Department for Education

# Changes to Ofsted inspection fees for independent schools

## Government consultation response

November 2026

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# Introduction

The consultation was published on 25 September 2025 and closed on 20 November 2025. Its main purpose was to consult schools and other interested parties on proposed new fee rates for certain inspections of independent schools conducted by Ofsted, as commissioned by the Department for Education under the Education and Skills Act 2008.

The consultation was conducted via the online CitizenSpace platform. There was an email inbox for any enquiries. No events were held in connection with the consultation, or other online platforms used. Documents pertaining to the consultation can be found at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-ofsted-inspection-fees-for-independent-schools

## Summary of responses received and the government's response

33 responses were received; of these, 7 respondents identified as being a proprietor or head teacher of an independent school. Responses were also received from associations and other stakeholders. A list of respondents[1] is at Annex A.

Questions 4, 10, 13, 15, and 16 afforded respondents an opportunity to provide written comments. Three respondents elected to provide a separate written response, two of which addressed the proposal to increase inspection fees in general terms, rather than responding individually to each of the first 13 questions posed in the consultation.

Now that the consultation has concluded and the responses considered and analysed, the government still intends to make regulations to increase the inspection fees Ofsted may charge, in line with the consultation proposals. This will uprate the fees, which have not risen since 2019,[2] in order to move closer towards full cost recovery. In doing so, the need for government – and therefore taxpayer – subsidy will be reduced.[3] In addition, we intend to proceed with an option presented as part of the consultation to increase the tariff for pre-registration inspections (and with that, increase fees for these inspections to the higher of the two levels proposed) and make the fees here payable in advance of the inspection.

## Main findings from the consultation

Most respondents were opposed to any increase in fees for the three types of chargeable inspections in scope of the consultation (standard, pre-registration, and progress monitoring), and were similarly opposed to the proposal to increase the tariff for pre-registration inspections. However, a significant minority responded in support of the proposed fee increases across all three inspection types. Opinion was split on whether this should occur incrementally over a five-year period, and respondents were also divided on the question about whether Ofsted should charge for pre-registration inspections in advance of the inspection. The greatest degree of unanimity was reached on the question of whether small schools should pay a lower proportion of their standard inspection costs, with a vast majority responding in support of a continuation of this approach.

Written comments consisted of mixed responses regarding the various proposals across the three inspection types, though a clear majority were opposed to increases to fees. Respondents consistently cited concerns about the impact of the proposed changes on smaller schools' ability to operate, including faith schools and those catering for pupils with

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[1] Excepting respondents requesting confidentiality.

[2] The fees currently charged are set out in The Independent Educational Provision in England (Inspection Fees and Savings Provisions) Regulations 2019

[3] In line with government policy – see Chapter 6 of Managing public money - GOV.UK

special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), as a reason for opposition. Some respondents perceived fee increases as adding further pressure in addition to that felt because of other rising costs. A number of comments expressed support for the government's proposal to increase fees to mitigate the disparity between inspection costs and fees charged.

The written responses provided separately were largely in opposition to the proposed changes for similar reasons to those set out above. However, these responses also expressed support for the government's policy that the smallest schools should remain the least impacted.

# Question analysis

The consultation asked 29 questions in total. 13 questions were asked seeking respondents' views on proposals (or options) related to fees for standard, pre-registration, and progress monitoring inspections (about fee increases for the 3 types of inspection and, in the case of pre-registration inspections, increasing the tariff for them and making the fees for them payable in advance of the inspection); 3 questions were in regard to the equalities impact of changes, with a further 13 about respondents' characteristics and personal information.

## Question 1

**Do you agree that standard inspection fees should increase for the first time since 2019 so that private schools move closer to full cost recovery?**

| Answer | Total | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 7 | 22.58% |
| No | 24 | 77.42% |

This question relates to the proposed increase in fees for standard inspections for non-association schools of all sizes which, generally speaking, take place once every three years and are carried out by Ofsted under the Ofsted inspection framework.

