that statutory and non-statutory guidance, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to participation and development, thereby giving learners and apprentices the greatest possible opportunity to develop a broad array of skills and knowledge that prepare them well for living and working in modern Britain.

These factors are:

- providing learners and apprentices with welcoming environments for study and (where applicable) work, where bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation, physical and/or sexual violence, and derogatory language are not tolerated
- ensuring that learners and apprentices are supported to attend regularly and participate enthusiastically in their studies, for example by setting high standards, and that they are encouraged and supported to improve their attendance and participation when needed
- supporting learners and apprentices to demonstrate appropriate behaviours both in their studies and when at work, and dealing with inappropriate behaviour swiftly and consistently
- providing learners and apprentices with age-appropriate pastoral support and wider opportunities that help them to understand how to stay healthy and safe and to develop their personal skills
- ensuring that learners and apprentices are prepared well for life in modern Britain through developing an understanding of fundamental British values and diversity, and respect for protected characteristics
- providing learners and apprentices with an appropriate careers education and guidance programme to help them make informed choices about their next steps
- providing a relevant programme of work-related learning to learners who are enrolled on a 16 to 19 study programme
- ensuring that learners and apprentices develop appropriate employability skills and, where relevant, skills for independent living

Considering participation and development in different provision types

When inspectors evaluate participation and development across different FE and skills settings, they consider the context of the curriculum the provider offers and the nature of the learners and apprentices, for example:

- the age-appropriateness and relevance of topics covered during tutorial or similar programmes, such as healthy relationships
- the potential for specific learners in terms of their wider development, for example adults on short, part-time courses, who study for only a few hours per week
- the differences in pastoral needs between different groups of learners and apprentices; for example, what is appropriate for a full-time study programme learner may not meet the needs of a part-time adult learner at the same setting
- the focus of careers education and guidance in different learner and apprentice contexts
- the differences in approach to behaviour monitoring and management for different groups of learners; for example, professional standards and behaviours have particular relevance for apprentices and certain learners
- the provider's work, if relevant, with learners and apprentices who need to improve their behaviour, attitudes to learning or attendance
- the promotion of equality of opportunity so that all learners and apprentices feel that they belong, and understand that individual characteristics make people unique and that they thrive together; this includes, but is not limited to, an age-appropriate understanding of the protected characteristics defined by the Equality Act 2010

Gathering evidence about participation and development

Strategic leadership of participation and development

In gathering evidence about the strategic leadership of participation and development, inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders:

- set and embed clear expectations for attendance, behaviour and personal responsibility across all provision types
- provide learners and apprentices with access to a suitable range of opportunities beyond their taught courses that help them to build confidence, resilience and personal skills
- take strategic and proactive steps to support learners and apprentices to engage fully in their studies and wider development

Attendance, behaviour and participation

In gathering evidence about attendance, behaviour and participation, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- learners and apprentices have high attendance levels, or improve their attendance quickly and sustainably, including through one-to-one appointments such as apprentice progress reviews
- learners and apprentices participate in scheduled learning sessions, tailored one-to-one learning, and other relevant aspects of their programme, including remote learning and work-based elements
- where appropriate, learners and apprentices behave professionally, maintain high standards in their training and/or workplace settings, and are supported by teachers, trainers and employers to do so
- leaders and staff promote and reinforce high expectations for attendance and participation for all learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics

Wider opportunities

In gathering evidence about wider opportunities, inspectors evaluate (where applicable to the context of the provider and provision type) the extent to which:

- learners and apprentices take part in tailored wider development and enrichment activities that prepare them well for adult life, employment or further study, in particular those who are disadvantaged and those groups listed above
- learners and apprentices develop their understanding of mental, physical and emotional health, how to protect themselves from radicalisation and extremist views, healthy relationships and online safety, through content that is appropriate to their age and stage
- learners and apprentices develop their understanding of fundamental British values, diversity, and respect for all citizens, especially those with protected characteristics, and they can apply this in their learning, work and interactions with others

- leaders provide meaningful work-related learning for 16- to 19-year-old learners, which meets statutory requirements
- learners and apprentices, as appropriate, make a positive contribution to their communities or support the wider development of others

Learners' and apprentices' preparation for their next steps

In gathering evidence about learners' and apprentices' preparation for their next steps, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- learners and apprentices develop the employability skills and personal attributes they need for their intended job roles, further study or, where appropriate, for greater independence
- leaders provide learners and apprentices with structured, tailored careers education and guidance that reflect their interests, aspirations and potential next steps
- learners and apprentices understand the range of progression routes available to them and can make informed decisions about their future learning, employment and/or training
- learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, such as young carers and those without level 2 English and/or mathematics, are supported to explore and plan for progression from their current role or course, including through the use of work-based mentors, where relevant, and they feel confident and well prepared to take their next steps

