

Non-association independent school inspection toolkit

This toolkit sets out the areas that will be evaluated and graded on standard inspections of non-association independent schools inspected by Ofsted under sections 108 and 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008. 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 [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#) ('the ISS'), statutory duties, non-statutory guidance, professional standards (where these are relevant), research and inspection evidence. We will update the inspection toolkit as required, usually on an annual basis, to reflect any changes.

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

Inspectors collect first-hand evidence of how the school typically operates, mainly through professional conversation and observing, often alongside leaders, the day-to-day work of the school. Inspectors are required to view specific documentation. This should be limited to documents relating to the school's statutory requirements or documents that it produces as part of its normal business processes, for example evidence (such as policies) required by the ISS. 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 school. This would create unnecessary workload.

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

This evaluation area considers whether:

- the school establishes an open and positive safeguarding culture that puts pupils' interests first
- leaders, the proprietor and those responsible for governance take an effective, whole-school approach to safeguarding (we will refer to this group as 'leaders' throughout the safeguarding evaluation area for ease of reading)

Inspectors focus on gathering evidence relating to the factors that statutory and non-statutory guidance, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to safeguarding. This is so that pupils who need help and protection receive high-quality support.

The factors are:

- protecting pupils from maltreatment and harm, whether within or outside the home or online; schools are vigilant, maintaining an attitude of 'it could happen here'
- working with safeguarding partners and other relevant agencies, in line with '[Working together to safeguard children](#)', to help and protect pupils
- being open and transparent, sharing information appropriately with others, actively seeking expert advice when required, making sure all safeguarding decisions are accessible for scrutiny, and accepting challenge so that the right decisions are made
- recognising that safeguarding issues might occur in any provision at any time
- ensuring that all those who work with pupils are trained well in supporting them to be safer, and are empowered to speak out and take action when there are concerns
- recognising that pupils who do not attend school (children missing education) might indicate safeguarding concerns, including neglect, emotional, physical or sexual abuse, or other harms both in and outside their home; these include concerns about child criminal or sexual exploitation, gangs, or online harm
- actively seeking and listening to the views and experiences of pupils, staff, 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 pupils whose families may need help and support from other agencies
 - identify pupils 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)
 - secure the help that pupils need and, if required, refer concerns in a timely way to those who have the expertise to help
 - manage safer recruitment and allegations about adults who may pose a risk to pupils
 - are aware of and respond to some pupils' increased risk of needing help and protection, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and pupils who do not communicate verbally
- being receptive to challenge, and reflecting on practice, so that safeguarding policies, systems and processes are kept under continual review

- maintaining a single central record of pre-appointment checks, in paper or electronic form, as required by the ISS

Considering safeguarding for different ages, phases and provision types

When a school is part of a wider proprietorial group of schools, inspectors need to see the single central record for each individual school.

When inspectors evaluate safeguarding for **pupils with SEND in independent schools**, they:

- seek to understand the needs of individual pupils and their particular challenges and barriers so that they are fully aware of these pupils' specific safeguarding vulnerabilities and needs
- work with leaders to draw on their insights into individual pupils and any additional support needed to keep them safe
- want to understand leaders' rationale for their approaches to teaching pupils to stay safe, for example by exploring how pupils learn about online safety, to make sure these approaches are reflective of the school's context and the needs of pupils

When inspectors evaluate safeguarding in **early years and key stage 1**, they will adapt their language when talking about safeguarding and online safety to reflect the pupils' ages and context.

When inspectors apply this evaluation area in **post-16 provision**, they consider whether the provision has students **aged 19 and over** on roll. If this is the case, they only inspect and take account of the provision for these students if they began their studies before the age of 18. However, as these students are essentially adults studying alongside children, inspectors will always report (through the safeguarding evaluation area) whether safeguarding is effective.

Gathering evidence about safeguarding

ISS

By evaluating safeguarding, inspectors also gather evidence to assess whether leaders have ensured that the school meets paragraphs 7(a) and 7(b), part 4 and paragraph 34(1)(c) of the ISS.

Leadership of safeguarding, including establishing an open and positive safeguarding culture

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

- establish a culture in which staff, pupils and parents feel comfortable raising and discussing concerns that relate to safeguarding pupils, and feel confident that appropriate action will be taken when necessary
- know and are assured that policies and procedures are understood, applied and have a positive impact on pupils
- ensure that pupils know who to go to for support
- establish purposeful and appropriate links with outside agencies to support the school's safeguarding procedures and practice, and to ensure that they meet their statutory duties, for example in working with safeguarding partners
- engage productively with multi-agency partners to get pupils the support they need

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
- ensure that the school has policies and procedures for reporting safeguarding concerns about adults, 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 the school works in partnership with other local agencies to identify, help and protect pupils at risk of maltreatment or harm within or outside the home or online
- appoint an appropriate senior member of staff to the role of designated safeguarding lead to carry out the school's statutory duties to identify, help and protect pupils, including as set out in the '[Prevent](#)' duty
- ensure that the school's procedures protect pupils who are at greater risk of harm, for example those attending alternative provision
- ensure that pupils are taught how to stay safe and keep others safe, including online
- ensure that the school's information systems safeguard pupils effectively from online harm

- notify the local authority of private fostering arrangements to make sure these are suitable and safe

Safer recruitment

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

- receive suitable training in safer recruitment, and understand and follow safer recruitment practices
- know and understand the checks required for all staff, and all other adults in the school, including visitors, volunteers and contractors
- ensure that risk assessments are carried out and managed effectively
- obtain written confirmation that the required safeguarding checks have been carried out on all staff working at any alternative provision that the school uses
- ensure that the single central record indicates that all the required pre-appointment and vetting checks for staff have been made
- ensure that any other required records regarding disqualification under the Childcare Act 2006 are accurate and up to date

Child-on-child violence

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

- fulfil their responsibilities in relation to 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 pupils' own intimate relationships (teenage relationship abuse)
- ensure that staff are aware of the signs that pupils may be at risk of becoming involved in violence and understand that early, evidence-based intervention can be key to preventing them from going on to commit violence
- take timely action to support and protect the victim, the alleged perpetrator(s) and any other pupils who are involved or otherwise affected
- have appropriate risk assessments that are reviewed regularly
- make sure that staff know and understand the scale and range of sexual violence and sexual harassment, and the circumstances under which these occur, including beyond the school and/or online
- ensure that staff respond quickly and effectively to all signs of child-on-child violence and all reports and concerns about it
- have clear, effective systems for reporting incidents of sexual violence and sexual harassment, for sharing information and for consulting with multi-agency safeguarding partners

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 lead to pupils, or particular groups of pupils, being unsafe. Leaders have not taken sufficient action to resolve weaknesses following a failure of safeguarding that meant pupils may not have been kept safe. Leaders are not open to challenge and/or do not learn from issues or incidents. If pupils are not on the school site (whether long term, temporarily or for part of the school day), leaders are either not clear where the pupils are or are not able to demonstrate that they have taken steps to safeguard them. This includes pupils absent from education and those attending inappropriate, unregistered or unmonitored alternative provision. Pupils have little confidence that the school will tackle concerns about safety, including the risk of abuse. This is because leaders have not taken their views seriously and/or have not dealt with relevant concerns, so they feel unsafe. Leaders do not fulfil their responsibilities in relation to child-on-child violence. This 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 pupils’ own intimate relationships (teenage relationship abuse). Leaders do not handle allegations of abuse swiftly and appropriately. This is likely to lead to pupils being put at risk of significant harm.	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 have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility. Multi-agency working is effective. There is strategic oversight of all aspects of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of pupils. Leaders actively try to learn from safeguarding cases and incidents and take any action needed. Pupils are kept safe and feel safe. Their voices are heard, including the voices of pupils who are not on the school site (whether long term, temporarily or for part of the school day). Teaching pupils about how they can stay safe and when they may need help is embedded across the curriculum. Pupils and parents know who to go to for support. All staff are vigilant and carry out their responsibilities effectively to keep pupils safe. Staff understand the signs of possible safeguarding concerns. They respond by following the school’s systems confidently and consistently. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities in relation to child-on-child violence. This 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 pupils’ own intimate relationships (teenage relationship abuse). Leaders know and fulfil the statutory requirements for safeguarding. These include managing safer recruitment, reporting, referrals, record-keeping and the ‘Prevent’ duty. The school has clear and accessible policies and procedures that keep pupils safe. Leaders are receptive to challenge and are reflective about

Not met	Met
Leaders do not fulfil their responsibilities in relation to safer recruitment, reporting, referrals, record-keeping and the 'Prevent' duty. Leaders do not handle safeguarding allegations against adults in line with requirements. They do not fulfil their duty to refer allegations or concerns to the appropriate authority.	their own practices. This means that the impact of safeguarding policies, systems and processes is kept under continual review. Leaders ensure that staff's work is monitored and that they get appropriate supervision and support. The conduct and behaviour of staff are appropriate. Leaders follow local authority procedures in managing safeguarding concerns or allegations about adults. Where appropriate, leaders have resolved any minor safeguarding issues identified during the inspection or are taking steps to resolve them.

Inclusion

This evaluation area considers how leaders and staff identify and support:

- socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils
- pupils with SEND; this means pupils receiving special educational needs (SEN) support and those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan
- pupils who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, such as children in need and looked-after children
- pupils who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, which may include pupils who share a protected characteristic

Inspectors focus on gathering evidence relating to the factors that statutory and non-statutory guidance, including the associated ISS, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to inclusion.

These factors are:

- setting high expectations for all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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
- embedding a culture in which early and accurate assessment of pupils' needs is prioritised
- using the information from the assessment of pupils' needs to implement a continuous cycle of planning, actions and review in order to reduce barriers to pupils' learning and/or wellbeing
- involving specialists when necessary to support pupils' development
- working closely and effectively with pupils, parents, professionals and staff, and ensuring that pupils' and parents' views and aspirations are included in decision-making about support for pupils

Considering inclusion for different ages, phases and provision types

When considering the factors above, inspectors take account of how they apply to different ages and stages of learning, and the needs of different groups of pupils.

When inspectors evaluate inclusion for **pupils with SEND in independent special schools**, they understand that, while an independent special school is not required to appoint a SEN coordinator (SENCo), it is likely that a member of staff or team will be coordinating provision and support for pupils with SEND. Inspectors will therefore work closely with them throughout the inspection.

Gathering evidence about inclusion

The ISS

- By evaluating inclusion, inspectors also gather evidence to assess whether leaders have ensured the school meets the ISS. Leaders and staff have a responsibility to ensure the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils, including those with an EHCP (paragraph 2(1)(b)), so that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and make progress (paragraph 2(2)(h)). ISS 3 requires teachers to ensure that this curriculum is delivered effectively to all pupils and that reasonable adjustments are made when these are necessary. More broadly, leaders are required to actively promote the wellbeing of all pupils (paragraph 34(1)(c)).