### Government response

Having carefully considered responses to the consultation, and despite the majority of respondents opposing any increase in fees for standard inspections, we have decided to proceed with increasing standard inspection fees. This is a necessary step in recouping a greater proportion of costs, and we continue to believe it is right that standard inspection fees are increased in order to reduce the government, and as such, taxpayer, subsidy. Moreover, fees have not been raised since 2019, despite inflation and rising costs. This means the gap between inspection costs and fees charged has widened considerably.

## Question 2

**Do you agree that regulations should set out fee increases for standard inspections over a five-year period?**

| Answer | Total | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 15 | 48.39% |
| No | 16 | 51.61% |

This question was about the time period over which standard inspection fees would increase. The effect of the proposal is that fees for these inspections will rise by more than the target rate of inflation (2%) each year over a five-year period.

### Government response

The government was pleased to note that almost half of respondents were in favour of fees being incrementally raised over a five-year period.

We still consider it appropriate, despite the negative responses here, to provide a reasonable transition period, limiting the extent to which fees for standard inspections will rise in a single year. This should serve to reduce the immediate impact on schools. No respondents suggested that the fee increases proposed should be made all at once. It is therefore the government's intention to introduce new fees for standard inspections over a five-year period and at the rates proposed.

## Question 3

**Do you agree that small schools should pay a lower proportion of the cost of their inspections?**

| Answer | Total | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 27 | 87.10% |
| No | 4 | 12.90% |

The current policy, reflected in the current regulations imposing inspection fees, is that standard inspection fees vary according to school size (i.e. according to the number of pupils on roll). This question asked whether respondents agreed that fees charged should continue to be tied to size.

## Government response

The government was pleased to note that the vast majority of respondents agreed with the proposal that small schools should effectively continue to pay a lower proportion of inspection costs. We continue to think that it strikes the right balance between the aim of moving closer towards full cost recovery and the aim of ensuring that increased charges do not place undue pressure on the ability of smaller schools to operate.

# Question 4

**Do you have any comments on the proposals to increase fees for standard inspections over the next five years?**

There were 25 written responses to this question. Many respondents raised in comments their opposition to an increase in standard inspection fees, citing other additional rising costs (including the introduction of VAT on private school fees) as placing schools under pressure; several emphasised that private schools should shoulder a greater proportion of inspection costs to reduce the need for government subsidy. Written comments also reinforced the majority opinion expressed in response to Question 3 that small schools should pay less; a number outlined concerns about the impact on private schools catering for pupils with SEND as well as smaller faith schools; one comment stated that private school inspection was the government's responsibility, whilst another suggested that inspection costs could be streamlined. No respondents suggested the increases should be implemented all at once, though one comment suggested the changes could take place over a shorter timeframe. One respondent made the point that, because many private schools make a significant profit, it should be for schools to bear inspection costs. Some respondents raised concerns about rising costs being passed on to local authorities.

## Government response

It is important to recognise that inspection costs at the end of the 5-year period will still exceed fees charged, compounded by the fact that actual costs are expected to rise over five years; full costs will not therefore be recovered at the end of the 5-year period. In addition, we are not persuaded by responses suggesting it is correct that the taxpayer should continue to subsidise the cost of standard inspections. We remain of the view that is appropriate to close the gap between fees charged and actual costs, which necessitates increasing the level of fees charged by Ofsted for standard inspections.

However, we remain committed to mitigating the risk that increased charges will place a greater financial burden on schools. As such, the proposed fees structure will provide a degree of protection to the smallest schools (including those which are faith schools) by ensuring they are subject to the lowest percentage increases in fees each year. Proposed changes to standard inspection fees for schools with fewer than 100 pupils (which comprise over 80% of non-association private schools) are equivalent to a 1% increase

without inflation; the impact of the government's proposals on the smallest schools is therefore likely to be negligible, with the smallest impact on the largest group.

Similarly, in line with the proposal, the government still intends to adopt a gradual approach, thereby minimising immediate impact. We will monitor the impact of higher standard inspection fees over the course of the five years after they are introduced, including on smaller faith schools and schools that make provision for pupils with SEND, and in the light of this monitoring, review whether we are still satisfied with our approach.