Dealing with bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation

In gathering evidence about dealing with bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- leaders and staff create a safe and respectful learning environment for all learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged and those groups listed above
- bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation are not accepted or normalised at the provider, the workplace, or any other premises where learning takes place
- learners and apprentices know how to report concerns and are confident that staff will take them seriously and act promptly
- staff consistently recognise and address inappropriate language, attitudes and behaviour
- leaders monitor incidents and concerns, and take strategic action to address patterns and underlying issues
- apprentices are treated appropriately in their workplace and trust that any concerns will be addressed by their employer and the provider

Inclusive participation and development

In gathering evidence about inclusive participation and development, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- learners and apprentices feel welcome, valued and respected
- learners and apprentices benefit, where relevant, from high-quality professional learning and expertise opportunities, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, such as young carers and those without level 2 English and/or mathematics
- learners and apprentices understand, appreciate and respect diversity
- learners and apprentices respect the protected characteristics defined by the Equality Act 2010
- learners and apprentices have the opportunity to develop a range of professional and social skills in different contexts, for example working and socialising with other learners and apprentices, including those from different religious, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds

Grading participation and development

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
Participation and development are likely to be graded 'needs attention' when the 'expected standard' has not been met. This may include when one or more of the following applies: • Leaders understand the importance of attendance and have suitable expectations, but their work to identify and tackle low attendance and/or barriers to attendance is inconsistent and lacks focus. As a result, the improvement in attendance for some groups of learners and apprentices is limited or not sustained, and this hinders their progress. • Leaders have suitable expectations of learners' and apprentices' behaviour and attitudes, but staff lack the confidence and/or skills to manage incidents of poor behaviour. This can cause disruptions to learning and slows learners' and apprentices' progress. • Leaders have established a programme of wider development, but this does not consider well enough the wellbeing and pastoral needs of all learners and apprentices, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may	Participation and development meet the 'expected standard' when all the following apply: Leaders typically ensure that learners and apprentices study and, where relevant, work in safe and respectful environments, where their wellbeing is prioritised, particularly those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics. Leaders set high expectations for the attendance, behaviours and attitudes of groups of learners and apprentices. Learners and apprentices typically behave appropriately and have high attendance at lessons and other activities. Staff address any inappropriate behaviour consistently and promptly. Leaders do not tolerate bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation, physical and/or sexual violence, or derogatory language. They usually act quickly and appropriately when concerns arise. Learners and apprentices know how to raise issues and are confident that staff will take them seriously.	Participation and development meet the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and all the following apply: Leaders foster an inclusive culture in which diversity is celebrated, equality of opportunity is promoted, and social equity is actively pursued. This work has a significant positive impact on learners and apprentices from all backgrounds. They feel highly valued and respected. Incidents of bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation, physical and/or sexual violence and derogatory language are rare. When they do occur, they are dealt with consistently and highly effectively. Leaders' consistent and persistent focus on attendance and participation has had a sustained positive impact on learners and apprentices. Staff contribute to a culture in which high attendance and participation by all groups of learners and apprentices are expected, valued and routinely achieved. Learners and apprentices are highly motivated, show a strong commitment to their studies and are proud of the work they produce. They collaborate respectfully with their peers, contribute positively to the learning

