

Scottish Government
School inspections are changing
26 November 2025

NASUWT is disappointed with the narrow focus of the consultation paper. A fit-for-purpose accountability regime would hold the Government, Ministers and other public bodies to account effectively for the impact of their actions on education. It would also move away from its current disproportionate focus on the perceived performance of individual schools.

It is the Union's view that the current school accountability regime, comprised of the inspection of individual schools, should be reformed in order to be fairer and more supportive of schools and the teachers and leaders that work in them. This was the view set out in a recent NASUWT Scotland Conference motion:

School Inspection and Accountability

Conference believes that school inspection reporting in Scotland is bland, simplistic and judgemental and may not:

- (i) operate in accordance with*
 - (a) research ethical codes,*
 - (b) standard judicial processes;*
 - (c) transparent data validation;*
- (ii) have means of appeal.*

Conference notes that institutional and professional accreditation, development, update and regulation currently exist within procedures of Local Councils and the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS).

Conference considers that due to the complex and diverse nature of modern education, and the scale and nature of the changes and challenges now facing schools, grading and inspection as a snapshot may be inappropriate and potentially harmful.

Conference calls on the Scotland Executive Council to:

(a) lobby the Scottish Government and MSPs to evaluate approaches to school accountability and institutional learning, utilising:

- established methods of the learning sciences;*
- systems learning in public services; and*
- the peer-led, enhancement-focused approaches of Scotland's tertiary sector.*

(b) recommend these approaches, operated by existing bodies, to the Scottish Government and MSPs as an alternative to the establishment of a new stand-alone inspection body for Scottish schools

While we have responded to the requested questions at the end of the consultation paper, the mainstay of our response sets out our position in full, including eight key principles for accountability. These principles should be used to support policy development and review.

Summary of NASUWT's key points and recommendations on inspection and accountability

- As publicly funded institutions, schools should be held accountable for the contribution they make to children and young people's educational progress and achievement. However, it is important that they are held to account for the right things and in the right ways. While public attention has largely focused on Ofsted and accountability in England, none of the current inspection and accountability regimes in the UK meet this test.

- The current inspection system, and the wider accountability regime within which it sits, operates largely on the basis of a fictional notion that the responsibility for the quality of children and young people's educational experience rests primarily within the boundaries of each individual school. The fact is, however, that the quality of education in individual schools cannot exceed the capacity of the wider system to support the efforts of teachers and headteachers.
- Some form of external inspection is a necessary part of a publicly accountable education system. Yet it is the case that inspection will always be regarded as deeply controversial and contestable for as long as it remains located within a dysfunctional accountability framework.
- The accountability framework needs to be reformed so that it incorporates within its scope the actions of others with responsibility for the education system. This includes Government Ministers, local authorities and the wider services for children and young people that have an impact on their learning and wellbeing.
- Excessive workload demands associated with inspection may derive from perceptions and misconceptions about the requirements of the inspection process. The consequences of inspection on teachers and headteachers and schools also contribute to a distortion of the efforts of headteachers and teachers, which is damaging to school improvement and to the health and wellbeing of those working in schools.
- Schools are too often driven by a desire to satisfy the perceived or actual requirements of inspection, which detracts them from the provision of high-quality teaching and learning. We believe that robust remedial action is required to address the unintended consequences of inspection.

- Reforms should be focused on: ensuring that inspection teams include people with recent and relevant direct experience of classroom practice and are entirely disassociated from the schools they inspect; the ways in which complaints about inspection are managed; and correcting the drift away from the core role of inspection on learning.
- Further, we believe that consideration should be given to an immediate freeze of all inspections in order that a full mental health impact assessment of teachers and school leaders is carried out. Any new framework must support the work of schools in raising standards.

A. Understanding the context within which inspection takes place

Schools should be held to account for the right things in the right ways...

1. As publicly funded institutions, schools should be held accountable for the contribution they make to children and young people's educational progress and achievement.¹ However, it is important that they are held to account for the right things and in the right ways. NASUWT's *Maintaining World Class Schools* report, adopted as the Union's policy at its Annual Conference, sets out the essential features of an effective accountability system. It specifies that such a system:

- is fit for purpose and secures public trust and confidence in education;
- secures greater parental and public

¹ Maintaining World Class Schools (2013): *'The NASUWT's view is that whilst it is right for schools within the system to be held to account, they must be held accountable for the right things. There must be an accountability system that is fit for purpose, and which secures public trust and confidence in public education.'*

Annual Conference Resolution, 2015: *'Conference calls on the National Executive to [campaign] for an inspection body which: is fit for purpose; operates consistently and fairly across all settings; is accountable; and does not exceed its remit...'*

engagement in, and support for, public education;

- enables teachers to teach more and test less;
- is driven by educational rather than political concerns; and
- evaluates the quality of public education rather than simply measuring the performance of individual schools or colleges.