Fees for standard inspections will continue to be payable by instalments. Given that standard inspections typically take place once every three years, these fees will arise relatively infrequently, and even over a five-year period the overall amounts payable will remain comparatively modest. As a result, we do not think that exemptions for certain categories of school are appropriate.

Inspection is a vital measure of accountability and is a necessary means of ensuring children are safe and receive a good quality education. Those entering or currently operating in the private school sector should be aware of this. Therefore, in our view, inspections should be seen as part of a school's own operating costs and not the responsibility of central government.

There are no plans to streamline or reduce the scope of inspections to manage or reduce costs. It is vital that Ofsted is properly equipped to carry out robust and effective inspections to assess private schools' compliance with standards relating to, amongst other things, the education and welfare of pupils. On the question of whether changes to fees will result in costs being passed on to local authorities, whether the additional costs are passed on in this way will ultimately be a decision for individual schools.

## Question 5

**Do you agree that pre-registration inspection fees should increase for the first time since 2019 so that settings pay a greater proportion of the cost of pre-registration inspections?**

| Answer | Total | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 8 | 25.81% |
| No | 23 | 74.19% |

Private schools currently pay a fixed charge of £2,500 for a pre-registration inspection,[4] which equates to approximately 50% of the actual cost (£4,900 in 2024). This question asks whether inspection fees for these inspections should now rise for the first time since 2019.

### Government response

Despite nearly three quarters of respondents indicating opposition to this proposal, we remain of the view that the taxpayer should not be subsidising pre-registration inspections.

Furthermore, it is also the case that unlike registered non-association schools, which have no choice but to pay the fees chargeable for their inspections, proprietors of prospective schools can make an active choice as to whether to proceed with an application, and with it, bear the associated costs.

As well as reducing taxpayer subsidy of pre-registration inspections another driver for the change is to disincentivise pre-registration inspections being used as a means of testing the extent to which a prospective school is likely to meet the Independent School Standards[5] (ISS) and Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)[6] framework if applicable (as is required to be entered in the register) in cases where a setting is not yet ready to open. Higher fees, closer to full cost, will discourage such speculative applications. It is also noteworthy that none of the respondents questioned the fact that increasing fees for pre-registration inspections could have this effect.

Whilst most respondents were opposed to the proposal to raise pre-registration inspection fees, the government welcomes the fact that a quarter were in favour. We still consider it the right course of action to proceed with increases to pre-registration fees.

## Question 6

**Do you agree that regulations should set out fee increases for pre-registration inspections over a five-year period?**

| Answer | Total | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 13 | 41.94% |
| No | 18 | 58.06% |

[4] When the Secretary of State has received a complete application to register a new school, Ofsted (having been notified) must conduct a pre-registration inspection of the school in accordance with s99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008.

[5] The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014

[6] Early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework - GOV.UK

This question asked whether respondents agreed with the proposal to increase fees for pre-registration inspections over a five-year period.

### Government response

The government was pleased to note that a very substantial minority were supportive of proposed increases taking place over five years. This proposal would align the schedule for increasing pre-registration inspection fees with the proposed timeline for standard inspection fees and progress monitoring inspection fees – i.e. over five years.

However, as set out in the consultation, the proposed initial increase (which as originally proposed would have been in 2026, but is now planned for 2027) is substantial, with smaller increases over the subsequent four years. Spreading the increases more evenly over time would prolong a cross-subsidy from existing feepayers, including those subject to ongoing inspection and to new entrants. We therefore propose to close the gap between costs and fees at a faster rate, so that applicants more directly bear the costs associated with their decision, while reducing the burden on the wider system. As with standard inspections, the cost of a pre-registration inspection will still exceed the fee that will become payable by the end of this period.

Having considered the responses, the government does not believe there is good reason to change its approach regarding the incremental introduction of fee increases and therefore intends to incorporate this proposal when updated regulations are made.

## Question 7

**Do you agree that HMCI should increase the tariff for pre-registration inspections?**

| Answer | Total | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 8 | 25.81% |
| No | 23 | 74.19% |

This question is about the proposed increase in tariff for pre-registration inspection, allowing Ofsted to commit greater resource to evaluating whether new schools are likely to meet the ISS when they open.