Identifying, assessing and meeting needs, and reducing barriers

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

- leaders understand that the most effective inclusion strategy begins with everyday high-quality inclusive teaching, which has most benefit for the pupils who find learning hardest and reduces the need for individual adaptations
- leaders have established a culture in which staff understand the range of barriers pupils may face to their learning and/or wellbeing, including those specific to their community and the school's context; they quickly and accurately identify pupils facing these barriers
- leaders make sure pupils 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](#)
- leaders work closely with parents, taking their views into account and making best use of their knowledge of their children
- leaders make sure that any inclusion base meets pupils' needs effectively and supports them, as appropriate, to participate meaningfully in wider school activities
- leaders make sure that any alternative provision the school uses is suitable and safe, and the decisions to place pupils in it are made in pupils' best interests
- the published school accessibility plan meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, is implemented effectively and is reviewed regularly

Supporting disadvantaged pupils

In gathering evidence about supporting disadvantaged pupils, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders have a secure understanding of their disadvantaged pupils' needs and use the best available evidence, including high-quality research, to inform their approaches to addressing these
- any necessary adaptations to approaches the school uses to support disadvantaged pupils are timely and effective
- leaders' approaches have a positive impact on pupils' learning

Supporting pupils with SEND

In gathering evidence about supporting pupils with SEND, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- where relevant, a qualified SENCo is empowered, through their leadership status within the school, to lead whole-school improvement for pupils with SEND
- leaders identify pupils' emerging or changing needs quickly and accurately, make sure support is effective and draw on any specialist advice when necessary
- leaders use the 'graduated approach' (a continuous cycle of 'assess, plan, do and review') which helps to ensure that pupils receive an appropriate level of support and meets pupils' needs, and staff receive suitable training and support to implement it
- leaders make sure their work improves the progress and achievement of pupils with SEND, and they do not lower their expectations of them
- where relevant, leaders are committed to their role in the local area partnership's strategy to improve the experiences of, and outcomes for, pupils with SEND; they promote the local offer and help pupils with SEND, and their families, to find out what support is available and how to access it
- leaders meet the needs of pupils with SEND, and adapt the environment, teaching and the school's wider offer in ways that support them to access education
- leaders monitor the progress of pupils with SEND, and review adaptations and support systematically, making any necessary changes to improve their learning and/or wellbeing
- leaders support successful transitions for pupils with SEND, whether that is into or within the school or on to other settings or adulthood

Supporting pupils who are known (or previously known) to children's social care

In gathering evidence about supporting pupils who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- pupils receive high-quality support to improve their learning and/or wellbeing, and leaders and staff have regard to looked-after children's personal education plans, if any are in place
- the designated safeguarding lead and other leaders use their knowledge of a pupil's social care status to inform decisions about promoting their welfare, such as providing additional academic support, supporting their wellbeing, or reducing barriers to attendance
- leaders share information effectively with the local authority, and support the authority to complete statutory assessments in relation to pupils' social care needs
- leaders work well with social workers and other professionals to plan and provide multi-agency support for pupils who are known (or previously known) to children's social care

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 pupils' needs or reduce barriers to pupils' learning and/or wellbeing. • Weaknesses or inconsistencies in practice have a negative impact on a particular group of pupils. • Leaders' use of alternative provision has limited positive impact on pupils' learning and/or wellbeing.	Inclusion meets the 'expected standard' when all the associated ISS are met and all the following apply: Leaders identify pupils' needs quickly and accurately, including any emerging or changing needs. This includes the needs of disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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. Leaders have high expectations for these pupils. They engage proactively and in a timely manner with them and their families to help reduce barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. Typically, the support they provide (following engagement and any specialist advice, if needed) reduces barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. Leaders take a graduated approach (as explained earlier), which means pupils' needs are generally met. Staff receive suitable training and support to implement this approach. Leaders have a secure understanding of these pupils' needs and the progress they make. Any strategies and approaches are generally understood and implemented by staff.	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 disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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. Leaders and staff rigorously monitor the progress of these pupils and consistently ensure that any barriers to success are swiftly and effectively addressed. Strategies are systematically and skilfully adjusted as needed, so that they make a sustained difference to pupils' opportunities and experiences. Well-analysed, quantitative and qualitative data underpins leaders' decisions.

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
	Where relevant, the qualified SENCo has sufficient authority within the leadership structure to make a positive difference for pupils with SEND. Where relevant, leaders are committed to, and understand, their role in the local area partnership's strategy to improve the experiences of, and outcomes for, pupils with SEND. Where appropriate, they ensure that local partnership strategies have a positive impact on pupils at the school. Leaders support pupils well who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, including looked-after and previously looked-after children. Staff work effectively, including with other professionals, so that these pupils generally improve their opportunities and experiences. Leaders and staff have regard to the pupils' personal education plans, if any are in place. Alternative provision is commissioned appropriately and is used in pupils' best interests. Leaders take responsibility for the education and welfare of pupils who are placed in it.	

Urgent improvement

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

- Leaders do not identify or assess pupils' needs effectively. This has a significant negative impact on how well the school supports pupils' learning and/or wellbeing.
- Support for disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care and/or those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing is ineffective.

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 pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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, are reduced exceptionally well to ensure highly positive outcomes and experiences for pupils.

Leaders' actions have had a transformational impact on how well these pupils achieve and thrive across all areas of school life, and have ensured that they feel they belong within the school community.

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 school and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other schools, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks

Curriculum and teaching

This evaluation area considers whether:

- leaders design a high-quality, ambitious curriculum for all pupils (the intent), paying particular regard to disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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
- leaders and staff deliver the curriculum effectively (the implementation), across all subjects and year groups
- leaders make sure that pupils build strong foundations for accessing the curriculum and for later success, including academic achievement, good health and wellbeing

Inspectors focus on gathering evidence relating to the factors that statutory and non-statutory guidance, including the associated ISS, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to high-quality curriculum and teaching.

These factors are:

- constructing, adopting or adapting a curriculum that is ambitious, informed by the best available evidence and designed to give all learners, especially the groups of pupils listed above, the knowledge they need to achieve and thrive in later life
- planning and sequencing the curriculum clearly so that all pupils can access it and gain knowledge and skills incrementally to reach its stated aims
- establishing strong foundations in communication and language, reading, writing and mathematics so that pupils can access the rest of the curriculum and gain later success, including academic achievement, good health and wellbeing
- making sure that teachers have expert knowledge of the subjects/phases they teach
- making sure the curriculum is implemented in line with leaders' intentions and that teachers teach the subject curriculum effectively, focusing on the most important knowledge or concepts, presenting information clearly, checking pupils' understanding systematically and adapting their teaching appropriately
- using assessment effectively to inform teaching and learning, and to help pupils embed key concepts, use knowledge fluently and develop their understanding

Considering curriculum and teaching for different ages, phases and provision types

When considering the factors above, inspectors take account of how they apply to different ages and stages of learning, and the needs of different groups of pupils.

During all inspections, inspectors must evaluate how effectively pupils are enabled to secure **strong foundations for accessing the curriculum**. This involves evaluating how effectively the school supports pupils who are at the early stages of communication and language, reading, writing and mathematics, including older pupils whose development is not at their age-appropriate level.

When evaluating curriculum and teaching, particularly in **small schools**, including those with **mixed-age classes**, inspectors recognise that leaders:

- may share curriculum expertise and/or resources across schools
- may adopt, adapt or construct their curriculum
- may organise their curriculum differently to meet the needs of pupils who are in a class with a mix of different ages

When evaluating **early years provision**, inspectors will also refer to the 'early years' evaluation area.

When evaluating **post-16 provision**, inspectors will also refer to the 'post-16 provision' evaluation area.

When inspectors evaluate curriculum and teaching for **pupils with SEND in independent schools**, they:

- seek to understand the starting points of pupils with SEND
- consider whether pupils have access to a suitable curriculum that builds on their knowledge and is adapted to their needs
- recognise that pupils' work can take many forms, and discuss this with leaders
- consider whether pupils' needs are properly considered and are met through the design and delivery of the curriculum, including taking into account any reasonable adjustments that need to be made
- work closely with leaders and staff to understand their strategies to help pupils communicate and, where appropriate, use these (with support from staff) to gather first-hand evidence

Gathering evidence about curriculum and teaching

Specialist curriculums

Some schools with a specialist curriculum take radically different approaches to the curriculum, including, for example, schools that teach a range of academic subjects through a faith-based curriculum. In these schools, inspectors consider how, alongside the specialist education, leaders have built a curriculum with appropriate coverage, content, structure and sequencing, and have implemented it effectively. They consider whether the specialist curriculum is being delivered in a way that does not limit pupils' opportunities to study a broad range of subjects and helps prepare them for life in modern Britain. When grading curriculum and teaching, inspectors will only consider the school's secular curriculum.

ISS

When evaluating curriculum, inspectors also gather evidence to assess whether leaders have ensured that the school meets the ISS. This includes requirements about the curriculum and the quality of teaching in part 1.

Inspectors take into consideration any exemptions and/or modifications from the learning and development requirements of the early years foundation stage (EYFS) that the school has in place, as agreed by the Department for Education (DfE).

Strategic leadership of curriculum and teaching

In gathering evidence about the strategic leadership of curriculum and teaching, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders have a comprehensive understanding of the quality of curriculum and teaching across the school
- the curriculum (whether adopted, adapted or constructed) is at least as ambitious in breadth and depth as what is required by the ISS; this curriculum is an entitlement for every pupil
- the curriculum is designed to give pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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, the knowledge they need to take advantage of opportunities, responsibilities and experiences in later life
- leaders assure themselves that the curriculum is taught well; they identify areas for improvement and take effective action to tackle these, including through professional learning that ensures teachers develop the expertise needed to deliver the curriculum effectively
- leaders can explain how they identify significant barriers to teaching and learning and how they take action to reduce those barriers
- leaders deploy staff effectively so that all pupils have access to high-quality teaching

Securing strong foundations for all pupils

In gathering evidence about securing strong foundations for all pupils, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- for primary-age pupils (and for older pupils where necessary), the curriculum prioritises accurate and fluent word reading, spelling, handwriting and mathematics/numeracy
- leaders prioritise 'keeping up' rather than 'catching up', quickly dealing with any identified gaps in pupils' knowledge
- the curriculum is designed to extend pupils' language and vocabulary, both spoken and written, and increase their reading competency across all subjects
- all pupils are explicitly taught how to communicate effectively through spoken language (oracy), articulate ideas, develop understanding and engage with others through speaking, listening and communication
- teaching of reading is rigorous and sequenced, and develops pupils' fluency, confidence and enjoyment; at all stages, reading attainment is assessed accurately and gaps are tackled quickly and effectively, so that all pupils can access the whole curriculum

For pupils in Reception and key stage 1, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- the curriculum clearly identifies and prioritises the foundational knowledge and skills pupils need for later learning
- staff engage pupils in high-quality interactions to develop their knowledge and vocabulary across all areas of learning
- staff help pupils to articulate what they know and understand by scaffolding, modelling, extending and developing their ideas
- staff build pupils' emotional connection to language and help them gain awareness and control of their voices through songs, rhymes and poems
- teachers prioritise daily story time; they read aloud and re-read high-quality stories, and talk about them to build pupils' familiarity and understanding
- staff provide enough teaching and practice for all pupils to become fluent in word reading, spelling, handwriting and number facts
- staff provide enough teaching and practice for pupils to be able to count and calculate, and describe time, size and shape using correct mathematical terminology
- staff ensure that pupils have sufficient foundational knowledge to complete tasks; they provide additional teaching and practice for those who need it

For older pupils, including those in key stage 2 and beyond who have not yet secured the strong foundations they need to access the curriculum, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- assessment accurately identifies any gaps in pupils' foundational knowledge in communication and language, reading, writing and mathematics
- ongoing, targeted teaching and practice are prioritised so that pupils quickly catch up
- relevant leaders and other staff are supported to develop the expertise and experience to provide effective additional support and regularly check whether this is having the intended impact

For pupils at the early stages of learning English as an additional language, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders and teachers recognise that these pupils already speak at least one language, and do not lower their expectations of them
- teachers assess pupils' English language proficiency accurately and regularly
- teachers recognise that providing opportunities for pupils to talk with staff and peers during lessons is particularly important; teachers help pupils articulate what they know and understand by scaffolding, modelling, extending and developing their ideas
- teachers focus on the vocabulary pupils need, including subject-specific vocabulary, to help them understand new concepts; they keep explanations clear and precise
- teachers develop and extend pupils' language carefully and deliberately, with plenty of repetition
- teachers ensure that pupils learn to read using systematic synthetic phonics as soon as possible, so that they have access to a wide range of literature that will accelerate their understanding of English

School and subject curriculum

In gathering evidence about the curriculum (including subject curriculums), inspectors consider the extent to which:

- the curriculum is at least as ambitious in breadth as that set out in the ISS
- the curriculum is coherently planned and sequenced so that pupils build knowledge and skills sequentially and cumulatively
- time is available within the curriculum for revisiting content and dealing with gaps in knowledge and skills
- the curriculum has subject-specific rigour, so that pupils gain disciplinary knowledge and can answer subject-specific questions
- leaders and teachers have a sophisticated understanding of the differences between subjects; this informs teachers' choices and helps leaders precisely evaluate quality and take targeted actions for improvement
- decisions about the curriculum are refined over time, based on evidence and insight from within and beyond the school