2. NASUWT applies these criteria to its assessment of the fitness for purpose of the accountability regime and its identification of improvements that should be made to that regime.

...and accountability means more than just the inspection of individual schools.

3. However, in making such assessments, it is important to recognise that inspection forms only one element of a wider school accountability system – accountability is more than just inspection.

Decisions about what happens after a 'bad' inspection are not taken by the

4. A fundamental stated purpose of the current accountability system is to identify schools that are deemed to be underperforming. It is necessary to recognise that bodies other than the inspectorate should make decisions over what should happen to a school following inspection outcomes that are regarded as unacceptable.

inspectorate...

***...and often
have serious
adverse
impacts on
those working
in schools.***

5. These decisions are often highly consequential. For staff, particularly senior leaders, in individual schools, adverse inspection outcomes can prompt employers – either acting on their own volition or under pressure from the local authorities or diocesan bodies – to sanction those they identify as responsible for such outcomes.
6. The impact that such a process has on the mental health and future employability of those involved is often profound. The anxiety felt over inspection, given the possible consequences of an outcome judged by employers and others as ‘unacceptable’, is wholly understandable, but also avoidable.

***The quality of
education
depends on
the
Government
and others,
not just
schools and
colleges...***

7. This characteristic feature of the context within which inspection currently operates serves to highlight the failure of the accountability regime to recognise effectively the role played by others, especially the Government, in establishing and maintaining a framework of investment and support for schools to deliver high-quality educational standards.²

² Maintaining World Class Schools (2013): ‘*the accountability systems in use today serve the interests of policy makers, not educators, by deflecting attention from the impact that government policies have on children, young people and the workforce in schools.*’

...but our system blames schools and lets others, including the Government, off the hook.

-
8. The accountability regime fails to acknowledge the significant authority, control and influence other bodies have over individual schools, or to hold them to account for the exercise of their powers. These bodies discharge critical functions that relate to matters including the curriculum and qualifications, supporting children with special and additional needs, workforce recruitment, retention and deployment, and the quantum and distribution of funding.
 9. Further, it does not take account of the impact of decisions at national and local level on the provision of wider services for children, including health, social care and youth and community services, all of which play a critical role in supporting the work undertaken by schools.
 10. The Government should not insist on inspection arrangements that hold schools accountable for its failure to prioritise investment in education. Against over a decade of cuts to local authorities, impacting education and the services that support it, teachers and headteachers have battled to deliver the very best education possible for children and young people. Too often, our members report that they are swimming against a tide of cuts and a lack of resources.
 11. The current inspection system, and the wider accountability regime, operates largely on the basis of a fictional notion that the responsibility for the quality of children and young people's educational experience rests primarily within the boundaries of each individual school. NASUWT is clear that this false prospectus for the accountability regime results

in distortions and misconceptions about how the proper purposes and functions of this regime should be established. Too often, its consequences include the generation of excessive and unreasonable pressures on the school workforce and allow people to conclude that the main purposes of accountability are to be punitive and unsupportive of schools and their staff.

Reform of the accountability system should put this failure right...

12. It is for this reason that NASUWT continues to call for a fundamental reassessment of the ways in which accountability is understood and operationalised across the education system.

...as well as considering how inspection itself should be reformed.

13. It is entirely valid to consider ways in which the current model of inspection might be changed, and options in this respect are set out elsewhere in this submission. However, notwithstanding the nature of any potential changes, it is the case that inspection will be regarded as deeply controversial for as long as it remains located within a dysfunctional broader accountability system.

B. Towards a more holistic context for inspection

Every public body that has responsibility for education should be held accountable...