### Government response

None of the respondents questioned that it is of the utmost importance that schools are safe and provide pupils with a good quality education. It remains our view that achieving this is crucial in deciding whether to raise the tariff. Although schools are required to demonstrate they are likely to meet the ISS (and therefore, the standards there designed

to ensure pupil safety and welfare and a decent education) as a condition of registration, there have been instances in recent years where Ofsted has found schools to be unsafe and/or delivering a poor education at their first standard inspection, which is generally carried out in the first year of opening. Increasing the tariff would enable Ofsted to increase resource for pre-registration inspections, giving inspectors more time to explore the prospective setting and its likely compliance with the standards. That Ofsted is able to apply greater rigour to the inspection of new settings will in turn engender greater confidence that a prospective school is likely to meet the ISS when it opens. Therefore, the government still intends to move forward with plans to increase the tariff for pre-registration inspections.

## Question 8

**If HMCI were to increase the tariff for pre-registration inspections, would you prefer option 1 or option 2?**

| Answer | Total | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Option 1 (maintain existing tariff) | 23 | 74.19% |
| Option 2 (increase existing tariff) | 7 | 22.58% |
| Not answered | 1 | 3.23% |

This question also relates to the tariff for pre-registration inspection and presents respondents with two options: Option 1 was to maintain the existing tariff with no additional increase in resource, with fees rising to £4,600 by 2030/31; Option 2 was to increase tariff and therefore resource, with fees rising to £6,900 over the same five-year period.

### Government response

Most respondents favoured Option 1 (the option involving no increase in tariff and the lower levels of fees). However, as set out above, it remains our view that it is crucial for pre-registration inspections to be sufficiently resourced in order to ensure rigour. Option 1 carries the risk that any capacity and capability issues, which may lead to problems once a school has opened, are not identified at the pre-registration inspection. Option 2 proposes to increase the existing tariff to allow additional resource for pre-registration inspections; specifically, this option envisions doubling the inspector time committed to these inspections, along with fees being raised to reflect that increase in tariff. Although most responses expressed opposition to this proposal, the government believes it is appropriate to proceed with Option 2 to ensure HMCI is properly equipped to carry out rigorous and effective inspection of prospective schools. Proprietors of prospective schools can make an active choice as to whether to proceed with an application and with it the associated

costs. Those costs should be, in the main, for the organisation to bear, not the taxpayer, in order to limit detriment to the public purse.

## Question 9

**Should HMCI charge for pre-registration inspections in advance of the inspection?**

| Answer | Total | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 11 | 35.48% |
| No | 19 | 61.29% |
| Not answered | 1 | 3.23% |

Pre-registration inspection fees are currently charged after the inspection has taken place. This question asked respondents whether this should be charged prior to the inspection going forward.

### Government response

Despite the level of opposition, with three fifths of respondents disagreeing with the proposal for pre-registration inspection fees to be paid in advance, we still consider it appropriate to take forward plans to adopt an upfront payment model. We remain satisfied that this will help ensure that settings are committed to and fully ready to open before applying for registration. No respondents questioned that this could be the case. Moreover, requiring payment before an inspection is scheduled will also mean that Ofsted does not have to absorb costs in cases where a setting is found unlikely to be compliant with the ISS (and therefore not entered in the register) and does not subsequently make the payment. There is, in our view, no good reason a failed application for registration should be subsidised in this way. Finally, the proposal is only that payment should be charged in advance of the inspection; the fee would be payable in any event, albeit at a later date.

## Question 10

**Do you have any comments on the proposals regarding fees for pre-registration inspections?**

There were 14 written responses to this question. Several written comments were in favour of the government's proposal to increase pre-registration inspection fees over a five-year period, as well as the proposal to increase both tariff and resource – a number underscored the importance of this type of inspection in ensuring prospective schools are safe to operate, and agreed that additional resource was necessary to enable this; one

comment suggested the proposed increase was disproportionate given only a small number of schools fail, and asked to see greater evidence to support the rise. A number of comments reiterated concerns raised about the impact of increased fees on schools catering for pupils with SEND and for smaller faith schools, with some pointing to how costs may be passed on to local authorities; others expressed opposition to the proposals without giving a reason. Written comments did not, in the main, address the proposal to charge fees in advance of inspection, though some comments did suggest the process for making the payment was unclear. A single comment suggested proposed changes may discourage would-be proprietors from opening new schools.

## Government response

The government welcomes the fact that several written comments expressed support for the proposal to increase pre-registration inspection fees, and was pleased to see that many respondents acknowledged the need for increased resource to ensure robust pre-registration inspections are carried out to help ensure pupils are safe and receive a good quality education. Support for the proposal may be because it is prospective proprietors' choice to open a private school and, as such, inspection costs should be factored into broader set-up costs. Despite the objections, it remains our view that these costs should be for the organisation to bear, not the taxpayer and therefore, for example, that we should increase the tariff but set fees at the level proposed under Option 1. Therefore, whilst the government recognises that it is possible increases to pre-registration inspection fees may deter a small number of prospective proprietors from opening new schools, it remains the right approach to increase pre-registration inspection fees and to reflect an increased tariff.

In response to the point about a small number of schools failing to meet the standards, the government's position is that **all** independent schools should meet the ISS at all times, and therefore that all schools should undergo rigorous pre-registration inspection. Without additional resources for pre-registration inspections, it will be less easy to identify in advance those cases of newly registered schools that are unlikely to sustain compliance. Early weaknesses in leadership, governance, curriculum, or safeguarding can leave pupils vulnerable during the critical first months and years of a school's operation. For this reason, it is essential that pre-registration inspections are robust, so that potential areas of non-compliance are identified before a school opens. This allows providers to address any issues early and ensures that only schools capable of consistently meeting the ISS are registered. Strengthening pre-registration inspections by allocating greater resource in the form of inspector time is a preventative measure that protects pupils' education and welfare from the outset.

Furthermore, because pre-registration inspections for the well-run school should occur only once, and because fees at the higher level will still remain modest, the government does not believe that proposals in relation to these inspections will threaten the viability of prospective and suitable schools – including smaller faith schools and schools catering for

pupils with SEND. In addition, how these costs are managed, including whether costs are passed on to the local authority, will be a decision for individual schools to make.

In response to the point made about the process for making payments of pre-registration fees in advance being unclear, we can look at how best to set this out in regulation and supporting guidance, and we will review the information to ensure that the payment process is transparent and accessible.

## Question 11

**Do you agree that progress monitoring inspection fees should increase for the first time since 2019 so that private schools pay a greater proportion of the cost of their inspections and therefore move closer to full cost recovery?**

| Answer | Total | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 7 | 22.58% |
| No | 24 | 77.42% |

As with other types of inspection, fees for progress monitoring inspections (PMIs) (commissioned by the Department for Education where a private school fails to meet the ISS) have not risen since the regulations prescribing current inspection fees came into force in 2019. Schools pay for PMIs on a per pupil basis and schools are divided into two tiers dependent on size; schools with 151 pupils or more pay a higher, fixed rate. Furthermore, schools pay a higher rate for subsequent PMIs (i.e. if further inspections to monitor progress are required because a school failed to meet the ISS at its first PMI). This question asks whether these fees should now increase.

### Government response

The 2024 cost of a PMI was £6,300; costs recovered via the current fees that are payable – irrespective of school size or whether it is a first, second or subsequent progress monitoring inspection – fall significantly short of this. Whilst the government recognises that the majority of respondents were opposed to the proposal to increase fees for PMIs, the government continues to believe that it is right that the guiding principle here should be one of cost recovery in order to limit detriment to the public purse.

Regarding the proposal to continue to charge a higher rate for second and subsequent PMIs, we still consider that if a school persistently fails to meet the ISS and requires more frequent inspections as a result, the fee for those inspections should remain higher to reflect the fact that increased regulatory oversight is avoidable; once a school meets all relevant ISS, PMIs are no longer necessary, and it is therefore within the school's control to avoid continuing to pay for PMIs at the higher rate.

In order to move closer to full cost recovery, it still remains our intention to increase fees for all PMIs. Smaller schools will continue to pay a lower rate, as they currently do.