Teaching

In gathering evidence about teaching, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- the school's approach to teaching is based on an evidence-informed understanding of effective teaching and how pupils learn
- teachers have expert knowledge of the subjects that they teach and, if they have gaps in their knowledge, they are supported so that ineffective teaching does not disadvantage pupils
- teachers have a strong, shared understanding of the school's curriculum and its approach to teaching and assessment
- teachers present information clearly, promote appropriate discussion, check pupils' understanding systematically, identify misunderstandings and adapt teaching as necessary to correct these

- teaching resources and materials given to pupils enable them to achieve the aims of the curriculum
- teachers teach the subject curriculum in a way that allows pupils to transfer key knowledge to long-term memory
- teaching is sequenced so that new knowledge and skills build on what has been taught before and pupils can work towards clearly defined end points
- leaders and teachers consider the most important knowledge and concepts that pupils need to know and focus on these; they prioritise feedback, retrieval practice and assessment
- evidence informs the school's approach to assessment; for example, assessment is used to help pupils embed and use knowledge fluently, to check understanding and inform teaching, or to understand different starting points and gaps
- any gaps in pupils' knowledge or skills are identified and tackled quickly

Inclusive curriculum and teaching

In gathering evidence about an inclusive curriculum and teaching, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- staff know how to identify and remove barriers to achievement for their pupils through effective curriculum design, formative assessment and adapting their practice to meet pupils' needs
- the school's approach to the curriculum and teaching draws explicitly on the best available evidence, including high-quality research relating to supporting disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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
- any additional adults in the classroom are deployed to enable all pupils to access high-quality teaching from their class teacher and to develop pupils' independence over time
- reasonable adjustments or adaptations to the curriculum or teaching for specific pupils' needs are well targeted and effective in reducing barriers; adaptations focus on pupils' long-term success rather than short-term fixes; leaders consider the possible downsides of any adaptations and mitigate these
- where curriculum adaptation is required, this should be coherently planned to support progress and create as many opportunities as possible for inclusion with mainstream peers

Grading curriculum and teaching

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
Curriculum and teaching 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 and teaching are appropriate, but weaknesses or inconsistencies in implementation mean these have a negative impact on pupils in general or on a particular group. • Leaders have only recently started to take action to improve the curriculum and teaching. While their actions are appropriate, they are at an early stage. This means it is too soon to determine the impact of this work. • Leaders have considered appropriate adaptations to teaching for disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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, but these adaptations are not well matched to pupils' needs.	Curriculum and teaching meet the 'expected standard' when all the associated ISS are met and all the following apply: Leaders have an accurate and informed understanding of the quality of the curriculum and teaching across the school. They draw on this when deciding how to deploy staff and allocate resources, and to identify when timely action is needed to bring about improvement. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is suitable and well planned for each subject and year group. It identifies clear end points and is appropriately sequenced to build on what has already been taught and learned. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is generally taught well. Teachers draw on their knowledge of pupils' needs and starting points and an evidence-informed understanding of effective teaching and how pupils learn. Leaders make sure that teachers have, or gain, the expertise they need for the subjects and phases they teach. Leaders ensure that all pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read are taught to do so through systematic synthetic phonics. Leaders and staff are particularly aware of pupils who have not yet secured the necessary	Curriculum and teaching meet the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and all the following apply: Leaders make astute decisions about how the curriculum and teaching should adapt and evolve, based on their evidence and insight about how well pupils have learned what was intended. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is of a consistently high quality across subjects and year groups. Leaders have a sophisticated understanding of the differences between subjects, so that pupils' learning at each stage can be secured quickly and shaped carefully in the anticipation of future learning. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is consistently taught well. Highly effective teaching is embedded across subjects and year groups. Teaching ensures that pupils consistently develop their language and vocabulary, both spoken and written, and increase their reading competency, across subjects. Teachers consistently make highly effective choices about what to teach, and when and how to teach it, in the context of the subject, phase and pupils' needs. The school's approach to the curriculum and teaching for disadvantaged pupils, those with

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
	foundations in communication and language, reading, spelling, handwriting and mathematics. They take appropriate action to secure this foundational knowledge. Leaders and staff generally use assessment well to check understanding and make changes to teaching and/or the curriculum, as necessary. Leaders and staff are clear about the importance of high-quality teaching, supplemented with targeted academic support. Any reasonable adjustments or adaptations to the curriculum or teaching for particular pupils are generally considered and implemented carefully. EHC plans are properly considered when designing and delivering the curriculum.	SEND, 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 is implemented consistently well across the school. This reduces barriers to achievement for these pupils.

Urgent improvement

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

- Leaders' understanding of the quality of the curriculum and/or teaching is inaccurate.
- Leaders are not doing enough to tackle weaknesses in pupils' education.
- The curriculum lacks ambition, structure or coherence. Leaders have not considered its content and sequencing sufficiently.
- The range of subjects is limited and narrow. It does not prepare pupils for adulthood or provide them with the knowledge they need to achieve and thrive in later life.
- The curriculum lacks ambition for disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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.
- Pupils with SEND do not receive a high-quality education and/or reasonable adjustments are not being made.
- Pupils' experiences in lessons do not help them to learn effectively what has been planned in the curriculum.
- Leaders do not do enough to make sure that teachers develop sufficient expertise to teach the curriculum.
- Teachers' expectations are too low, either for all pupils or for particular groups.
- Adaptations or reasonable adjustments do not meet pupils' needs or they reflect low expectations for particular pupils or groups.

Exceptional

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

Exceptionally high standards in the curriculum and teaching have been sustained. Across all subjects and phases, well-planned, effective and highly responsive teaching quickly and securely develops the knowledge and skills pupils need to be successful.

Leaders' actions have a transformational impact on the learning of disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who face barriers to learning and/or wellbeing. These pupils are now exceptionally well prepared for current and later learning, and for future success.

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 school and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other schools, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks

Achievement

This evaluation area considers:

- whether the school provides a high-quality education for all pupils (the impact), especially disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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, that gives them the necessary knowledge, skills and qualifications to succeed in life, and equips them for the next stage of their education, training or employment
- pupils' attainment and progress over time in national tests and examinations, where relevant
- the progress that pupils make across the curriculum from their starting points, so that they know more, remember more and are able to do more

Inspectors focus on gathering evidence relating to the factors that statutory and non-statutory guidance, including the associated ISS, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to pupils' achievement.

These factors are:

- securing important foundational knowledge in language and communication, reading, writing and mathematics so that pupils can access the whole curriculum
- reading fluently at an age-appropriate level
- securing the knowledge and skills pupils need before undertaking more complex tasks
- ensuring that pupils make progress from their starting points, in that they know more, remember more and can do more; they learn what is intended, and develop broad and deep subject knowledge across the curriculum
- equipping pupils to produce high-quality work that reflects the breadth and depth of their learning
- equipping pupils to achieve well in national tests and examinations, where relevant, and across the curriculum
- preparing pupils, at each phase, for the next stage of education, training or employment

Considering achievement for different ages, phases and provision types

When considering the factors above, inspectors take account of how they apply to different ages and stages of learning, and the needs of different groups of pupils.

In schools where **published data from national tests and examinations is available**, for example in some independent secondary schools, inspectors consider:

- what the published data indicates about achievement over time, and use this as a starting point for discussions with leaders about achievement
- how comprehensive the picture presented by published outcomes is (for example, what proportion of pupils or subjects the data is available for) and will be aware of the data's gaps or limitations, for example in relation to small cohorts; inspectors take into account that published outcomes do not reflect the achievement of pupils in every year group or of some groups, such as some pupils with SEND
- how compelling the picture presented by published outcomes is (for example, the consistency of outcomes over time and whether performance is in line with, exceeds or falls below national averages)
- evidence gathered on site to provide a fuller picture of achievement over time, particularly for groups of pupils or phases for which published data is not available
- what published data, set alongside evidence gathered on site, indicates about pupils' achievement over time

Inspectors will not review internal data. However, they may discuss with leaders how they use internal assessment data, what it tells them about pupils' achievement and what decisions they make as a result.

In the majority of independent schools, **published data from national tests and examinations is not available**. Inspectors consider evidence gathered on site to provide a picture of pupils' achievement over time. This includes evidence from learning walks, pupils' work, discussions with pupils and case sampling. They take particular care in gathering evidence on the progress over time of disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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.

When inspectors evaluate achievement in **independent schools with early years provision**, they consider how quickly and securely children develop the necessary foundational knowledge to access later learning. This includes how they are supported to make the best possible start, and how children who might fall behind are supported to keep up so that all pupils can progress in their learning.

When inspectors evaluate achievement in **small schools**, they bear in mind that published data for small cohorts is likely to fluctuate considerably.

When inspectors evaluate achievement in schools with **primary-age pupils**, they consider:

- how quickly and securely pupils develop a strong foundation in communication and language, reading, writing and mathematics; this includes how the youngest pupils are supported to make the best possible start, and how pupils who might fall behind are supported to keep up, so that all pupils can access the curriculum and progress in their learning
- the extent to which pupils in key stage 2 have developed the knowledge and skills across the curriculum to prepare them for later study; inspectors bear in mind that for younger pupils and those at an earlier stage of developing their foundational knowledge, the school's priority must be to secure the foundations that will support access to the curriculum and later learning

When inspectors evaluate achievement in schools with **secondary-age pupils**, they consider:

- whether pupils achieve well in national tests and examinations, where relevant
- the extent to which pupils make progress across the whole curriculum and through key stage 3, in preparation for key stage 4 and post-16 study
- the extent to which gaps in knowledge are tackled for pupils who are at the early stages of securing their foundational knowledge (including reading fluency), so that they can access the curriculum

When inspectors evaluate the achievement of **pupils with SEND in independent school settings**, they:

- keep in mind that published outcomes data may not give a sufficiently detailed picture of the progress and achievement of some groups of pupils, or this data might not be available, and therefore evidence gathered on site is crucial to evaluating progress and achievement
- consider pupils' starting points and the progress they make from them; inspectors also want to understand the curriculum pathways of individuals or groups, and whether leaders have identified the right priorities for them and are ensuring that they make good progress

Gathering evidence about achievement

In schools with a [specialist curriculum](#), inspectors will only consider the school's secular curriculum when grading achievement.

The ISS

- By gathering evidence within this evaluation area, inspectors assess whether leaders have ensured that the school meets the ISS. This includes requirements about the quality of education in part 1 (paragraphs 2(1)(a), 2(2)(b), 2(2)(h), 2(2)(i), 3(a) and 3(g)).

Foundational knowledge

In gathering evidence about foundational knowledge, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- pupils have the age- and phase-appropriate knowledge and skills they need to progress to the next stage of learning, including:
 - language and communication skills that enable them to access the full curriculum
 - accurate and fluent reading
 - compositional skills
 - accurate spelling
 - legible and fluent handwriting
 - mathematical knowledge
- pupils read widely and often, with age-appropriate comprehension
- a strong culture of reading is embedded across the school, shown by pupils' confidence in and enjoyment of reading, which sets them up to be lifelong readers

Inclusive achievement: national tests and examinations

In gathering evidence about attainment and progress in national tests and examinations (when available), inspectors consider the extent to which:

- pupils' attainment and progress in national tests and examinations compare with national averages
- where published attainment and/or progress data is not available, including for pupils with SEND and those who are disadvantaged, pupils generally make progress from their starting points
- pupils gain the relevant knowledge, skills and/or qualifications they need to progress to the next stage of their education, training or employment

Inclusive achievement: across the curriculum

In gathering evidence about achievement across the curriculum, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- pupils make progress from their starting points, in that they know more, remember more and can do more; they learn what is intended, and develop broad and deep subject knowledge across the curriculum
- pupils produce high-quality work that reflects the breadth and depth of their learning
- pupils have the foundational knowledge and skills they need by the end of key stage 1 to ensure that they are ready for key stage 2
- pupils in key stage 1 and 2 develop their knowledge and skills across the curriculum to prepare them for further study, particularly as they progress into key stage 3
- secondary-age pupils develop detailed knowledge and skills across the key stage 3 curriculum, preparing them well for key stage 4 and more advanced study post-16
- pupils have the necessary knowledge, skills and/or qualifications for the next stage of their education, employment or training, including a strong grounding in English and 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: • Although many pupils achieve well, a significant minority of pupils have gaps in their learning, which hinders their achievement. • Leaders have only recently started to take action to improve achievement. While their actions are appropriate, they are at an early stage. This means it is too soon to determine the impact of this work. • Pupils' attainment and progress are inconsistent or not as good as they need to be over time. • Leaders are taking appropriate action to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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. However, currently, a significant minority of these pupils do not achieve well from their starting points.	Achievement meets the 'expected standard', when all the associated ISS are met and all the following apply: On the whole, pupils are ready for the next stage of education, employment or training. They generally have appropriate knowledge and skills across the curriculum, as reflected in the quality of their responses and the work they produce. Pupils develop the foundational knowledge and skills they need, including language and communication skills. Pupils who are at the start of their education (and older pupils, where necessary) largely secure the necessary accuracy and fluency in word reading, spelling, handwriting and number facts. Any gaps in pupils' foundational knowledge or skills are closing quickly. On the whole, pupils, including those with barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, achieve well. Where relevant, this will be typically reflected in their achievement in national tests and examinations, which is broadly in line with national averages. Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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, generally make suitable progress from their starting points. They develop appropriate knowledge and skills to enable them to progress to the next stage. Any gaps in their knowledge or skills are closing quickly.	Achievement meets the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and all the following apply: Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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, consistently achieve well, develop detailed knowledge and skills, and produce high-quality work across the curriculum. Where relevant, this achievement will be reflected in above-average outcomes in national tests and examinations over time. Any gaps are quickly narrowing. All pupils, including the groups listed above, are consistently well prepared for the next stage in their education, employment or training.

Urgent improvement

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

- Pupils lack the foundations of communication, reading, writing or mathematical knowledge (taking into account that some pupils with SEND may not establish these foundations). Gaps in foundational knowledge are not tackled quickly or effectively.
- Pupils have not gained the knowledge and skills and/or any qualifications they need to progress to the next stage of education, training or employment.

Exceptional

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

Exceptionally high standards of achievement have been sustained. Across all subjects and phases, pupils achieve consistently well, developing detailed knowledge and skills. This will be reflected in consistently high outcomes in national tests and examinations (where available).

Leaders' actions have a transformational impact on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND and 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. These pupils now achieve consistently high outcomes and are exceptionally well prepared for their next steps.

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 school and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other schools, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks

Attendance and behaviour

This evaluation area considers:

- whether leaders and other staff create a calm, orderly, respectful, supportive and positive environment in which pupils can thrive
- the impact of the school's work on the attendance, behaviour and attitudes of all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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, such as young carers

Inspectors focus on gathering evidence relating to the factors that statutory and non-statutory guidance, including the associated ISS, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to pupils' positive attendance, behaviour and attitudes.

These factors are:

- prioritising pupils' attendance and punctuality, as well as their positive behaviour and attitudes to learning, so that pupils benefit from the education and experiences the school offers
- fostering a positive and respectful culture in which staff know, support and care about pupils, including the groups of pupils listed above
- having clear policies for attendance and behaviour that are applied effectively and proportionately
- staff applying clearly defined consequences consistently and fairly when needed
- setting clear routines and expectations for pupils' behaviour across all aspects of school life, not just in the classroom
- keeping an accurate record of any sanctions imposed on pupils for serious misbehaviour
- developing pupils' motivation and positive attitudes to learning, since these are important predictors of attainment and instil important behaviours for future learning
- creating an environment in which pupils feel safe, and in which bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment (including sexual harassment), victimisation, physical and sexual abuse and/or violence – online or offline – are not accepted and are dealt with quickly, consistently and effectively

Considering attendance and behaviour for different ages, phases and provision types

When considering the factors above, inspectors take account of how they apply to different ages and stages of learning, and the needs of different groups of pupils.

In independent schools with **early years and key stage 1 provision**, inspectors consider:

- the fact that pupils' punctuality and attendance may depend on parents, and the school's response to this
- how well staff teach pupils daily routines and habits to promote positive learning

For **pupils with SEND in independent schools, including specialist settings**, inspectors:

- consider how leaders and staff support pupils with emotional, mental health or medical needs that affect attendance, and how they help these pupils to attend more regularly; this may include working with parents and professionals
- bear in mind that some pupils may need additional support to help them manage their behaviour and emotional regulation; inspectors explore leaders' work over time and its impact on helping pupils to meet high expectations
- consider how leaders and staff work with medical professionals and other specialists to support access to education and attendance at school, as appropriate, for pupils who are educated under section 19 (of the [Education Act 1996](#)) duties because they are unwell, including those educated in hospitals

Some schools have a significant proportion of pupils who join with previously low attendance or following disruption to their education or pupils with SEND which may affect their attendance. In these schools, inspectors recognise that this may affect overall attendance or rates of persistent absence. They therefore pay particular attention to the impact of the school's work to improve attendance rapidly for these pupils and to maintain improvements over time.

Gathering evidence about attendance and behaviour

The ISS

By evaluating behaviour, attitudes and attendance, inspectors also gather evidence to assess whether leaders have ensured that the school meets the ISS. Leaders and staff have a responsibility to:

- ensure the good behaviour of pupils (paragraphs 3(h), 9)
- promote positive attitudes to learning (paragraphs 3(b), 5(b)(ii))
- prevent bullying as far as is reasonably practicable (paragraph 10)
- promote the wellbeing of all pupils (paragraph 34(1)(c))
- ensure that an admission and attendance register is maintained in accordance with the [School Attendance \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2024](#) (paragraph 15)
- ensure that inspectors have access to the school's admission and attendance registers (paragraph 32(1)(g))
- ensure that restrictive interventions, including incidents of use of force and incidents of seclusion, are recorded and reported (paragraphs 16A(1) to 16A(6) and 32A to 32A(3))

Strategic leadership of attendance and behaviour

In gathering evidence about the strategic leadership of attendance and behaviour, inspectors consider the extent to which leaders:

- know and understand their pupils, the influences on them given the context of the school and the challenges they may face in maintaining positive behaviour
- promote good attitudes to learning and regular attendance, especially for disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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
- pay close attention to every element of the school's work to make sure that the school is a place that pupils want to attend
- have high expectations for all pupils' attendance, behaviour and attitudes, and design effective policies that communicate these high expectations clearly to all staff, pupils and parents, including expectations related to mobile phones
- implement agreed policies effectively so that they are applied consistently by staff
- have an informed and accurate understanding of what is working well and where improvement is needed, including through using day-to-day processes and detailed data analysis to identify, anticipate, prevent and improve poor attendance and behaviour, including bullying
- have developed a clear, strategic plan to tackle improvement priorities, demonstrate a record of improvement and ensure a high standard of attendance, behaviour and attitudes

Attendance

In gathering evidence about attendance, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders place a high priority on improving attendance and punctuality, at whole-school level and for different groups, including for those who are occasionally, persistently and severely absent
- pupils attend well, including disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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, such as young carers; if this is not the case, attendance is improving towards national averages and the school's pre-pandemic levels
- leaders and staff pay close attention to the needs of the groups of pupils listed above, so that they attend regularly and come to school on time
- leaders and staff pay close attention to the needs of pupils who are absent because of mental or physical ill-health so that they attend regularly and come to school on time
- leaders do not stop striving for whole-school improvement once attendance reaches national averages
- leaders and staff communicate their expectations about attendance clearly, strongly and consistently to pupils so that they are well understood
- leaders and staff understand the importance of paying close attention to pupils' attendance, take opportunities to promote good attendance and act on absence or declines in attendance promptly
- staff complete attendance and admissions registers accurately, and the day-to-day processes to follow up on absences are established and effective
- leaders work with parents, local authorities and other agencies, including the virtual school head, to communicate expectations about attendance and improve it; this includes any multi-agency work for disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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

Behaviour, including bullying

In gathering evidence about behaviour, including bullying, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders and staff establish appropriate routines and explicitly teach and model the behaviour they expect from pupils, so that these are well understood
- approaches are adapted to meet pupils' individual needs as necessary
- leaders train and support teaching and non-teaching staff to challenge poor behaviour, including low-level disruption that prevents learning, and they agree on consequences for poor behaviour and apply these confidently and consistently
- poor behaviour is prevented from disrupting lessons or the school's day-to-day life
- relationships between pupils and staff show kindness, courtesy, empathy and respect, reflecting a positive culture
- leaders and staff create a positive environment in which bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, victimisation, physical and/or sexual violence and derogatory language are not tolerated

- leaders recognise that bullying takes various forms, and is often motivated by prejudice against particular groups, for example on grounds of race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, SEND, or because a pupil is adopted, in care or has caring responsibilities; it might be motivated by actual differences between pupils, or perceived differences
- leaders ensure that the school has a culture in which staff are trained and empowered to deal with child-on-child violence; they assume it happens in the community and, potentially, in school, even in the absence of specific reports, so establish a whole-school approach to tackle it
- pupils feel confident reporting incidents of aggression, bullying, unlawful discrimination or derogatory language when these occur, and leaders deal with them quickly and effectively so that they are not allowed to spread
- leaders and staff support pupils who are affected by aggression, bullying, unlawful discrimination or derogatory language so that they feel safe and confident at school
- sanctions, including isolation, suspension and permanent exclusion, are used proportionately and appropriately to tackle behaviour that does not reflect leaders' high expectations, ensuring those pupils with barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing are supported to meet these high expectations
- leaders reintegrate suspended pupils and those returning from off-site direction and alternative provision, carefully on their return and manage their behaviour effectively
- leaders work with pupils and parents to communicate expectations about behaviour and to foster partnerships between home and school
- leaders work with the local authority, other agencies and partners, where necessary, to support effective and continuing improvements to behaviour

Attitudes to learning

In gathering evidence about attitudes to learning, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- pupils arrive at lessons punctually and settle quickly
- low-level disruption is anticipated, responded to and dealt with, so that it is uncommon and does not disrupt lessons
- pupils are taught how to study effectively and do so, developing increasing independence, resilience to setbacks and persistence in the face of difficulties
- pupils are committed to their learning, motivated, self-confident, and able to work cooperatively and collaboratively with their peers and staff
- pupils take pride in their achievements and the work they produce

Inclusive approaches to attendance and behaviour

In gathering evidence about inclusive approaches to attendance and behaviour, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- staff have the necessary expertise, confidence and support to adapt behaviour policies and practices appropriately and consistently for pupils with specific needs
- staff make reasonable adjustments and adaptations when considering pupils' needs, challenges and barriers, while maintaining high expectations for what all pupils can achieve

- leaders and staff use timely, well-chosen, targeted interventions to support those who need additional help in meeting the school's high expectations of attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning, and sustaining this over time
- leaders monitor, evaluate and amend any specific approaches, reasonable adjustments, adaptations and interventions to account for pupils' changing circumstances and/or needs
- leaders have worked with parents and the local authority to ensure that pupils with an EHC plan have suitable support to attend and behave well, where appropriate
- leaders and staff make sure that (when they are needed) part-time timetables are short term and have defined end points, and plans for supporting pupils' return to full-time education are clear and appropriate
- leaders and staff make sure that restrictive physical intervention is used as a last resort, and that these incidents are analysed carefully to minimise the need for the use of force
- when alternative provision is used, leaders monitor pupils' attendance carefully, both daily and over time, and take swift and effective action when pupils do not attend
- leaders, staff and pupils have established a culture across the school in which relationships between adults and pupils are open, respectful and harmonious
- pupils who need support to improve their attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning show improvements over time

Grading attendance and behaviour

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
Attendance and behaviour 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 have appropriate ambitions and/or expectations for pupils' attendance, behaviour and attitudes, but weaknesses or inconsistencies in practice mean that these have a limited impact on pupils or a particular group of pupils. • Leaders have only recently started to take action to improve pupils' attendance, behaviour and/or attitudes. While their actions are appropriate, they are at an early stage. This means it is too soon to determine the impact of this work. • Support for disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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 is not improving their attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning. Support is not adapted to	Attendance and behaviour meet the 'expected standard' when all the associated ISS are met and all the following apply: Leaders and staff have an informed and accurate understanding of matters related to attendance, behaviour and attitudes. They establish effective strategies to tackle any issues. Leaders establish high expectations for all pupils about behaviour, built on positive relationships, and on rules and routines that staff and pupils generally understand. Leaders ensure that staff maintain and reinforce the same high expectations, acting as role models and teaching positive behaviour. Leaders and staff generally apply agreed rules and sanctions effectively, including keeping a record of any sanctions for serious misbehaviour. Suspension and permanent exclusion are used appropriately. Leaders and staff usually ensure that incidents of bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation, physical and/or sexual violence and derogatory language are dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils generally behave well, follow the agreed school routines and show positive attitudes to	Attendance and behaviour meet the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and all the following apply: Leaders and staff have established a culture that is highly conducive to learning and in which pupils of all ages flourish. Leaders respond to the school's and pupils' changing circumstances and needs swiftly and skilfully. Pupils show self-discipline and dedication to their learning. They learn how to manage their own emotions and resolve conflict with others. They consistently show high levels of respect for others and rarely need to be reminded about positive behaviour. Older pupils' behaviour, including consideration for others, sets an excellent example. Tailored and responsive reasonable adjustments and adaptations, interventions and/or support for pupils who need help to improve their behaviour have a demonstrable impact. The importance of high attendance is consistently promoted well by leaders and staff. High-quality training and support enable them to have supportive but challenging conversations with pupils and families when attendance needs to improve.

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
keep up with pupils' changing circumstances.	their learning. This contributes to a safe and calm environment. Leaders analyse attendance information closely, at whole-school level and for different groups to identify patterns and trends. They use this analysis well to identify the causes of poor attendance, intervene early and remove barriers. Overall attendance is broadly in line with national averages or shows an improving trend over time. Attendance is improving, including the attendance of pupils who are persistently or severely absent and individuals or groups that leaders have focused on. Any reasonable adjustments or adaptations to attendance and/or behaviour strategies are timely and appropriate, including for disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, such as young carers. Any interventions are timely, well chosen and targeted.	Leaders' actions to identify and tackle barriers to attendance result in high attendance or rapid and/or notable improvement, both overall and for individuals and groups.

Urgent improvement

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

- Leaders' expectations of pupils' attendance, behaviour and attitudes are not high enough. This negatively affects pupils' achievement, their enjoyment and their sense of belonging at school.
- Leaders do not take effective action to secure pupils' positive attendance and/or behaviour. They do not have a consistent, whole-school approach to maintaining discipline. Support for staff to manage behaviour is weak.
- Leaders do not have a strategic approach to tackling poor attendance. They do not monitor or evaluate pupils' attendance properly, including at alternative provision, to identify accurately the barriers to improving attendance and to establish and implement a clear action plan.
- Attendance is consistently low. It shows little or no sign of sustained improvement over time, overall or for significant groups.
- A significant minority of pupils show a lack of respect for each other and/or staff and a lack of self-discipline. Pupils frequently ignore or refuse staff's requests to moderate their conduct.
- Incidents of bullying and/or prejudiced and discriminatory behaviour, both direct and indirect, are frequent and/or tolerated.
- Pupils' lack of engagement and persistent, low-level and/or high-level disruption contribute to reduced learning and/or disorderly conduct, within classrooms and/or around the school.
- Leaders do not take pupils' concerns seriously. Problems escalate because leaders act too slowly. Pupils have little confidence in the school's ability to tackle bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation, violence and/or discriminatory behaviour.
- Use of force or restrictive intervention is excessive and/or unsafe.
- Sanctions, suspensions and/or permanent exclusions are used inappropriately.

Exceptional

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

Exceptional standards of attendance and behaviour have been sustained over time so that there is a highly inclusive culture in which all pupils feel that they belong. Pupils who need it receive exceptional and tailored support from highly skilled staff to improve their attendance and behaviour, with perceptible results.

Leaders' actions have a transformational impact on how well disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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 achieve and flourish across all areas of school life.

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 school and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other schools, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks

Personal development and wellbeing

This evaluation area is focused on the personal development and wellbeing of pupils.

This evaluation area considers:

- whether leaders establish a suitable and coherent programme of personal development, through both the curriculum and the wider opportunities and experiences they provide for pupils
- whether the school supports pupils to develop the knowledge and skills they need for participation and success in later life
- whether the school promotes pupils' wider development, character and wellbeing, ensuring that they receive the care and support to achieve and thrive, in school and beyond
- pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development, which can be seen across the school's activities

Inspectors focus on gathering evidence relating to the factors that statutory and non-statutory guidance, including the associated ISS, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to personal development and wellbeing.

These factors are:

- ensuring that the curriculum contributes to pupils' personal development and their SMSC development
- supporting pupils to become responsible, respectful and active citizens who can play their part in public life as young people and adults
- developing and deepening pupils' understanding of fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs
- promoting equality of opportunity so that all pupils can thrive together and understand that individual characteristics make people unique; this includes, but is not limited to, an age-appropriate understanding of the protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010
- developing pupils' character so that they reflect wisely, learn eagerly, behave with integrity and cooperate consistently well with others
- developing pupils' confidence, resilience and knowledge so that they can keep themselves mentally healthy
- enabling pupils to recognise online and offline risks to their wellbeing – for example, risks from criminal and sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, substance misuse, gang activity, radicalisation and extremism – and making them aware of the support that is available
- enabling pupils to recognise the dangers of using technology and social media inappropriately
- developing pupils' understanding of how to keep physically healthy, eat healthily and maintain an active lifestyle, including by providing them with enrichment activities and opportunities to be active during the school day
- developing pupils' age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships through relationships and sex education
- supporting pupils' readiness for the next phase of education, training or employment so that they are equipped to make the transition successfully, including by providing impartial careers information, education, advice and guidance for secondary-age pupils

Considering personal development for different ages, phases and provision types

When considering the factors above, inspectors take account of how they apply to different ages and stages of learning, and the needs of different groups of pupils.

When inspectors evaluate personal development and wellbeing in **independent schools with early years provision**, they consider whether the personal development programme is aligned with the EYFS educational programme for personal, social and emotional development (PSED).

When inspectors evaluate personal development and wellbeing for **pupils with SEND in independent school settings**, they:

- seek to understand the school's priorities for the personal development of individual pupils and its approaches to developing and providing a personal development programme, including careers education, matched to pupils' needs
- understand that pupils' participation in enrichment opportunities may vary according to their needs and circumstances
- recognise that these pupils may face increased risks relating to their age rather than their developmental stage; inspectors want to understand how the school supports pupils with SEND to access, in ways that are developmentally suitable, the age-appropriate content they need to keep themselves healthy and safe

Gathering evidence about personal development

The ISS

- By evaluating personal development and wellbeing, inspectors also gather evidence to assess whether leaders have ensured that the school meets the ISS. In part 1 of the ISS, leaders have a responsibility to ensure that curriculum planning provides for effective personal, social, health and economic education and that secondary-age pupils have access to accurate careers guidance. Part 1 of the ISS also makes provision for effective relationships and sex education. More broadly, leaders and staff should ensure that pupils are prepared effectively for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in British society. Part 2 of the ISS outlines the requirements leaders are expected to meet to provide for pupils' SMSC development.

Strategic leadership of personal development and wellbeing

In gathering evidence about the strategic leadership of personal development and wellbeing, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders ensure that the personal development programme (which includes taught content and wider opportunities and experiences) is broad, coherently planned and suitable for the school's context, and that the programme and the school's wider work reinforce one another
- leaders ensure that staff have the knowledge and skills they need to teach the content of the personal development programme, and this content is planned, taught and assessed in line with the best available evidence
- leaders are effective in promoting equality of opportunity and diversity

The personal development programme

In gathering evidence about the personal development programme, including pupils' SMSC development, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- the personal development curriculum meets the requirements of the ISS
- the curriculum and wider opportunities prepare pupils for life beyond school
- pupils develop their ability to be reflective about their own beliefs (religious or otherwise) and perspective on life, including developing their knowledge of, and respect for, different people's faiths, feelings and values
- pupils gain a sense of enjoyment and fascination in learning about themselves, others and the world around them, using imagination and creativity in their learning and being willing to reflect on their experiences
- pupils' talents and interests are nurtured, developed and extended through a range of opportunities
- pupils are willing to participate in – and respond to – artistic, musical, sporting and cultural opportunities
- pupils develop their ability to recognise the difference between right and wrong, including:
 - understanding the consequences of their behaviour and actions, and readily applying this understanding in their own lives
 - recognising legal boundaries and respecting the civil and criminal law of England

- offering reasoned views about moral and ethical issues
- pupils learn how to manage their own emotions and resolve conflict with others
- pupils are given meaningful opportunities to:
 - prepare effectively for adulthood and life in modern Britain
 - acquire the knowledge they need to achieve and thrive in later life
 - develop their understanding of the protected characteristics and the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs
 - learn how to be responsible, respectful, active citizens who contribute positively to society
- pupils are taught to recognise online and offline risks to their wellbeing, such as the dangers of sharing personal information and the impact of viewing harmful content online, and risks related to criminal and sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, substance misuse, gang activity, radicalisation and extremism; they are made aware of the support available
- pupils know how to keep themselves safe and healthy, including how to look after their mental health and how to maintain an active lifestyle
- pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships
- pupils know how to discuss and debate issues and ideas in a considered way and how to engage with views, beliefs and opinions that differ from their own

Careers education

In gathering evidence about careers education, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders ensure that all secondary-age pupils are well prepared and supported to progress in education, employment or training, including continuing in education or training until at least their 18th birthday
- where relevant, there is an appropriate careers programme that includes impartial advice and guidance, opportunities for workplace experiences, and engagement with employers, colleges, training providers and universities
- pupils with SEND develop independence, contribute to their community, make positive friendships and are supported to be as healthy as possible
- careers guidance and the aspirations pupils have connect to the curriculum choices that are on offer

Pastoral support

In gathering evidence about pastoral support, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders and staff know their pupils and are vigilant in identifying individuals or groups who need additional pastoral support
- pastoral support is well matched to pupils' needs and targeted at those who may need extra guidance or care, or support for their emotional health or wellbeing; it deals with immediate issues and any underlying issues, in order to prevent problems recurring
- effective relationships with parents, local authorities and other external agencies are drawn on to strengthen pastoral support

- pupils understand what support is available and access pastoral care when they need it; leaders listen to, and take account of, pupils' views about their needs
- record-keeping, day-to-day processes and data analysis ensure that pastoral support is effective

Inclusive personal development and wellbeing

In gathering evidence about inclusive personal development and wellbeing, including pupils' SMSC development, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- pupils feel welcome, valued and respected and that they belong within the school community
- all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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, such as young carers, benefit from high-quality personal development opportunities
- all pupils have equal access to and participate in interesting and relevant extra-curricular activities
- all pupils benefit from high-quality careers education opportunities, where relevant, including the groups of pupils listed above
- pupils understand, appreciate and respect differences in the world and its people; they celebrate what we have in common across cultural, religious, ethnic and socioeconomic communities
- pupils respect the different protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010 and do not tolerate bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation
- pupils have the opportunity to develop a range of social skills in different contexts, for example working and socialising with other pupils, including those from different religious, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds
- reasonable adjustments or adaptations to the personal development curriculum or teaching for pupils are well targeted, effective in reducing barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing and focused on pupils' long-term success rather than short-term fixes; leaders consider the possible downsides of any adaptations and mitigate these
- pupils who attend alternative provision continue to receive a suitable personal development and relationships education/relationships and sex education programme

Grading personal development and wellbeing

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
Personal development and wellbeing 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 have appropriate ambitions for pupils' personal development and wellbeing but weaknesses or inconsistencies in practice have a negative impact on pupils in general or on a particular group. • Leaders have only recently started to take action to improve pupils' personal development and wellbeing. While their actions are appropriate, they are at an early stage. This means it is too soon to determine the impact of this work. • Leaders have considered pupils' needs when developing the personal development programme, but it is not well matched to, or does not keep up with, their evolving circumstances.	Personal development and wellbeing meet the 'expected standard' when all the associated ISS are met and all the following apply: A coherent and appropriate programme of personal development extends across the taught curriculum and wider opportunities and experiences. It makes a positive difference to pupils and enables them to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. The personal development programme includes a suitable and well-taught relationships and sex education programme, which develops pupils' knowledge. Pupils develop their understanding of, and respect for, protected characteristics, fundamental British values and cultural diversity in modern Britain. Pupils have a range of suitable opportunities that broaden their experiences and enable them to develop their talents and interests in areas such as the arts, music and sport. The school's careers education, where relevant, prepares pupils for future education, employment or training. Effective pastoral support meets pupils' needs. They are confident in accessing it when they need it.	Personal development and wellbeing meet the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and all the following apply: Pupils develop secure and detailed knowledge across the personal, social, health and economic education, relationships and (where relevant) sex education programme, and citizenship curriculum. Pupils are confident, resilient and independent. They are reflective, behave with integrity and cooperate consistently well with others. They are very well prepared for life beyond school. Leaders and staff have a deep understanding of all their pupils and are systematic in anticipating and identifying which individuals or groups might need additional pastoral support. What is provided is highly effective. Secondary-age pupils have a wide range of opportunities to learn about their options for education, support and training after school. The school engages well with employers in the local area to ensure that pupils are well informed. Pupils know what they need to do to achieve their ambitions. The programme of personal development is extensive and carefully tailored to the school's context and pupils' aspirations. Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, those

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
	The personal development programme is an entitlement for every pupil. Leaders track participation. They take steps to ensure that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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, for example young carers, can participate appropriately. Reasonable adjustments or adaptations are made for them.	who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, participate and benefit fully. Evidence of the impact of the personal development programme is clear on the outcomes and experiences of pupils, including the groups of pupils listed above.

Urgent improvement

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

- A significant minority of pupils do not receive a wide, rich range of experiences.
- Pupils do not receive the pastoral support they need.
- Leaders (including the proprietor) and/or those responsible for governance/trustees undermine or fail to promote equality and diversity.
- Significant weaknesses in the quality of the school's personal development programme are not identified or tackled.
- Leaders have established a culture and/or environment that places pupils under undue pressure or undermines their emotional health and/or wellbeing.
- The curriculum fails to teach pupils about healthy relationships in line with the statutory relationships and sex education guidance.

Exceptional

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

Exceptionally high standards of personal development and wellbeing have been sustained. Pupils feel well supported, develop consistently detailed knowledge and skills, make a strong positive contribution to the school's inclusive culture and are exceptionally well prepared for their next steps and for life beyond school.

Leaders' actions have a transformational impact on the personal development and wellbeing of disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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. These pupils are now able to thrive in school and beyond the school.

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 school and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other schools, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks

Early years

All the toolkit evaluation areas apply to the early years. Inspectors consider early years proportionately when grading each evaluation area. They also grade early years separately, using this evaluation area, to consider the early years provision as a whole. This evaluation area contains information that is specific to early years. The information is either not included in other evaluation areas or expands on the standards in other evaluation areas.

This evaluation area considers whether:

- the school meets the statutory requirements of the EYFS
- the school offers a high-quality early education for children, especially disadvantaged children, those with SEND, 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, that gives them the knowledge and skills they need for a successful start to their education and the best chance of later success

Inspectors focus on gathering evidence relating to the factors that statutory and non-statutory guidance, including the associated ISS, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to the quality of early education in independent schools.

These factors are:

- leaders understanding the strengths and areas for development of the school's early years provision and the effectiveness of their actions to improve it
- planning, designing and implementing an early years curriculum that is ambitious for all children
- having a curriculum and care practices that meet the needs of the range of children who attend
- the content of the curriculum being taught (see below) systematically, in a logical progression, and explained effectively, so that children gain the necessary foundations for the rest of their schooling
- ensuring that children develop, consolidate and deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills across all the areas of learning and development in the EYFS
- staff focusing on developing children's communication and language
- leaders identifying and supporting the groups of children listed above

Teaching is a broad term that covers the many different ways in which adults help young children to learn. In the early years, it includes their interactions with children during planned and child-initiated play and activities, communicating and modelling language, showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas, encouraging, questioning, recalling, providing a narrative for what they are doing, facilitating and setting challenges. It takes account of the equipment that adults provide, and the attention given to the physical environment, as well as the structure and routines of the day that establish expectations. Integral to teaching is how practitioners assess what children know, understand and can do, as well as how they take account of their interests and dispositions to learn (characteristics of effective learning), and how they use this information to plan children's next steps in learning and monitor their progress.

Considering early years for different ages and provision types

When considering the factors above, inspectors take account of how they apply to different ages and stages of learning, and the needs of different groups of children.

When inspectors evaluate **early years provision for 2- and 3-year-olds**, they:

- focus on the prime areas of learning
- take account of the typical development of 2- and 3-year-olds, including their emotional and physical dependence on adults; for example, inspectors consider how staff:
 - are responsive when children need comforting, and provide support appropriate to the child's individual needs
 - are attentive to children's care needs and daily routines, for example managing sleep routines and supervision at mealtimes, and use these occasions as an opportunity to support children's learning
 - give children time to be in familiar, small groups and opportunities to be in smaller, quieter areas for play
 - are patient and attentive when encouraging 2- and 3-year-olds to express their ideas
 - listen to children and respond to their verbal and non-verbal communication, rather than interrupting them

When inspectors evaluate **early years provision as part of mixed-aged classes**, they consider how:

- leaders and staff balance the needs of the youngest children with those of the older children in class, and ensure that the most effective teaching approaches allow the youngest children to learn across the areas of learning and development in the EYFS
- leaders and staff organise the daily routines and teaching opportunities so that the youngest children secure the foundations they need

When inspectors evaluate **early years provision for children with SEND in independent schools**, they consider:

- children's developmental differences, their starting points and the progress they are making from these
- the curriculum pathways of individuals or groups of children and whether leaders have identified the right priorities for them and are reducing barriers to progress

When inspectors evaluate early years, they consider any exemptions from the learning and development requirements of the EYFS, as agreed by the DfE.

Gathering evidence about early years

The ISS

By evaluating early years in schools, inspectors also gather evidence to assess whether leaders have ensured that the school meets the ISS: specifically the requirement to provide an appropriate programme of activities for pupils below compulsory school age (paragraphs 2(1), 2(1)(a), 2(2), 2(2)(f)).

Leadership of early years

In gathering evidence about the leadership of early years, inspectors consider the extent to which leaders:

- have a clear and ambitious vision for giving children the best start to their education
- have an accurate understanding of the provision's context, strengths and areas for development, which informs the actions they take to improve children's education and care, in line with the statutory requirements of the EYFS
- take all reasonable steps to make sure that all children have access to an ambitious curriculum, including those who attend part time or attend more than one setting, those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND, 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
- ensure that the curriculum identifies and sequences the key knowledge that children will learn across the EYFS educational programmes
- ensure that the curriculum is well taught across the setting
- ensure that staff use assessment well to make any necessary changes to teaching and/or the curriculum, including sharing information with Year 1 teachers when children move to key stage 1
- work in partnership with parents to promote children's learning and development and to raise their awareness about supporting children's readiness for starting school

Curriculum

In gathering evidence about the curriculum in early years, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- the curriculum supports all children's progress through the EYFS educational programmes, appropriate to their age and stage of development; it clearly identifies the foundational knowledge and skills that children need for later learning, and emphasises children's communication and language development
- the Reception Year curriculum for teaching systematic synthetic phonics, spelling and handwriting is logically sequenced and cumulative
- the mathematics curriculum is designed to develop children's confidence about and use of mathematical vocabulary, and gives them a secure grounding in number, numerical patterns and spatial reasoning

Teaching

In gathering evidence about teaching in early years, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- daily routines and interactions ensure that children develop their language and vocabulary across all areas of learning and development and can communicate and manage their thoughts and feelings
- staff engage children in high-quality interactions to develop their knowledge and vocabulary; they help children articulate what they know and understand by scaffolding, modelling, extending and developing their ideas
- staff build children's emotional connection to language and help them gain awareness and control of their voices through songs, rhymes and poems
- teachers prioritise daily story time; they read aloud and re-read high-quality stories, and talk with children about them to build familiarity and understanding
- staff develop children's ability to describe patterns, quantities and shapes in the world around them, and help children to enjoy mathematics so that they use what they know across all areas of learning; mathematics teaching is carefully sequenced so that concepts are introduced, developed and practised
- staff make effective choices about what, when and how to teach, tailored to the children's context, age and starting points, and select activities that enable children to sustain their attention, focusing on the intended learning rather than leaving it to chance; they ensure that children have sufficient foundational knowledge to complete tasks and provide additional teaching and practice for those who need more support
- staff present information clearly to children, check their understanding, and identify and tackle gaps in their knowledge; children have frequent opportunities to practise and consolidate their learning
- staff provide enough teaching and practice for children in Reception to develop a comfortable pencil grip and increasing accuracy and fluency in word reading, spelling, handwriting and number facts
- staff prioritise interacting with children rather than using their time to observe, record and compile evidence

Achievement in early years

In gathering evidence about the achievement of children in early years, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- children develop appropriate knowledge and skills across the 7 areas of learning and development, relevant to their age and stage of development
- children achieve well from their starting points, including disadvantaged children, those with SEND, 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
- children are well prepared to reach a good level of development by the end of Reception; they secure important foundational knowledge in the specific areas of literacy and mathematics, paving the way for future learning in Year 1 and beyond

Wellbeing and welfare in early years

In gathering evidence about the wellbeing and welfare of children in early years, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- care practices meet the needs of the range of children who attend, and promote all children's sense of belonging
- staff develop positive relationships with children to help them form secure attachments and to support their wellbeing and independence
- staff help children to understand, appropriate to their age and stage, how to make healthy choices to support their emotional and physical development; they support them to take well-managed risks to develop their resilience and understanding of personal safety
- staff give particular regard to statutory guidance for sleeping arrangements, ensuring that this is understood, implemented and monitored consistently for all children
- staff ensure that children's food is prepared and provided in line with their individual needs, developmental stage and any agreed care or allergy plans

Inclusive practices in early years

In gathering evidence about inclusive practices in early years, inspectors consider the extent to which leaders and staff:

- quickly and accurately identify children who face any barriers to their learning or wellbeing, including disadvantaged children, those with SEND, and those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care; they consider children's different starting points and stages of development, and act judiciously to reduce the barriers that these children face
- focus particularly on children whose language is less well developed and/or who do not readily engage with adults
- receive relevant, useful training and guidance so that they can identify and assess children's needs effectively, and meet them
- work in close partnership with parents, other settings, childminders and/or out-of-school provision to secure continuity of education and care for all children

Grading early years in schools

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
Early years in schools 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 appropriate ambitions for and/or expectations of children in the early years, but weaknesses or inconsistencies in practice have a negative impact on children in general or on a particular group. • Leaders have only recently started to take action to improve early years provision. While their actions are appropriate, they are at an early stage. This means it is too soon to determine the impact of this work. • Support for disadvantaged children, children with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and/or those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing is not well matched to their needs or does not keep up with their evolving circumstances.	Early years in schools meets the 'expected standard' when all the associated ISS are met and all the following apply: Leaders prioritise the early years to give children a successful start to their education and the best chance of later success. They have an accurate understanding of the quality and impact of education and care in this phase, and an effective strategy to bring about improvements. Leaders know the statutory requirements of the EYFS and make sure they are met. They have a clear vision for providing high-quality education and care for children in the early years and the same high expectations of them as they do for pupils in the rest of the school. Leaders ensure that statutory guidance for safe sleeping arrangements and food preparation and provision is well understood and implemented effectively. Leaders and staff make sure that education and care practices are suitable for the age and stage of children's development. Leaders make sure that the curriculum identifies and sequences the key knowledge that children will learn across the EYFS educational programmes. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is well taught and that staff engage in high-quality interactions with children.	Early years in schools meets the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and all the following apply: Relevant leaders, including the headteacher, are highly knowledgeable about the early years. They make astute decisions about how the curriculum and teaching should adapt and evolve, based on their evidence and insight about how well children have learned what was intended. Leaders are highly effective in quality assuring the impact of education and care in the early years, which allows them to make rapid and sustained improvements when necessary. Staff consistently maximise the opportunities for engaging children in high-quality interactions throughout the day, including during informal times and through care routines. They proactively seek out children who engage less readily with staff or other children. Typically, children's achievement will be reflected in above-average proportions reaching a good level of development. Children, including disadvantaged children, those with SEND, those who are known (or

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
	Staff consider children's starting points in their curriculum design and approach to teaching so that gaps in children's knowledge are identified and tackled. Leaders make sure that early years teachers inform Year 1 teachers about any gaps in children's knowledge to ensure an effective transition to key stage 1. There is a sharp focus on making sure that children acquire a wide vocabulary, communicate effectively and, in Reception, secure their knowledge of phonics. Leaders ensure that staff provide effectively for children's personal, social and emotional development, including making sure that they feel safe, secure, stimulated and happy. Children are being well prepared to reach a good level of development by the end of Reception. Typically, this will be reflected in the proportion of children reaching a good level of development being broadly in line with national averages. By the end of Reception, children use their knowledge of phonics to read accurately and with increasing fluency. Children develop appropriate knowledge and skills across the 7 areas of learning, relevant to their age and stage of development. Children, including disadvantaged children, those with SEND, and 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 typically achieve well from their starting points. This means that they are generally ready for the next stage of learning.	previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, develop a broad vocabulary and a detailed understanding across the 7 areas of learning and development. They are consistently very well prepared for the next stage of learning.

Urgent improvement

Early years in schools is likely to be graded 'urgent improvement' when any of the following apply:

- The proprietor and leaders have not met the statutory requirements of the EYFS in full. This has a significant negative impact on children's safety and wellbeing and/or learning and development.
- Leaders have low expectations of what children in the early years can and should achieve.
- The curriculum is poorly designed. It does not meet children's needs or provide the necessary foundations for future learning.
- Leaders or staff have a weak understanding of the areas of learning they teach and the ways in which children learn.
- Relationships between staff and children do not support children's emotional wellbeing effectively.
- Leaders have not ensured that statutory guidance on safe sleeping arrangements and safer eating is implemented effectively.
- By the end of Reception, children are unprepared for Year 1. They cannot communicate, read and/or spell enough phonically regular words to a level that is appropriate for their age. They do not have basic fluency in number, or knowledge of shape, space and measures.

Exceptional

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

Exceptionally high standards of education and care in the early years have been sustained. Children achieve consistently well, and develop the knowledge and skills to be exceptionally well prepared for their next steps.

Leaders' actions have a transformational impact on the outcomes and experiences of disadvantaged children, children with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those with other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. These children now achieve and flourish across all areas of school life.

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 school and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other schools, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks

Post-16 provision

All the toolkit evaluation areas apply to the post-16 provision. Inspectors consider the post-16 provision proportionately when grading each evaluation area.

They also grade the post-16 provision separately to consider it as a whole. This post-16 provision evaluation area contains information that is specific to post-16 provision; it is either not included in other evaluation areas or expands on the standards in other evaluation areas.

This evaluation area considers:

- whether the school has high-quality programmes of study that give students, especially disadvantaged students, those with SEND, 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, the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life, and for the next stage of their education, training or employment
- how the curriculum enriches students' education by providing careers education, work experience, industry placements, relationships and sex education, health education and non-qualification activities to equip them with vital life skills for adulthood, successful employment or higher-level study

Inspectors focus on gathering evidence relating to the factors that statutory and non-statutory guidance, including the associated ISS, research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to post-16 provision.

These factors are:

- having high-quality post-16 programmes of study that are tailored to the needs of individual students
- supporting, improving and accrediting students' English and mathematics knowledge when needed
- identifying and tackling barriers for students who are disadvantaged, those who have SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care or who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing
- making sure programmes of study include relevant and substantial vocational/technical and academic qualifications that prepare students for the next stage of their education, training or employment
- ensuring that programmes of study include purposeful work experience, work-related learning or industry placements
- ensuring that non-qualification enrichment activities (for instance, tutorials, work to develop study, leadership and volunteering) develop students' social, emotional and employability skills
- providing access to high-quality, individualised careers advice and guidance that prepare students well for the future

Considering post-16 provision in different provider types

When considering the factors above, inspectors take account of how they apply to different ages and stages of learning, and the needs of different groups of pupils.

When inspectors evaluate the post-16 provision for **students with SEND in independent schools**, they:

- focus particularly on understanding students' starting points and the progress that they are making from them
- seek to understand the curriculum pathways of individuals or groups of students and the extent to which leaders have identified the right priorities to ensure that they make good progress
- keep in mind that published data from national tests and examinations may be unavailable and therefore evidence gathered on site, in relation to students' starting points, will be crucial in evaluating their achievement
- work with leaders to understand students' relevant non-qualification activities, based on their needs, that prepare them for adulthood; activities may include, in exceptional cases, developing their independent living skills when qualifications or preparation for employment are not suitable options
- bear in mind that, in some settings, students might not access the full post-16 programme of study

Gathering evidence about post-16 provision

The ISS

By evaluating the post-16 provision, inspectors gather evidence to assess whether leaders have ensured that the school meets the ISS, particularly paragraph 2(2)(g), under which schools that have pupils above compulsory school age must provide 'a programme of activities that is appropriate to their needs', and other elements of paragraphs 2(2)(b) to 2(2)(i).

When grading the post-16 provision, inspectors will only consider the school's secular curriculum.

Provision for students aged 19 and over

An independent school may have students aged 19 and over on roll. When this is the case, inspectors only inspect and take account of the provision for these students if they began their studies before the age of 18. These students are essentially adults studying alongside children, so inspectors will always take this into account when they report (through the safeguarding evaluation area) whether safeguarding is effective.

Strategic leadership of the post-16 provision

In gathering evidence about the strategic leadership of the post-16 provision, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders offer a suitable programme of study that meets all statutory requirements; this includes appropriate qualifications, work-related learning, relationships and sex education and non-qualification activities, as well as English and mathematics courses when these are needed
- the provision is designed to meet students' academic needs and career aspirations and takes into account the school's context
- leaders have a comprehensive understanding of the quality of the curriculum and teaching across the post-16 provision
- leaders assure themselves that the curriculum is being taught well, identify areas for improvement and take effective action to tackle these, including through professional development

Achievement in post-16 provision

In gathering evidence about achievement in the post-16 provision, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- students develop their knowledge and skills across the curriculum to prepare them well for more advanced study, where relevant
- students' progress is reflected in the responses they give and the work they produce
- students are ready for the next stage of their education, employment or training; they have the necessary knowledge and skills and, where relevant, they gain qualifications that support their intended course of study and give them access to destinations that meet their interests and aspirations

Curriculum and teaching

In gathering evidence about the post-16 provision curriculum and teaching, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- the curriculum, including relevant work experience, is coherently planned and sequenced so that students build knowledge and skills sequentially and cumulatively
- the curriculum has rigour, so that students learn the knowledge that they need to answer subject-specific questions and to gain disciplinary knowledge
- teachers have a comprehensive understanding of the school's approach to teaching, how students learn and how to remove barriers to achievement
- teachers have expert knowledge of the subjects they teach
- teachers link curriculum learning with careers; they highlight progression routes for their subject and how the knowledge and skills developed in it are relevant to a wide range of career pathways

Preparation for next steps

In gathering evidence about preparation for next steps in the post-16 provision, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders ensure that all students are well prepared and supported to progress into education, employment or training, including continuing in education or training until at least their 18th birthday
- the work-related learning and careers programme meets the requirements set out in the ISS and includes high-quality work experience; work-related learning is well planned and relevant
- students have multiple opportunities to learn from employers about work, employment and skills that are valued in the workplace
- the study programme enables some students with SEND to develop their independent living skills to prepare them for later life
- leaders have established effective partnerships with local employers and with further and higher education institutions to prepare students for their next steps; students are aware of the academic, technical and work-related opportunities open to them

Wider opportunities

In gathering evidence about wider opportunities in the post-16 provision, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders provide a suitable range of wider opportunities and non-qualification activities, including personal, social, health and economic education and leadership experiences, that develop students' confidence and prepare them for adult life; activities are relevant and varied and students from all backgrounds take part
- leaders regularly evaluate the impact of the activities and refine what students are offered

Inclusive practices in post-16 provision

In gathering evidence about inclusive practices in the post-16 provision, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders reduce barriers for disadvantaged students, students with SEND, students who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, so that they achieve the best possible outcomes and are prepared for life beyond school
- teachers adapt the curriculum and their teaching to overcome the barriers individual students face, including students in the groups listed above; students get the support they need to access the provision
- students, including those listed in the groups above, have access to, participate in and benefit from the range of opportunities provided through the curriculum and through personal development opportunities
- structured careers education and guidance provide tailored support so that these groups of students are able to make informed decisions about their next steps

Grading post-16 provision

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
Post-16 provision 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 appropriate ambitions and/or expectations for students in the post-16 provision, but weaknesses or inconsistencies in practices have a negative impact on students in general or on a particular group. • Leaders have only recently started to take action to improve the post-16 provision. While their actions are appropriate, they are at an early stage. This means it is too soon to determine the impact of this work. • Support for disadvantaged students, students with SEND, students who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing is not well matched to their needs or does not keep up with their evolving circumstances.	Post-16 provision meets the 'expected standard' when all the associated ISS are met and all the following apply: Leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths of the post-16 provision and are addressing any inconsistencies in a timely way. They ensure that students follow a suitable programme of study that meets the expectations of the ISS and the specific needs of the post-16 cohort. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is appropriately sequenced and well taught overall. Leaders and staff typically use assessment well to make changes to teaching and/or the curriculum as necessary. Generally, students have age-appropriate knowledge and skills across the curriculum. This is reflected in the quality of their responses and the work they produce. Students generally achieve well. Typically, this will be reflected in their attainment and progress in national tests and examinations being broadly in line with national averages (where relevant). When published data is not available, including for some students with SEND, leaders can show that students typically make appropriate progress from their starting points.	Post-16 provision meets the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and all the following apply: Leaders ensure that the curriculum is taught consistently well across all post-16 provision. They carefully analyse its impact and make astute adaptations as needed. Teachers are skilled at delivering the curriculum in a way that enables students to achieve well. The choices teachers make about what to teach, and when and how to teach it, are highly effective in the context of the subject and the needs of students. Students achieve well. Typically, this will be reflected in above-average outcomes in national tests and examinations over time (where published data is available). Students are very well prepared for later life and proceed to highly appropriate education, employment or training. Students, including disadvantaged students, those with SEND, 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, achieve well, develop detailed knowledge and skills and produce high-quality work across the

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
	Students are generally ready for the next stage of education, employment or training. They go on to destinations that meet their interests, career goals and aspirations. Leaders have considered the needs of students in their curriculum design and approach to teaching. Adaptations to the curriculum or teaching for disadvantaged students, those with SEND, 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 are appropriate and enable students to achieve well.	curriculum. This prepares them well for more advanced study.

Urgent improvement

Post-16 provision is likely to be graded 'urgent improvement' when any of the following apply:

- The design, content, sequencing and/or teaching of the curriculum do not provide adequately for all students.
- Students' achievement in the post-16 provision is significantly lower than national averages, and shows little or no improvement over time.
- Disadvantaged students, those with SEND, those who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and/or those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing do not make enough progress. Students have not attained the qualifications, skills or behaviours they need to progress to the next stage of education, training or employment, or adulthood.
- The curriculum does not prepare students for opportunities, responsibilities and experiences they may encounter in adulthood or provide them with the knowledge they need to achieve and thrive in later life.
- The school does not ensure that students have access to unbiased information about potential next steps and/or high-quality careers guidance.

Exceptional

Inspectors may consider the post-16 provision to be 'exceptional' when the 'strong standard' has been met and all the following apply:

Exceptionally high standards of leadership, curriculum, teaching, achievement, personal development and wellbeing have been sustained. This means that students achieve consistently well, develop detailed knowledge and skills and are exceptionally well prepared for their next steps and later life.

Leaders' actions have a transformational impact on the outcomes and experiences of disadvantaged students, students with SEND, students who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. These students now achieve and thrive.

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 school and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other schools, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks

Leadership and governance

This evaluation area considers:

- whether leaders, the proprietor and those responsible for governance (where relevant) collectively ensure that the school's provision enables every pupil to thrive
- the commitment of leaders, including the proprietor and those responsible for governance (where relevant), to raising standards of education and care to improve the lives of all pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND, 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
- whether **all** leaders have ensured that the school consistently meets the ISS

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

These factors are:

- having a clear, strategic and reflective approach to improvement, in which leaders accurately monitor the school's context and prioritise actions that address the most significant barriers to learning
- managing the school as an organisation effectively, including organising staff strategically and removing barriers and distractions from core classroom activities
- leaders making decisions in the best interests of pupils, including prioritising the experiences and outcomes of the groups listed above
- leaders having a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development, and taking effective actions to engage the school community to improve and/or to sustain high standards
- having a coherent professional learning programme for all staff; this is rooted in a culture of purposeful collaboration, focuses on building collective expertise and enables expert teaching across all subjects and phases
- leaders and those responsible for governance (where relevant) understanding their respective roles and their performance in these roles, in a way that enhances the school's effectiveness
- parents and the school community engaging and participating in a thoughtful and positive way that supports pupils' education
- the proprietor taking into account the workload and wellbeing of leaders and, in turn, leaders taking into account the workload and wellbeing of their staff

Considering leadership and governance for different ages, phases and provision types

When inspectors evaluate leadership and governance in small independent schools, in the primary phase and in specialist settings, they recognise that leaders may have multiple responsibilities. The leadership team may be small. It may also draw on expertise or leadership from people who are not in the school every day of the week.

In all schools, inspectors work with leaders, and any nominee, to find out about the leadership structure and how key responsibilities are delegated. This ensures that they speak with the most appropriate people.

Gathering evidence about leadership and governance

The ISS

By evaluating leadership and governance, inspectors also gather evidence to assess whether leaders have ensured that the school meets **all** the ISS. This includes the standards included in those parts that fall outside other elements of the toolkits, such as part 3 (welfare, health and safety of pupils), part 5 (premises of and accommodation at schools), part 6 (provision of information) and part 7 (complaints). Inspectors carry out specific activities to assess compliance with these parts.

Failing to meet any of the ISS will mean that the quality of leadership and governance does not meet the 'expected standard'.

Strategic leadership

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

- demonstrate good skills and knowledge and fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the ISS are met consistently
- actively promote the wellbeing of pupils
- demonstrate consistently high standards of principled and professional conduct, and always act in the best interests of pupils
- establish and sustain the school's ethos and strategic direction, in partnership with the proprietor and those responsible for governance (as relevant) and through consultation with the school community
- have a clear and ambitious vision for providing high-quality education to all pupils, and uphold high educational standards that prepare pupils from all backgrounds for their next phase of education and life
- establish and sustain a culture in which pupils experience a positive and enriching school life
- promote positive and respectful relationships across the school community
- take a strategic approach to improvement, in which they carefully identify the right priorities to ensure the best possible outcomes and experiences for pupils
- know, understand, and act within the professional standards expected of them, and meet their statutory and non-statutory duties
- make a positive contribution to the wider education system
- promote effective use of resources, including digital technologies

The proprietor and governance (where relevant)

In gathering evidence about governance, inspectors consider the extent to which the proprietor and those responsible for governance:

- are knowledgeable about their statutory duties and carry them out effectively, including ensuring that all the ISS are met consistently
- support and challenge the school's leaders effectively

- select the best methods to assure themselves that leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's context and are prioritising the improvement actions that will have the greatest impact
- take account of and address leaders' workload and wellbeing
- ensure that systems for monitoring and quality assurance are fair, valid and constructive, and provide leaders and staff with high-quality feedback to inform continuous improvement
- hold leaders to account appropriately and effectively for the impact of the school's professional learning programme for staff
- hold leaders to account appropriately and effectively for the school's support and provision for disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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

Staff wellbeing and workload

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

- leaders take account of staff's wellbeing and make sure their workload is manageable; they do not create unnecessary burdens
- leaders have effective systems in place to protect staff from bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- leaders make sure that all staff feel valued and are supported to do their jobs to a high standard; they ensure that staff's 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 consider the extent to which:

- leaders establish a strong culture of staff professionalism, which includes a commitment from all staff to continuous improvement in their expertise and effectiveness
- leaders prioritise and participate in professional learning; they act as role models for all staff
- leaders ensure that staff have access to high-quality, evidence-informed, sustained and coherent professional learning programmes that build expertise and are aligned to balance the priorities of whole-school improvement, subjects/teams/phases and individual needs
- leaders allocate appropriate time and other resources to a coherent programme of evidence-informed professional learning for all staff
- professional learning includes purposeful collaboration between teachers on:
 - the curriculum, teaching and assessment
 - the school's vision, values and ethos
 - the school's approaches to delivering the intended curriculum
 - the school's approaches to attendance, behaviour and pastoral care
 - the school's mathematics and English curriculums (including systematic synthetic phonics and writing)

- the demands of each subject curriculum, including for staff who are non-specialists and teach outside their subject specialism
- the necessary adaptations for disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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
- leaders ensure that professional learning opportunities draw on the best available evidence, including high-quality research and expert provision from beyond and within the school, including (if they access these) nationally recognised career and professional frameworks and programmes, to build capacity and support succession planning
- leaders ensure that any early career teachers (ECTs) and any trainee teachers on placement receive the support they need to develop their teaching expertise
- leaders ensure that staff continually seek to improve their expertise, drawing on the best available evidence, including high-quality research, and the effective practice of others

Parental, professional and community engagement

In gathering evidence about parental engagement, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- leaders and those responsible for governance (where relevant) forge constructive relationships beyond the school, so that they can successfully engage and work in partnership with parents and the local community
- leaders commit the school to engaging and working successfully with other schools and organisations in a culture of mutual challenge, reflection and support
- leaders establish and maintain working relationships with fellow professionals and colleagues across other public services to improve educational outcomes for all pupils and to meet their statutory duties

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 have not ensured that all the ISS are met. However, these failings do not have a serious impact on pupils' welfare, health and safety, or on their academic or personal development. • Leaders have a broad awareness of the school's strengths and areas for development, including in meeting the ISS, but their actions lack precision and/or do not identify the underlying causes of any weakness and/or have unintended consequences for pupils or particular groups of pupils. • Leaders' actions to bring about improvement are largely focused on the right areas, but do not lead to improvement quickly enough. • The proprietor and, where relevant, those responsible for governance understand their broad roles and responsibilities but do not typically support and/or challenge leaders well. Their approaches to assuring	Leadership and governance meet the 'expected standard' when all of the ISS are met and all the following apply: Leaders ensure that the ISS are met consistently, over time. Leaders understand the school's context, strengths and areas for development. They have a clear rationale for their improvement priorities and largely take appropriate action to drive improvement across all key stages and areas of the school's work. The proprietor ensures that the vision, ethos and strategic direction of the school are clearly defined, takes account of context, and makes sure that resources, including digital technologies, are used effectively. They typically support and challenge leaders appropriately, giving due regard to leaders' and staff wellbeing and workload. Leaders are role models of high expectations and professionalism. Staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Leaders take action to ensure that staff and, where relevant, those responsible for governance feel valued and involved in the strategic direction of the school. The professional learning and expertise programme is evidence-informed, of high	Leadership and governance meet the 'strong standard' when the 'expected standard' has been met and all the following apply: Leaders provide meaningful opportunities for staff and, where relevant, those responsible for governance to share perspectives and insights and collaborate throughout any change process. Leaders use their detailed and insightful analysis of school performance to evaluate the effectiveness of their provision. They accurately identify, monitor and act on priorities for improvement, leading to consistently strong standards across all areas of the school's work or rapid improvement in any areas where this is not the case. Leaders at all levels make a consistently positive contribution to the school's priorities and develop staff expertise as the key driver of improvement. They allocate enough time for staff to work together to achieve this. Staff understand their role in improving and sustaining standards and make a consistently positive contribution to this. The proprietor uses their knowledge and expertise to provide consistent support and robust challenge to leaders across all aspects of the school's work.

Needs attention	Expected standard	Strong standard
themselves of the impact of leaders' work do not give them a precise picture of it. • Leaders are conscious of the implications any changes to practice may have on staff's workload, but they do not do enough to manage that workload or to avoid unnecessary burdens. • Leaders have a broad programme of professional learning and expertise, but it is overly generic or insufficiently targeted to build expertise (in terms of knowledge, skill and judgement). This limits its impact on the quality of the provision pupils receive. It provides few opportunities for purposeful collaboration or for staff to receive effective feedback on their practice. • Leaders have engaged with parents and the local community but this has been limited and/or not targeted appropriately.	quality and designed to build expertise. It draws on evidence and includes planned opportunities to apply and embed practice to build an effective team of teachers and staff, including ECTs and trainees, where relevant. Leaders protect time for professional learning. Leaders support staff's wellbeing and ensure that their workload is manageable. Leaders have systems to protect staff from bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation. Leaders develop constructive relationships with all parents and with the wider community, to build trust. They draw on these relationships to support pupils to achieve and feel that they belong. Leaders work with other schools, organisations and professionals in a culture of mutual support and challenge. Leaders act in the best interest of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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.	Leaders have achieved a culture of high expectations and professionalism, which ensures a positive experience for all pupils. Leaders have developed a highly effective culture of professional learning and expertise in which staff take responsibility for their own learning and are keen to continually improve their expertise. Leaders ensure that there is a professional learning and expertise curriculum that is informed by the best available evidence, including research, and is precisely matched to priorities for whole-school improvement, subjects/teams/phases and individual needs.

Urgent improvement

Leadership and governance are likely to be graded 'urgent improvement' if one or more of the following applies:

- Leaders have not ensured that all the ISS are met. This is having, or is likely to have, a significant negative impact on pupils' welfare, health and safety, or on their academic or personal development.
- Leaders do not identify and/or prioritise the right issues or take suitable or timely action to deal with them.
- Leaders do not have a track record of improvement or, since being appointed, have not taken action that they could reasonably be expected to take to secure improvements.
- The school's capacity to improve is poor, or leaders depend too much on external support to bring about and/or maintain improvement (support from within the school's trust is not considered external support).
- The proprietor does not carry out their statutory core functions. Breaches of legal responsibilities are serious because of the extent of their actual or potential negative impact on pupils.
- The proprietor is unclear about their statutory duties in relation to leaders' wellbeing and/or does not support leaders appropriately.
- Staff workload is unsustainable.
- Leaders' decisions are not taken in the best interests of pupils.
- Bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation go unnoticed or unchallenged.

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. The proprietor, leaders at all levels and all staff make a strong, positive contribution to the school's strategic priorities. This leads to continued improvement and/or sustained high standards in all areas of the school's work.

Leaders' actions have a transformational impact on the outcomes and experiences of disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, 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. These pupils achieve and thrive.

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 school and/or group
- share their learning and best practice externally to support system-wide improvement, for example with other schools, professionals, their community and stakeholders, including local and/or national networks