14. There are measures that the Government could take to provide a more supportive context for inspection; in particular, reforms to accountability should recognise that individual schools operate within a broader educational and children's services framework. While it is right that there is inspection of individual schools, the impact of the actions of other agencies and bodies must also be recognised within

the accountability system.³

***Government
and individual
Ministers
should be held
publicly
accountable
for their
actions...***

15. There are also no effective measures in place to ensure that local authorities are held accountable in ways that are adequately transparent and that secure public and professional confidence.
16. Options for enhancing accountability of increasingly powerful post holders in local authorities, including by subjecting them to external and impartial scrutiny and quality assurance, remain unexplored by the Government.
17. On the accountability of the Government and other national-level bodies, NASUWT recognises the valuable work undertaken by the Scottish Parliament Education, Children and Young People Committee, alongside other Parliamentary Committees and the National Audit Office. The scrutiny exercised by these bodies plays a critical role in highlighting the strengths and weaknesses in the development and implementation of national policy – this has often resulted in important changes in practice.
18. However, in this context of strategic oversight of standards in education, HMIE has been the servant of the Government rather than a body which holds it to account. A paradigm shift is required, in our view, which ensures that systemic strengths and weaknesses are properly interrogated and reported by the inspectorate.

³ Maintaining World Class Schools (2013) see note 1.

19. It is of concern that Ministers are under no obligation to take meaningful action to address concerns raised by committees. Ministers, therefore, have significant scope to act in ways that are contrary to their recommendations and that undermine the quality of provision of education.

20. The current accountability regime therefore holds accountable individual schools and their staff for problems that are in substantial part the responsibility of Ministers and the Government (and/or local authority leaders). The fundamental reassessment of accountability called for in this position statement must, therefore, include an examination of the ways in which the work of the inspectorate and Parliament can be strengthened to minimise the scope for Ministers to evade responsibility.

...as well as other public services that contribute to learning.

21. As noted above, individual schools operate within a wider children's services context that has significant implications for the outcomes against which schools are held to account. The Committee will be aware that in areas including supporting children with Additional Support Needs (ASN) and disabilities or securing high rates of attendance, schools depend upon access to sufficient resources as well as external services and sources of expertise. However, at present, a disproportionate and inequitable burden of responsibility falls on schools for the impact of deficits in the availability and quality of these services.

22. Further, it is not evident that decision-makers with responsibility for these services, including Ministers and national-level bodies, are held to account for the

impact of their decisions on the ability of individual schools to undertake their core functions. Reforming accountability meaningfully will require recognition of the interconnected nature of the impacts that schools and wider services have on children's educational outcomes and life chances. An accountability regime that recognises these interconnections would not only allow for a more precise identification of responsibilities, but would also ensure that support for securing improvements across services and settings can be offered on a sufficiently informed basis.

C. Reforming the inspection process

The case for reform to school inspection is clear...

23. While many of the concerns commonly identified with the inspection of individual schools are the result of the deeply flawed overarching accountability regime, aspects of the current inspection framework and the ways in which it is implemented are also problematic and in need of reform.

...including the need for a sharper focus on the inspection of staff workload and wellbeing.

24. A greater focus on staff workload and wellbeing and a more appropriate appreciation of the limitations of schools' internally generated assessment data is needed alongside a programme of evaluation of impact.

25. It is not clear that inspectors are always actively investigating the extent to which teachers and leaders are subject to excessive and unnecessary workload demands. This should be regarded as a core function of inspection, and NASUWT policy is clear that no school should be deemed to have passed its inspection if it is not taking

action to tackle workload and promote staff wellbeing.⁴

***The four-grade
inspection
reporting
system should
be abolished...***

26. The use of four single-word or phrase-grade descriptors in inspection judgements is deeply unhelpful. A fundamental function of inspection is to give assurance that schools are providing an acceptable standard of education. Differentiated grade descriptors do not align with this function and are so broad that they can never provide the level of precision they claim regarding the performance of a school. They hinder the production of valid and detailed evaluations of the performance of schools, especially those that will be of practical use to teachers with school improvement responsibilities. They also undermine the important principle that all schools should seek to improve.

***...and be
replaced by a
system that
helps schools
to improve and
ensures that it
is focused on
the quality of
provision.***

27. For this reason, NASUWT advocates the introduction of a 'passed/not passed' inspection outcome system to affirm whether an acceptable system of educational provision is in place. Where schools are deemed to have 'not passed', they should be signposted by the inspectorate to sources of support to enable them to secure the improvements needed. Any re-inspection should be conducted in a timely way in order to verify that provision now meets the standards required.