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics. As such, they do not benefit from a suitably broad programme of wider development to help them build personal skills or, where relevant, to develop preparedness for adult life. - Although leaders have developed a curriculum that focuses on learners' and apprentices' mental and physical health, healthy relationships, and how to protect themselves from radicalisation, extremist views and harmful online content, it is not matched well with their ages or needs. As a result, learners and apprentices do not develop a deep enough understanding of these issues. - Staff teach learners and apprentices about protected characteristics, fundamental British values and cultural diversity in modern Britain, and they challenge any prejudiced views or comments, but this work is not taught in a way that deepens understanding. As a result, learners and apprentices struggle to apply these values or recognise their relevance in daily life or work. - Leaders have offered careers education and guidance programmes to learners and apprentices, but these are unstructured and/or lack detail. They do not give learners and apprentices sufficient	Leaders identify the reasons why certain learners and apprentices do not attend or participate regularly, particularly those who are disadvantaged, young carers and those groups listed above. Leaders' actions support learners and apprentices to re-engage with their studies. Leaders generally understand learners' and apprentices' wider development needs. They provide suitable opportunities for groups of learners and apprentices to take part, for example, in citizenship programmes, volunteering and/or leadership-related activities, which prepare them well for the future. The curriculum includes age-appropriate content on learners' and apprentices' mental and physical health, healthy relationships, and how to protect themselves from radicalisation, extremist views and harmful online content. Learners and apprentices develop an appropriate understanding of these issues, and they generally know how to stay safe and make informed choices about their wellbeing. Learners and apprentices develop their understanding of, and respect for, protected characteristics, fundamental British values and cultural diversity in modern Britain. Staff address prejudiced views or comments. Learners and apprentices receive coherent careers education and tailored guidance. On the whole, this helps them make informed decisions about their next steps, and	environment, and demonstrate high levels of professionalism in workplace settings. Where relevant, leaders provide groups of learners and apprentices with a rich and carefully tailored programme of wider opportunities. These develop learners' and apprentices' confidence and independence. Learners and apprentices demonstrate strong personal and social responsibility, for example by contributing to their communities. Leaders and staff expertly embed fundamental British values, understanding of, and respect for, protected characteristics, and cultural diversity in modern Britain across the curriculum. Learners and apprentices confidently apply their understanding in lessons, workplaces and community engagement. Leaders and staff skilfully embed high-quality careers education and guidance throughout the curriculum. Learners and apprentices develop detailed knowledge of their potential future pathways and are confident in knowing how to take their next steps. Learners and apprentices who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face any other barriers to their learning or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics, receive tailored, impactful support and guidance, which prepare them

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
information and support to help them make informed choices. Learners' and apprentices' preparedness for future work opportunities is underdeveloped. Although leaders have planned an appropriate programme of work-related learning for those on 16 to 19 study programmes, this does not yet provide learners with enough or sufficiently relevant opportunities to experience the world of work.	challenges any misconceptions or stereotypes they may hold about careers. Leaders provide a work-related learning programme that is matched to learners' and apprentices' needs, aspirations and intended destinations, and which meets the expectations of the 16 to 19 study programme. Leaders ensure that learners with high needs access planned support and activities to develop their resilience, confidence and independence over time.	very well for future learning, employment and/or independence. Learners on 16 to 19 study programmes benefit from high-quality opportunities to encounter work-related learning. They experience a wide variety of workplace settings. This helps them to develop clear goals and highly relevant employability skills. Learners with high needs take part in an ambitious programme of development opportunities that build their resilience, confidence and independence. These include high-quality and meaningful activities that help learners to take an active role in their lives and plans for the future.

Urgent improvement

Participation and development are likely to be graded 'urgent improvement' when any of the following apply:

- Bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment and/or victimisation are common and not addressed properly. Learners and apprentices feel unsupported and lack trust in leaders to handle their concerns, leading to under-reporting.
- Leaders have not established a culture that encourages and supports high attendance and participation in learning. They do not take actions that help learners and apprentices overcome their barriers to attendance. As a result, attendance is low.
- Learners and apprentices behave inappropriately, and are not challenged or do not respond to requests to modify their behaviour.
- Learners and apprentices are not taught the knowledge they need to build healthy relationships, protect themselves from online harm, or protect themselves from radicalisation and extremist views. As a result, they are unsure how to respond to risks or make safe choices.
- Leaders have not ensured that learners and apprentices receive careers education and guidance. As a result, learners and apprentices cannot make informed decisions about their future.
- Leaders do not meet the requirements of 16 to 19 study programmes. All learners, in particular those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those without level 2 English and/or mathematics, are excluded from and/or not supported to access work experience or wider opportunities where it is appropriate for them to do so.

Exceptional

Inspectors may consider leaders' work in participation and development to be 'exceptional' when the 'strong standard' has been met and all the following apply:

Leaders' focus on participation and development has a transformational impact on learners and apprentices from all backgrounds.

Learners and apprentices feel highly valued and respected by staff and their peers, and they support one another exceptionally well.

Leaders' highly focused work on attendance results in learners and apprentices attending their courses at very high rates over a sustained period.

Where relevant, the programme of wider opportunities is exceptional. It relates directly to the development needs of learners and apprentices of different ages and at different stages of learning. High numbers of learners and apprentices benefit from activities such as experiencing community projects, listening to high-quality guest speakers, and having internal and external competitions.

Leaders and staff support learners and apprentices to demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of fundamental British values and diversity, and respect for protected characteristics.

There are no significant areas for improvement that leaders have not already prioritised.

If this grade is awarded, leaders should use their exceptional success in this evaluation area to:

- support improvement across all aspects of their own provision and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other providers, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks.