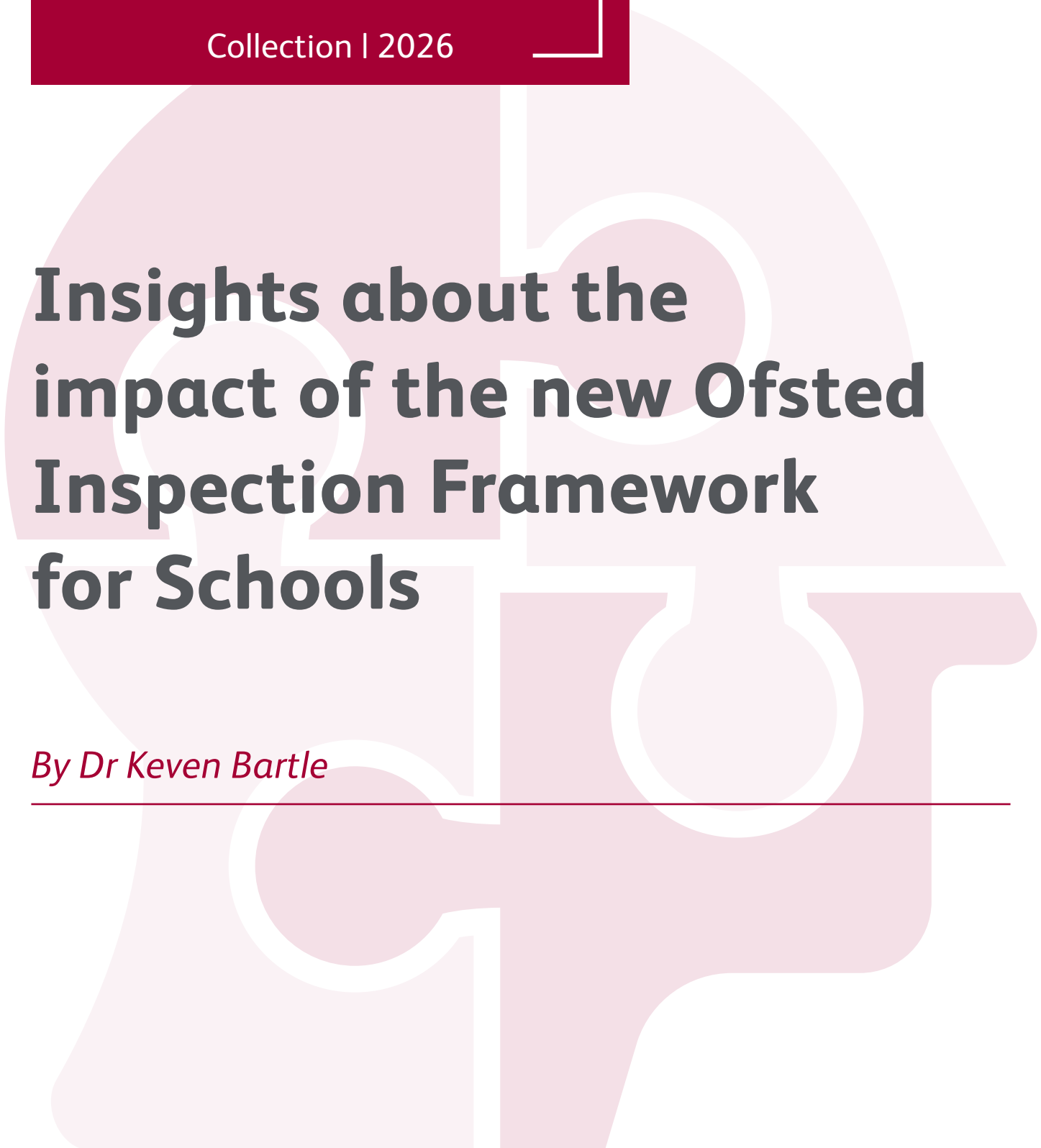




***SSAT Think Piece***

Collection | 2026



# Insights about the impact of the new Ofsted Inspection Framework for Schools

*By Dr Keven Bartle*

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This publication brings together a series of previously published blog articles by Dr Keven Bartle, exploring early insights into the impact of the new 2025 Ofsted inspection framework. Drawing on extensive analysis of inspection reports and thousands of identified improvement priorities, the articles examine how inspection focus, judgements and outcomes are evolving across the sector.

The first article in this collection is the **most recently published** and serves as an **overview of the key insights from the articles that follow**. It revisits the main themes that have emerged across the series and reflects on what appears to be becoming more established in the data, as well as where important new trends may still be taking shape.

Across the wider set of articles, the analysis considers how inspection focus is shifting, what kinds of 'next steps' are becoming more or less common, and how these changes are playing out for different schools. Particular attention is given to issues including achievement, leadership and governance, attendance, behaviour, inclusion, and the differing experiences of primary and secondary settings.

Together, these articles provide a data-rich, evolving picture of inspection practice, offering school leaders practical insights into emerging risks, trends and priorities as they prepare for inspection under the new framework.

## About the author

Dr Keven Bartle, Senior Education Lead, SSAT



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Keven has been a teacher for almost three decades and was headteacher at a richly diverse secondary school in London for nine years. Through his career, Keven has been committed to the power of education for social justice and transformation, working in schools where staff make a difference to the lives of children, families and communities.

Click below for a free consultation with Keven to discuss how your school is ready for Ofsted.

# **Six Months Later: What we are learning about the new inspection framework**

*21 May 2026*

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This week marks the half-year anniversary of the introduction into inspection practice of Ofsted's new inspection framework. I have written several blogposts in the intervening period to try and make sense of the emerging data from Ofsted inspection reports published since the switch from the 2019 framework.

SSAT's Inspection Tracker is, we believe, the most thorough attempt to get under the bonnet of the inspection process. Although we do not yet have six months of reports to analyse (the latest reports take us up to late March), we do have well over 3000 'next steps' from every inspection report published so far (up to and including 14th May 2026, at time of writing).

In this short post, I want to do two things. Firstly, to identify what appear to be consistent patterns and established trends within the data. And secondly, to notice some microtrends that potentially show how the new framework is evolving in response to actual inspections.

### Established patterns and emerging trends for broad inspection focus

- ▶ Curriculum and Teaching is far less frequently mentioned than the Quality of Education was under the previous framework. It previously underpinned about two-thirds of 'need to improve' under the old EIF and is now representing less than half of 'next steps' under the new EIF (43.1% to be exact).
- ▶ The proportion of Leadership and Governance 'next steps' has almost doubled from around 10% when it was previously Leadership and Management, to being one of every five 'next steps' (19.5%)
- ▶ Attendance and Behaviour (13.0%), Achievement (9.4%), and Inclusion (9.2%) are the areas of focus in the middle of the pack. It is worth noting that Attendance and Behaviour has become marginally more frequent for schools inspected in February and March, whilst Inclusion has become marginally less frequent over the same period.
- ▶ Personal Development and Wellbeing continues to be the Cinderella of the inspection framework, mustering only 5.2% of the published 'next steps' for schools since November. However, for each month of the new framework in action, PDW has been gaining in frequency and (as yet incomplete) data for March 2026 has this section of the framework appearing as 7.3% of all 'next steps'.
- ▶ Safeguarding issues continue to remain blessedly rare, at 0.5% of all 'next steps' following the changes made to how Ofsted inspects safeguarding in September 2024.

### Established patterns and emerging trends for specific next steps

- ▶ There are four specific 'next steps' that are very common across schools. The first is 'teacher curriculum implementation' (10.9%), followed by 'formative assessment' (9.3%), 'attendance and punctuality' (9.2%), and 'teaching of writing' (8.6%). Every phase of education has at least three of these as high frequency needs.
- ▶ There are four other fairly common 'next steps': 'in-class adaptations' (4.8%), 'early years' (4.8%), 'monitoring and evaluation' (4.2%), and 'foundational knowledge' (3.7%).
- ▶ For schools offering specialist provision (special schools, PRUs, special independent schools) 'professional learning' (4.4%) and 'staff knowledge' (3.8%) are also fairly common 'next steps' for inspected schools.
- ▶ Amongst other common 'next steps' there are some that are running at an all time high since the start of 2026. These include 'pupil outcomes' (3.0%), 'support for addressing barriers' (2.6%), 'governance challenge and support' (2.5%), 'professional learning' (2.5%), and 'personal development provision' (2.4%).

## Established patterns and emerging trends around grading

Note: To calculate patterns and trends in grading, we give a score of 5 for any 'exceptional' judgement down to a score of 1 for any 'urgent improvement' judgement. We then aggregate these judgements, and so a mean of 3.00 would equate to an 'expected standard'.

- ▶ The mean of all grades (linked to each 'next step') is 2.80, which is between 'needs attention' and 'expected standard' although much closer to the latter. The lowest means are for 'achievement' at 2.54 and 'curriculum and teaching' at 2.60. The highest means are for 'personal development and wellbeing' at 3.09 and 'inclusion' at 2.94.
- ▶ By phase, primary schools have an overall mean grade of 2.82 marginally above the mean for all schools (2.80). In the earlier stages of the new framework implementation, this was not the case and primaries were faring badly. Secondaries have a mean grade exactly in line with the mean for all schools of 2.80. The outliers at the top end are through schools (2.88) and the bottom end are PRUs (2.46), but the data for these phases are much smaller at this stage and therefore far less reliable.
- ▶ Converter academies (2.93) and free schools (2.92) are doing much better than the mean for all schools, closely followed by special independents (2.87) and their data are reasonably robust (very robust in the case of converter academies. Community schools (2.72), sponsored academies (2.74) and foundation/voluntary schools (2.75) are achieving notably lower mean gradings under the new inspection framework.
- ▶ In terms of regions of England, it is largely a case of as you were from the previous inspection schedule. Inner London (3.28) and Outer London (3.05) are well ahead of national average gradings. Not far behind are the West Midlands (2.96) and East of England (2.95) with the South East (2.87) also above the mean across England.
- ▶ It follows from this that the further away from London one gets, the lower the average gradings. Again, as in previous years of grading, the North West (2.63), South West (2.68) and North East (2.70) have the lowest mean gradings, closely followed by the East Midlands (2.72) and Yorkshire and Humberside (2.75) who are also well below the England average of 2.80.
- ▶ But, of all of these contextual factors, there is one that stands out as the starkest correlate of the level of grading under the new framework and it is... the level of grading under the old framework at the last inspection. Previously outstanding schools lead the way with an average grade of 3.83 (i.e. close to the 'strong standard') followed by previously good schools (2.89), then previously requires improvement schools (2.41) and, finally, previously inadequate schools (2.06).
- ▶ Finally, Ofsted now publishes data on the quintiles for two measures of deprivation and two measures of additional needs. On deprivation, schools with very high levels of FSM (2.67) and local deprivation (2.71) achieve much lower mean grading than those with very low levels of FSM (3.11) and local deprivation (2.96). On additional needs, schools with very high levels of EHCPs (2.72) and SEND support (2.65) perform well below the mean for all schools, whilst those with very low levels of EHCPs (2.91) and SEND support (3.16) do much better than the mean for all schools.

## Established patterns and emerging trends around risk for schools and leaders

- ▶ Unsurprisingly, the greatest grading risks for schools are ‘next steps’ around safeguarding. For schools that have had these improvement needs, the mean of all grades is 1.86 and the mean grading for leadership and governance is 1.24.
- ▶ More surprisingly, the second most risky set of ‘next steps’ for all schools are those around Personal Development and Wellbeing, which have an overall mean grading of 2.61 and for leadership and governance of 2.60.
- ▶ However, it is worth slicing the data here as the picture is very different for secondaries, for which the Personal Development and Wellbeing is the least risky judgement area (2.87). Instead, Attendance and Behaviour (2.61 overall mean) and Inclusion (2.62) occupy the second and third spots of risky ‘next steps’ areas of the framework.
- ▶ Leadership and Governance is the fourth most risky judgement area for all schools (2.66 mean overall, and 2.49 for the L&G judgement). But ‘next steps’ around leadership and/or governance for primaries are third on the list of risk (2.67 and 2.50).
- ▶ For all schools, curriculum and teaching ‘next steps’ are relatively low risk (2.89 overall mean and 2.84 for the LG judgement), followed by achievement (2.84 and 2.82). In both of these areas, each of the mean judgements is better than that for any identified next step.
- ▶ Digging a little deeper to think about the combination of frequency and impact when making a risk assessment, I would argue that the following next steps around leadership and governance are the ones of which schools need to be most aware and wary.
  - **Governance challenge** – 83 schools with an average grading of 2.48.
  - **Leader capabilities** – Only 24 schools but with an average grade of 2.04.
  - **Professional learning and staff knowledge** – The first covers 89 schools with an average grading of 2.60 and the second 56 schools with a grading of 2.44.
  - **Improvement planning** – 57 schools with an average grading of 2.52.
  - **Monitoring and evaluation** – 132 schools with an average grading of 2.73.

## Conclusions

As outlined earlier, the new Ofsted inspection framework is now firmly embedded. What we thought we were seeing during the earliest days of its implementation was subject to a lot of data ‘noise’ that is now beginning to quieten down. This post has attempted to outline some of the more established patterns within the data emerging from the many hundreds of Ofsted reports published under the not-quite-so-new framework.

Paradoxically, one of the benefits of being able to see such established patterns is that it helps us to see where there may be some interesting emerging trends that could indicate how the maturing framework is evolving through its contact with the reality of inspecting schools. Hopefully this post has managed to give some indication of these as well.



# How the new Ofsted framework is changing inspections

*20 February 2026*

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We have been tracking every Ofsted inspection report published since September 2023. Our focus has been on helping schools being ready for inspections through [webinars](#), our inspection readiness [audit tool](#) and [bespoke support](#).

We also routinely blog about our analysis of the 25,000+ improvement recommendations made to schools as a 'need to improve' or 'next step'. This post presents our first analysis of what is happening under the new inspection framework, based on almost 550 'next steps' published in reports for schools that have been inspected since November 2025.

We will outline which areas of the new framework are gaining greater prominence and touch upon what we are learning about gradings for each area. We will also examine the most frequent next steps identified by inspection teams since November, to see how this has changed since last academic year and how this varies for primary and secondary schools.

### Focus on the new Ofsted framework

The table below shows the impact of new processes upon the focus of inspection teams. As we have been tracking inspection outcomes since September 2023, we were able to put the old wine of previous inspections under the 2019 framework, into the new bottles of the 2025 framework inspection areas. The left-hand column shows what this looks like for the reports for schools inspected in the 2024-25 academic year.

The right-hand column shows the new wine in new bottles (i.e. next steps for school inspected under the new framework since November 2025). Flowing from this, the final two columns show the actual and relative differences from the 2024-25 academic year to the first batch of reports for inspections undertaken between November 2025 and January 2026.

EIF Focus	% of Need to Improve (Sep 24 to Jul 25)	% of Next Steps (Nov 25 to Jan 26)	Actual Change	Relative Change
Curriculum and Teaching	65.4%	43.7%	-21.7%	-33.2%
Leadership and Governance	10.8%	19.5%	+8.8%	+80.6%
Attendance and Behaviour	9.7%	13.3%	+3.6	+37.1%
Achievement	1.9%	9.8%	+7.9%	+415.8%
Inclusion	7.4%	9.3%	+1.9%	+25.7%
Personal Development and Wellbeing	4.0%	3.9%	-0.1%	-2.5%
Safeguarding	0.8%	0.4%	-0.4%	-50%

Focusing on the relative change column, we can see some striking patterns about how the new Ofsted framework is guiding inspection teams in identifying next steps for school improvement. What leaps out is the massively **increased frequency of next steps for schools around achievement**, one of the newly introduced areas of focus. It is **more than four times more likely to be identified as an improvement need** than was the case last academic year.

Arguably more surprisingly (but arguably not) the next biggest increase in focus is on **leadership and governance**, which has gone from just over 1 in 10 improvement needs to close to 1 in 5 next steps since the new framework became operational. Much has been made of how leaders have come into sharper focus during the inspection process, but the early evidence is that they have also come into sharper focus in the inspection reports as well.

**Attendance and behaviour** comments have been another area where the new framework is clearly driving the behaviour of inspection teams, but there is a crucial caveat to that insight and that is the very significant decrease in next steps related to behaviour. In 2024-25, improvement needs specifically focused on behaviour were at 4.1% whereas in the first of the new inspection reports, they are only 1.2% of next steps. I have blogged before about the strange and perhaps worrying decline in focus by inspection teams on behaviour in [October 2025](#) and in [March 2025](#) and the new Ofsted framework appears to be continuing and accelerating that trend.

There has been a relatively modest increase (by a quarter) of next steps around inclusion as the new framework has been implemented. This could be a little surprising given the amount of airtime that has been given to inclusion in the lead-up to the implementation of the new framework. However, as will be discussed later in this post, there is a strong argument that the idea of inclusion as a lens for other judgement areas has impacted on inspection processes.

And finally, it is worth paying attention to **what aspects of the framework have been receiving less attention** since November. **Safeguarding** concerns have been far less frequently given as next steps, reflecting a longer period of decline as the inspectorate responded to the coroner's finding after the death of Ruth Perry. There has also been a marginal decrease in the proportion of next steps around **personal development and wellbeing** since 2024-25 and, once again, this has been part of a wider trend since the 2023-24 academic year.

The biggest actual (rather than relative) decline has been in the proportion of next steps around **curriculum and teaching**. We noted this during the last academic year, when considering the old Ofsted framework judgements against the new framework headings. However, it is now clear that the new inspection areas are reducing focus upon curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment practices. Of course, curriculum and learning remain paramount for a positive inspection for schools, but their prominence is now more than counterbalanced by other aspects of provision.

### Focus on the new judgements

The table below shows the mean judgements awarded by inspection teams since November 2025, based on the *Exceptional* judgement given a numeric value of 5, the *Strong Standard* judgement as 4, and so on to *Urgent Improvement* represented by 1. Here, the colour coding shows the areas scoring higher than the mean for all judgements in green and those scoring lower than the mean for all judgements in red.

Inspection framework focus	Mean judgement
Personal Development and Wellbeing judgement	3.25
Inclusion judgement	3.09
Attendance and Behaviour judgement	2.98
Leadership and Governance Judgement	2.96
All judgements	2.95
Curriculum and Teaching judgement	2.73
Achievement judgement	2.66

As with the 2019 inspection framework, **personal development and wellbeing** is the strongest area, which is perhaps reflected in the fact that it features less often in next steps than any other area of the framework (other than safeguarding). What is perhaps more surprising, given the rhetoric around the 2025 framework, is that **inclusion** is the second most highly rated area.

The **achievement** judgement is clearly the most stringent judgement under the new framework, followed by curriculum and teaching and then by leadership and governance. In my next blog, I will explore these mean judgements more thoroughly to analyse how they are showing variation by school types, by geography and, crucially, by previous inspection outcome.

### Focus on the ‘next steps’

The right-hand column of the table below shows the top ten most frequent ‘next steps’ from reports published under the new Ofsted framework so far across all types of school. The colour coding indicates where the frequency of the ‘next steps’ has increased (green) or decreased (red) since last academic year. The left-hand column gives the top ten ‘*need to improve*’ comments for 2024-25 along with their frequency across all school types.