⁴ Annual Conference Resolution, 2016: 'Conference calls on the National Executive to...campaign for inspection frameworks to include inspection of work/life balance and workload policies using school staff surveys as sources of evidence'.
Annual Conference Resolution, 2017: 'Conference calls on the National Executive to...continue to campaign for inspection bodies in the UK and in the crown dependencies to include the inspection of work/life balance and workload in their frameworks...'
Annual Conference Resolution, 2018: 'Conference instructs the National Executive to campaign for a trade union-agreed staff wellbeing inspector to be part of every inspection team, who will check whether schools are complying with their obligations to staff for their work/life balance and wellbeing.'
Annual Conference Resolution, 2020: 'Conference believes that staff wellbeing [should be] a mandatory element in all inspection frameworks [and] inspection judgements on staff workload and wellbeing [should be] a limiting judgement in the inspection of schools and colleges.'

28. Inspection has become high stakes because any adverse judgement will trigger a process over which schools have little or no influence or control. A fit-for-purpose system of school inspection would necessitate a dialogue about how best to support schools that need support, which involves schools and their staff, employers and other stakeholders. Schools should be enabled to become active participants in their improvement journeys rather than the passive recipients of external interventions.

29. The high-stakes accountability context within which schools operate has triggered pressure from Ministers and other advocates of particular practices, interests or curriculum content to secure their inclusion in the inspection framework. This is not a coherent basis on which to determine the foci of inspection and merely increases the accountability demands placed on schools.

30. We must not be reliant on an inspectorate to ensure that schools' safeguarding practice is effective. Quality assurance of safeguarding cannot be established on this basis securely, in light of the lengthy intervals between inspections to which the substantial majority of schools are subject. This function should, instead, be undertaken by appropriately resourced and empowered local authorities, given their statutory responsibilities and their knowledge of local contexts. Inspection should be focused on matters related directly to the quality of educational provision.⁵

***A balanced
scorecard
system would
make***

31. It is also clear that inspection reports in their current form seek to provide not only a description for parents about the quality of education a school provides, but also useful information for leaders, teachers and those responsible for

⁵ Annual Conference Resolution, 2015.

***inspection
fairer, more
supportive and
more
developmental***

...

governance in areas of strength and future development. These two purposes are legitimate, but they require inspection outcome reporting to be tailored to the interests of different audiences.

32. NASUWT believes that a balanced scorecard approach, alongside greater emphasis on qualitative evaluation, would have significant merit and should be explored further. Inspections should seek to provide more helpful feedback to schools and recognise that this reporting is likely to be different in nature to the report provided to parents. Inspection and accountability generally should recognise the very different contexts and challenges that schools face and the importance of accountability promoting an inclusive education system. A balanced scorecard would provide an opportunity to embed this principle more securely in inspection and other accountability-related processes.⁶

***...and should
be part of a
system in
which
inspections
are carried out
by serving
classroom
teachers as
well as
leaders.***

33. Much attention rightly continues to be focused on the credibility of the inspection regime and the extent to which it takes effective account of the realities of those working directly with pupils in classrooms. Without such credibility, inspection will never be able to command the highest possible levels of professional confidence of teachers and school leaders. While it is important that those with current leadership experience and professional inspectors continue to have a role in the inspection process, it is striking that very few inspectors are active classroom practitioners with recent and relevant experience of the classroom. This is in contrast to the Care Quality Commission and the HM Police and Fire Service inspection models, where the skills and experience of relevant practitioners are central to their

⁶ Maintaining World Class Schools (2013): *'The Union supports the contention that a more qualitative approach to evaluating schools is needed and that the metrics used to assess school performance need to be broadened to enable school performance to be evaluated against a "balanced scorecard".'*

inspection methodologies. The same principle should apply to the inspection of schools.⁷

34. Credibility of the inspection system also requires that those making potentially consequential judgements about schools are – and are seen to be – entirely disassociated from the schools they inspect. The role of the inspector in any effective system is to make judgements without fear or favour on the basis of the evidence before them.

***Inspection
myths must be
busted more
effectively...***

35. It is NASUWT's experience that while the process and requirements of inspection can create workload burdens, many of the issues associated with inspection are the result of misconceptions about these requirements. Schools have often imposed practices on staff on the basis that inspectors will expect to find them in place, when this is not, or should not, be the case. Robust action is needed to ensure that schools do not add to already significant workload burdens in this way.

***...and a more
effective,
independent
process for
dealing with
complaints
should be
introduced.***

36. Ensuring that the legitimate interests of those impacted by inspection are respected requires a process that allows for effective and timely complaints to be made and for any appropriate remedies to be identified and implemented.

37. It is apparent that the current complaints system is not fit for purpose in this respect. The current procedure is heavily weighted towards the judgement of the inspector and it is unacceptable that there is no effective appeals process to challenge an inspection judgement that relates to standards. The current system makes it extremely difficult for individual members of staff to pursue complaints about an inspection. The timescale for making complaints is too rigid and excludes cases where it has taken time for the full

⁷ Annual Conference Resolution, 2013: '*all inspectors [should] have relevant and recent classroom experience...inspectors' employment experience and qualifications [should be] published.*'

evidence to become available. It is not evident to NASUWT that existing mechanisms for the external scrutiny of complaints provide a sufficiently robust means by which inspections can be subject to objective and expert scrutiny and correction.

38. Addressing these issues will be critical to ensuring the highest possible levels of professional and public trust and confidence in the inspection system. The complaints system must also allow for inaccuracies and unreasonable judgements to be challenged fully before inspection reports are placed into the public domain.

NASUWT Principles for School Accountability

Systems of school accountability should:

1. Trust teachers as professionals.

Systems of accountability should be constructive and must be designed to operate in ways that recognise teachers' professional status, integrity and commitment.

2. Support schools to provide a broad and balanced education that recognises and values the diverse needs and achievements of all learners.

Accountability systems should value the range of ways in which schools help learners to engage in learning, progress and achieve. Teachers should be actively engaged in decisions about the design and implementation of curricula and assessment and related accountability arrangements.

3. *Support ongoing professional and institutional development and learning, including encouraging schools to work together to develop and share effective practice.*

Accountability arrangements should complement efforts to improve progress and outcomes of pupils. Teachers and school leaders should have an entitlement to high-quality Career-Long Professional Learning (CLPL) and time within the working day to access such CLPL. Teachers should be encouraged to work together to develop and share effective practice. Collaborative working, within and beyond the school, should be recognised as an important form of CLPL.

4. *Support schools to be fair, equitable and genuinely inclusive.*

Accountability systems should value all that schools do to meet the needs of learners, including those with complex and challenging needs. A school should not be disadvantaged or penalised because it is inclusive.

5. *Recognise the importance of professional dialogue and ensure that teachers and school leaders are encouraged and supported to engage in evaluations and decision-making.*

The collective voice of teachers and leaders should be recognised when forming judgements about the quality and effectiveness of education provision.

6. *Ensure that teachers' and leaders' workload is manageable and sustainable and their wellbeing is protected.*

Accountability systems should not place unnecessary or excessive workload and bureaucratic burdens on teachers and school leaders. Accountability systems should identify and challenge practices that create workload burdens and/or add to stress and anxiety.

7. *Be transparent, valid, reliable and reasonable.*

The teaching profession and the public should trust the inspection process and have confidence in the judgements made.

8. *Highlight issues for governments, administrations and system-level organisations.*

Accountability systems should identify where national policies are needed to address barriers to high-quality and inclusive education or where the needs and interests of learners, teachers and leaders are not being met. They should ensure that governments, administrations, employers and system-level institutions are held to account for the impact of their actions and decisions on learners, as well as teachers and leaders.

School inspections are changing: shape what's next

Section 1: People involved in inspection

School inspections involve a range of people who each play an important role. HM Inspectors lead the inspections. Teams can also include associate assessors, who are experienced school leaders, middle leaders or local authority staff.

Members of the public who are not education professionals are also sometimes involved in inspection teams – these people are called lay members. They are trained by HM Inspectors and provide a lay person's view on areas such as the school's links with parents and the local community.

To build a well-rounded understanding of the school's work, HM Inspectors meet with learners, staff, school leaders, parents and carers, local authority representatives/proprietors of independent schools, and partner organisations.

We would like your views on the range of people involved in inspection and the value they bring.

1.1 To what extent do you agree or disagree that having associate assessors in inspection teams strengthens inspection?

☐ Agree strongly

1.2 To what extent do you agree or disagree that lay members should be part of inspection teams?

☐ Disagree

1.3 Senior leaders in schools are invited to join parts of the inspection process, such as observing learning alongside inspectors or taking part in professional discussions with the inspection team.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that this strengthens inspection?

☐ Agree

1.4 To what extent do you agree or disagree that local authority staff/proprietors of independent schools should contribute to school inspections by sharing relevant knowledge about the local context, including existing partnerships and support available to the school?

☐ Agree strongly

1.5 Inspectors already gather the views of children and young people through questionnaires, focus groups, and direct conversations.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that children and young people should have increased opportunities to contribute to inspection?

☐ Neutral – wish to see improved rather than increased opportunities.

If you answered 'strongly agree' or 'agree', what approaches would ensure children and young people can meaningfully share their views during inspection?

1.6 Inspectors already gather the views of staff through questionnaires, focus groups and direct conversations. To what extent do you agree or disagree that school staff should have increased opportunities to share their views during inspection?

☐ Agree strongly

If you answered 'strongly agree' or 'agree', what approaches would ensure school staff can meaningfully share their views during inspection?

There is an opportunity to engage with trade union representatives in schools, who will be able to provide a context of where staff may be reticent to come forward and speak.

It is important that diverse staff voices are heard so that the feedback reflects the whole school community. Opportunities should be structured, confidential and inclusive. They must recognise and address any imbalance in power dynamics, particularly for those with protected characteristics who may feel less able to speak openly due to fear of repercussions or marginalisation. It is also important that inspectors are appointed in a way which supports improved representation in the inspectorate from groups with protected characteristics.

1.7. Inspectors already gather the views of parents and carers through questionnaires, focus groups and meeting the Chair of the Parent Council. To what extent do you agree or disagree that parents and carers should have increased opportunities to share their views during inspection?

☐ Neutral

If you answered 'strongly agree' or 'agree', what approaches would ensure parents and carers can meaningfully share their views during inspection?

Section 2: Inspection frequency and selection

There are around 2,500 schools in Scotland. Currently, there is no fixed cycle for inspections. HM Inspectors carry out around 250 inspections each year, using a national sampling approach. Schools can also be selected for inspection as a result of risk. This means that, on average, a primary, secondary or special school may be inspected once every ten years, although some schools may wait longer. Some people feel that not being inspected for a long time can lead to uncertainty or create anticipation and pressure.

Under the Education (Scotland) Act 2025, Scottish Ministers will be required to set a minimum frequency for school inspections by regulation. The Chief Inspector of Education will then be responsible for determining how often inspections happen in practice, provided the minimum is met.

We would like your views on how often school inspection should take place and whether all schools should be visited within a defined period.

2.1 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the current sampling model, where around 10% of schools in Scotland are inspected each year, should continue?

☐ Neutral (see comments above regarding wholesale review).

2.2 In your view, how should schools be selected for inspection?

☐ Sampling-based: schools should continue to be selected using a national sampling approach, based on levels of risk, performance or context

☐ Fixed-cycle: every school should be inspected within a fixed national cycle (e.g. every five-seven years)

☒ Combined approach: a combination of a clear cycle for all schools, with additional inspection based on risk

☐ No preference

2.3 In future, how often do you think each school should be inspected?

☐ At least once every ten years

- ☐ At least once every seven years
- ☐ At least once every five years
- ☐ Only when there is a concern
- X None of the above
- ☐ No preference

Do you have a different view on how often inspections should take place?

The question is incorrectly framed – the frequency of inspection is not the driver for improvement. See full details set out above in terms of an improved inspectorate.

Section 3: Use of grades in inspection

HM Inspectors currently use a six-point grading scale to provide a high-level summary of how well a school is performing in key areas.

Grade (What it means):

- Excellent: Outstanding and sector-leading.
- Very good: Major strengths.
- Good: Important strengths, with some areas for improvement.
- Satisfactory: Strengths just outweigh weaknesses.
- Weak: Important weaknesses.
- Unsatisfactory: Major weaknesses.

Grades are published in the school's inspection report and are intended to provide a clear and consistent way of reporting findings.

We would like your views on the use of the six-point grading scale to summarise how good a school is and whether this approach should be kept.

3.1 To what extent do you agree or disagree that using grades helps provide a clear overview of how well a school is doing?

- ☐ Disagree strongly

3.2 To what extent do you agree or disagree that grades help schools, parents, and local authorities/proprietors of independent schools understand what needs to improve?

☐ Disagree strongly

3.3 To what extent do you agree or disagree that grades can oversimplify what is happening in a school?

☐ Agree strongly

3.4 Do you think school inspections should continue to use grades to summarise how well a school is performing?

☐ No

3.5 If grades continue to be used, what should happen to the current six-point scale? Please select the one option that best reflects your view.

None of the options were appropriate or suitable.

3.6 If school inspection no longer used grades to evaluate and report on key areas, how should inspection reports show the quality of education in a school? Please select all options that apply.

☐ A clear written summary explaining the strengths and areas for improvement

Section 4: Notification of inspection

Currently, a school is given two-and-a-half weeks' notice of an inspection. This enables the inspection team to plan the inspection activities alongside the headteacher and to give staff time to complete pre-inspection paperwork. It also provides time for parents, pupils, staff and partner organisations to complete pre-inspection questionnaires and for the inspectors to collate and analyse responses.

We would like your views on whether the current notification period is appropriate.

4.1 How much notice do you think should schools receive before an inspection?

☐ About two days' notice (the minimum needed for planning)

☐ About the same as now (around 2.5 weeks)

- ☐ Three to four weeks' notice
- ☐ Not sure

X Other – this is the wrong question. There are mixed views within the profession on notice for inspection, but these views are predicated on an outdated and inappropriate model of inspection. The priority should be fundamental reform.

Section 5: Pre-inspection

Before an inspection takes place, HM Inspectors ask the school's senior leadership team to complete a self-evaluation summary using selected quality indicators from *How Good Is Our School?* (4th Edition).

This summary highlights the school's own view of what it does well, how it knows this and what it is working to improve. Schools are also asked to share pre-inspection questionnaires with learners, parents, staff and partners. The responses go directly to the inspection team. These steps help inspectors understand the school's context and performance, and the views of its community, before their visit begins.

We would like your views on what happens in the time before an inspection takes place.

5.1 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the self-evaluation summary helps make sure that inspection starts with the school's own view of its strengths and development areas?

- ☐ Agree

5.2 To what extent do you agree or disagree that schools should be able to use existing documents - like their Standards and Quality Report and their School Improvement Plan - instead of writing a separate self-evaluation summary for inspection?

- ☐ Agree strongly

5.3. How important is it to gather views from each of the following groups before an inspection?

Note: This has been pasted poorly from the questionnaire, so I made a table based on what was set out. NZ

Group	Very important	Important	Not very important	Not very important	Not very important
Children and young people		X			
School staff, including support staff	X				
Parents and carers		X			
Organisations and partners who work with the school	X				

Section 6: Design and content of a school inspection framework

HM Inspectors use a framework, *How Good Is Our School?* (4th Edition), to ensure a consistent approach to evaluating the quality of education in schools, including primary, secondary and special schools. Inspectors also use *How Good Is our School?* (4th Edition) alongside the *Advice on Gaelic Education* when inspecting Gaelic Medium Education. The same framework is used by schools to support their own self-evaluation, helping them reflect on what they do well and where they can improve. This shared approach ensures a common understanding of what high-quality education looks like across the education system. The framework includes a set of ‘quality indicators’ that cover key areas such as learning and teaching, leadership, wellbeing, and raising attainment.

How Good Is Our School? (4th Edition) has not been updated since it was launched in 2015. We would like your views on the format, purpose and content of a new school inspection framework.

6.1 Which of the following best describes your view on the format of a new school inspection framework?

- ☐ Single framework for all schools
- ☐ Different frameworks for different types of schools (e.g. primary, secondary, special)
- ☒ One main framework for all schools with guidance that can be adapted for each different type of school
- ☐ Not sure

6.2 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about a school inspection framework?

Statement	Agree strongly	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Not sure
It is helpful to use the same framework for both inspection and self-evaluation.	X					
Annual (or more regular) updates to the framework would help				X		

schools use it more effectively.						
Including examples of effective practice would make the framework more useful.			X			

The list below shows some of the key areas that could be included in a future school inspection framework. The framework sets out what matters in evaluating the quality of education and helps ensure consistency across schools. Not every inspection will cover every area of the framework. Inspectors may draw on any areas in the framework when planning and conducting an inspection, depending on the focus of the visit.

6.3. How important do you think each of these areas is for inclusion in a school inspection framework?

Key area (listed alphabetically)	Very important	Important	Not very important	Not at all important	Not sure
Attendance					
Children's					

rights					
Curriculum					
Digital technologies					
Health and wellbeing					
Inclusion, equity, equality and diversity					
Learner achievement					
Learner attainment					
Learner transitions and planning for progression to positive post-school destinations					
Learner, staff and parent voice in shaping and evaluating school improvement					

Learning environment					
Learning, teaching and assessment					
Meeting educational support needs					
Outdoor education					
Partnerships with communities, other services and organisations					
Partnerships with parents/carers					
Relationships and behaviour					
Safeguarding and promoting welfare					
School culture and ethos					
School					

leadership					
Senior phase pathway planning and vocational learning					
Skills development					
Staff wellbeing and professional learning culture					
Use of evidence to support school improvement					

Do you think anything is missing from this list? Please suggest any other areas you consider important.