## Question 12

**Do you agree that regulations should set out fee increases for progress monitoring inspections over a five-year period?**

| Answer | Total | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 12 | 38.71% |
| No | 19 | 61.29% |

This question asked whether respondents agreed with the proposal to increase fees for PMIs over a five-year period.

### Government response

The fact that changes to fees for PMIs are proposed to be introduced over a period of five years means that increases will take effect incrementally on an annual basis, and the government expects the gradual approach to reduce impact on schools. Although the majority of respondents disagreed with this proposal, the government was pleased to note that a substantial minority were supportive of the proposed timeframe. We remain committed to implementing regulations that provide for the phased introduction of the revised fees over a five-year period because we believe a longer-term approach is the right approach to ensure changes are introduced in a measured and sustainable way – rather than introducing the fee increases all at once or within a shorter time scale.

## Question 13

**Do you have any comments on the proposals to increase the fees for progress monitoring inspections over the next five years?**

There were 16 written responses to this question. The majority of respondents disagreed with the proposals to increase fees for PMIs, suggesting that the changes would, along with other rising costs, place additional pressures on schools; respondents reiterated concerns about the impact on smaller faith schools and schools catering for pupils with SEND and that increased costs would be passed on to local authorities. One comment suggested that fees should rise with inflation only. Another pointed to the importance of PMIs as a means of checking children attend schools which are safe and expressed surprise that fees have not been increased since 2019. One comment indicated that it was

the nature of inspection, rather than proposals to increase the fee, that formed the basis of their opposition, and called for PMIs to be more supportive and collaborative.

### Government response

Although we acknowledge that the majority of respondents opposed the changes, the government notes that respondents did not engage with the point made in the consultation document about PMIs (and therefore the fees charged for them) being unnecessary if a school is meeting the ISS.

The government recognises several respondents agreed with proposals to increase fees for PMIs over the next five years in order to move towards full cost recovery (an aim which, in response to the suggestion that fees should rise with inflation only, can only be achieved with above-inflation fee increases). Adopting a longer-term approach to raising fees provides a greater degree of certainty and will allow schools to plan, mitigating immediate impact. Furthermore, as with standard inspection fees, smaller schools (including where they are faith schools or cater for pupils with SEND) will continue to pay a lower rate than larger schools for PMIs to reduce impact. As such, and in the absence of respondents' substantive engagement with the point about PMIs being avoidable, the government does not intend to divert from the approach set out in the consultation document.

## Question 14

**Could any of the proposals have an impact – positive or negative – on people with any of the following protected characteristics? Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex or Sexual Orientation.**

| Answer | Total | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 19 | 61.29% |
| No | 7 | 22.58% |
| Unsure | 5 | 16.13% |

This question asks about whether the proposals set out in this consultation could have an impact in relation to the protected characteristics.

In the exercise of its function, the government needs to comply with the public sector equality duty in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. This means that in reaching a decision on how to proceed with the proposals in the consultation, we must have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

### Government response

The government is grateful for respondents' views on this question and in particular, that it confirms its view that the proposals are not entirely without impact in relation to the protected characteristics. We intend to monitor the impact of the proposals, by reference to the protected characteristics, once they are implemented and in reaching our current conclusions on them, have had due regard to the three aims covered by the public sector equality duty.

## Question 15

**What action could help reduce any negative impacts you identified in the previous question?**

There were 20 written responses to this question. Multiple comments suggested that a different fee regime (i.e. one that charges fees at a lower rate) should apply to independent special schools and smaller schools catering for pupils with SEND in order to mitigate the impact on people with the protected characteristic of disability; some comments raised concerns about the potential impact of proposed changes on faith schools (particularly Muslim or Jewish, including Charedi Jewish, schools relying on donations from the local religious community) and requested that an impact assessment be conducted and impact monitored. One comment suggested that the government consider 'hardship support' for schools struggling to pay.

### Government response

The government recognises that increases in fees could negatively impact faith schools (or schools with a preponderance of pupils from a particular racial group or groups) and those catering for pupils with SEND. However, despite this, we still intend to apply the proposed changes uniformly – i.e. without the charging of lower or no inspection fees at all for, for example, faith schools, independent special schools, or smaller schools catering for pupils with SEND.