An acceptable inspection system might have all of the areas listed above within scope. However, in line with our comments on notice periods, it really depends on the premises on which the inspection system is based. Is it supportive and developmental or punitive in character? Does it hold schools accountable for things that are genuinely within their reasonable control or influence? Does it hold other external agencies that influence children's experiences in school, including government, to account for their actions? Inspection should not only inspect the right things but should do so in the right ways.

Section 7: Reporting on the outcome of inspections

We are reviewing how inspection findings are reported and shared following school inspections. Currently, HM Inspectors publish:

- a short letter for parents and carers that summarises strengths, areas for development, and inspection grades;
- a separate and detailed report for the school, setting out the full findings;
- collated results from the pre-inspection questionnaires.

This section asks questions about whether this approach continues to meet the needs of different audiences, or whether it should change. We want to understand:

- whether inspection findings should be presented differently for different audiences;
- how inspection findings can be made more accessible and useful to children and young people;
- how reporting can better support the purposes of inspection as set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 2025.

Your views will help us decide whether to retain the current reporting model or introduce changes to improve clarity, accessibility, and impact.

7.1 How should inspection findings be presented to different audiences?

Please select the option which best reflects your view:

- ☐ A single inspection report for all audiences (e.g. schools, local authorities/proprietors of independent schools, parents and carers)
- ☒ Two inspection reports – one with detailed information for schools and local authorities/proprietors of independent schools, and a shorter, easy-to-understand version for parents and carers
- ☐ Other (please comment in the box below)

7.2 What do you think are effective ways of sharing inspection findings with children and young people?

In the usual course of learning, without additional bureaucracy or paperwork.

7.3 What makes an inspection report useful to you?

Please select all that apply.

☒ Language and content which reflects the context of the school

☒ Clear summary of strengths and areas for development

☒ Timely publication after the inspection

☐ Clear explanation of any inspection grades if these are part of the inspection

☐ Examples of effective practice

☐ Recommendations for improvement

☒ Clear explanation of what the school / local authority / proprietor of independent schools is expected to do next

☒ Indication of the support needed to make improvements

☐ Any planned follow-up activity by HM Inspectors

☐ Other (please comment in the box below)

7.4 From the list below, which three features of inspection reporting do you think matter most?

☒ Language and content which reflects the context of the school

☒ Clear summary of strengths and areas for development

☐ Timely publication after the inspection

☐ Clear explanation of any inspection grades if these are part of the inspection

☐ Examples of effective practice

☐ Recommendations for improvement

☒ Clear explanation of what the school / local authority / proprietor of independent schools is expected to do next

☐ Indication of the support needed to make improvements

☐ Any planned follow-up activity by HM Inspectors

Section 8: Inspecting nursery classes

Some schools include nursery classes. These are inspected using the new, separate quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sector developed by HM Inspectors and the Care Inspectorate. This framework is in use from September 2025. If a nursery class has been

inspected by the Care Inspectorate within the last 18 months, it may not be included in the school inspection. This arrangement will continue.

When HM Inspectors do include a nursery class as part of a school inspection, it currently receives a separate grade and summary of inspection findings.

We are not consulting on the new joint framework or inspection arrangements. We would like your views specifically on whether nursery classes should continue to receive separate grades and summary of findings when included in a school inspection.

8.1 To what extent do you agree or disagree that, when a nursery class is included in a school inspection, its evaluation should be reported separately from the rest of the school?

☐ Disagree

Section 9: Inspection follow-up

School improvement is based on the principle that schools continuously evaluate their own work, set priorities, and take action where improvement is needed. This process is supported by local authorities/proprietors of independent schools.

Currently, as part of inspection, HM Inspectors consider how well a school can lead its own improvement independently and/or supported by the local authority/proprietors of independent schools. Where an inspection team identifies that a school is not providing a sufficient quality of education, HM Inspectors continue to engage with the school. This may include a follow-up inspection.

We would like to hear your views on how HM Inspectors should engage with schools after an inspection.

9.1 In what circumstances do you think HM Inspectors should engage with a school after an inspection?

☐ Only when a school is not providing a sufficient quality of education

☒ When HM Inspectors establish that a school needs support to make improvements

☐ All schools should receive some form of follow-up

☐ Other (please comment in the box below)