We still consider that seeking to more fully recover the costs of inspection fees should be our guiding principle, because the taxpayer should not be continuing to subsidise at current levels the inspection regime for private organisations.

Moreover, treating schools uniformly, irrespective of ethos or whether schools cater for pupils with SEND, is an equitable approach. It also has the benefit of simplicity since further differences of treatment would need to be administered, which may give rise to avoidable complexity and impose a disproportionate administrative burden. As such, we do not think that exemptions for certain categories of school are appropriate.

It is also important to emphasise that smaller schools – many of which are faith schools or schools catering for pupils with SEND and which comprise the vast majority of non-association schools in the independent sector – already pay a lower proportion of costs for standard inspections and a lower rate for PMIs. Following the consultation, we have decided to retain this approach. In addition, the smallest schools will be least impacted by the proposed changes to standard inspection and PMI fees, with all changes being introduced over a 5-year timeframe in order to allow all schools to plan accordingly. Standard inspection fees are payable in instalments and in all three cases, the level of fees after 5 years will still represent relatively modest amounts with a degree of subsidy by the taxpayer continuing. Taking this together with the fact that pre-registration inspections should occur only once for the well-run school, that PMIs are avoidable, and the fact that standard inspections only take place once every three years, the government does not believe there will be an undue impact, including when these changes are taken cumulatively.

Given the above, we consider that our approach is a proportionate one for seeking to move towards full cost recovery in respect of all three types of inspection fee.

## Question 16

**Are there any other equality related impacts you think we should consider?**

There were 10 written responses to this question. Respondents reiterated concerns about the impact of proposals on faith schools and schools catering for pupils with SEND in terms of their ability to continue to operate. A number of comments pointed to a disparity between inspections in the state and private sectors, including one that noted private schools pay towards inspections whereas state schools do not. A further comment noted that private schools have a higher proportion of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and of pupils with SEND than does the state sector.

### Government response

That there is disparity between the state sector and the private sector in respect of Ofsted inspections is not, in our view, relevant because state schools are publicly funded whereas private schools, which operate as businesses or charities, are generally not.

The government has considered the potential impact of the proposals on faith schools, schools catering for pupils with a high proportion of pupils with SEND or pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. We will also monitor the impact of the proposals in these terms over

the five-year period during which fees are increased. The government, however, reiterates that it believes that its approach is proportionate – for example, the proposed increases taking place over five years to reduce immediate impact and allow schools to plan.

It is also important to emphasise that inspection fees are payable by school proprietors and not pupils; disabled pupils, pupils with particular religions or beliefs, or those from a particular racial group are not therefore directly affected by fee increases. In fact, the three types of inspections to which the consultation relates are a means of assuring that any pupils attending private schools, irrespective of their race, religion or whether they are disabled, receive an education in accordance with the ISS, and are therefore safe and receive a good quality education. We believe that increasing the tariff for pre-registration inspections should help assure that newly registered independent schools are safe places that provide a decent education.

In summary, it is right, in our view, that the inspection fees in question rise for the first time since 2019 in order to move closer towards full cost recovery. The government has sought to pursue this aim in a proportionate and balanced manner, including by proposing that increases be phased over a five-year period. This approach is intended to enable financial planning and mitigate potential impacts on affected schools.

## Next steps

The government will need to lay regulations before Parliament in order that Ofsted can charge inspection fees on the basis proposed in this document. The regulations would be subject to the negative resolution procedure and the current plan is that they should come into force on 1 January 2027.

# Annex A: Organisations and individuals that responded to the consultation

*Names are as given by respondents. Respondents requesting confidentiality are not included.*

- Association of School and College Leaders
- Caroline England
- Chinuch UK
- Chris Carey
- Christian Concern
- Harrow Monitoring Group
- Independent Schools Council (ISC)
- Katie Palmer Heathman
- Naseem Akhtar
- Roxanne Assinder
- Steve Beego
- Teresa Velocity-Hanks
- The Light Christian School

Department for Education

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