Top Ten Need to Improves (Sep 24 to Jul 25)	Top Ten Next Steps (Nov 25 to Jan 26)
Assessment for checking understanding (15.7%)	Teacher curriculum implementation (11.6%)
Teacher curriculum implementation (11.9%)	Attendance and/or punctuality rates (11.0%)
Subject content, knowledge and/or sequencing (6.9%)	Teaching and learning of writing skills (10.6%)
Teaching and learning of writing skills (6.7%)	Assessment for checking understanding (9.3%)
Special educational needs provision (5.5%)	Early years curriculum, learning, environment (5.0%)
Adaptations to challenge/support pupils (5.5%)	Appropriate professional learning for staff (4.4%)
Attendance and/or punctuality rates (5.3%)	Adaptations to challenge/support pupils (4.2%)
Prior knowledge recall in lessons (4.9%)	Monitoring and evaluation processes (3.5%)
Reading and phonics planning and delivery (4.6%)	Support from staff for addressing barriers (3.5%)
Evaluation of curriculum impact (2.5%)	Communication, language, vocabulary development (3.1%)

It is notable that the three ‘next steps’ in the top ten that are reducing in frequency are around the enacted **curriculum and classroom practice**. This reflects the way in which the new framework is focusing a lot less on curriculum and teaching than its predecessor (as outlined earlier in this post). But, as explained earlier, this does not render the Curriculum and Teaching area of the new framework insignificant: **Teacher implementation, formative assessment and adaptations together still represent over a quarter of all next steps** issued since the introduction of the new framework.

But there are clear signs that, whilst the delivery of the curriculum remains pre-eminent for success on inspection, its pre-eminence is not so total as before. The **focus on attendance** to school, for instance, has more than doubled in frequency from an already strong position in 2024-25. There is also an enhanced focus on other foundational elements for the **achievement, belonging and thriving** of learners: Early years provision, the teaching of writing skills, support to address barriers, and the development of communication skills by children have become significantly more frequently mentioned by inspection teams as next steps for schools.

And finally, it is worth noting that there is an enhanced focus on the **practice of leaders in monitoring and evaluating the impact** of their work and – as expected from the new framework – the **provision of appropriate professional learning for staff**.

## Focus on primary and secondary ‘next steps’

The table below looks at the top ten next steps for the phases that have had the most reports published since the change to inspection processes in November: primaries and secondaries. As above, the changes since the 2024-25 academic year are indicated by the colour-coding, with increases shown as green and decreases shown as red.

Primary Schools Top Ten Next Steps (Nov 25 to Jan 26)	Secondary Schools Top Ten Next Steps (Nov 25 to Jan 26)
Teaching and learning of writing skills (12.7%)	Assessment for checking understanding (15.9%)
Teacher curriculum implementation (10.7%)	Attendance and/or punctuality rates (14.6%)
Attendance and/or punctuality rates (10.5%)	Teacher curriculum implementation (12.2%)
Assessment for checking understanding (8.2%)	Adaptations to challenge/support pupils (9.8%)
Early years curriculum, learning, environment (6.5%)	Foundational skills for learning (4.9%)
Appropriate professional learning for staff (4.7%)	Post-16 provision, learning and achievement (4.9%)
Communication, language, vocabulary development (3.5%)	Support from staff for addressing barriers (4.9%)
Adaptations to challenge/support pupils (3.5%)	Teaching and learning of writing skills (4.9%)
Subject content, knowledge and/or sequencing (3.2%)	Provision of effective personal development (4.9%)
Support from staff for addressing barriers (3.0%)	Appropriate professional learning for staff (3.7%)

As previously discussed, all the next steps that are decreasing in frequency are related to the **curriculum** and its teaching. It should, however, be noted that for secondary schools there has been a very significant increase in the focus on **teacher adaptation of learning** which more than offsets the slightly diminished focus on formative assessment practices.

It is notable that the focus on both **early years and post-16 provision** has increased under the new framework. For primaries, early years is twice as likely to be identified as a next step than was the case last year, whilst **post-16 provision is four times more likely to be a next step** for secondary school leaders than was the case in 2024-25.


**Attendance** is also significantly more likely to be identified as a next step for both sectors. For secondaries, the change in frequency since last year means it is 1.5 times more likely to come up as an improvement need, whilst primaries are more than twice as likely to have it as a next step than was the case in 2024-25.

There is an increased focus on **inclusion for both primaries and secondaries**. For primaries, this is emerging as a more than fourfold increase in comments about how children are supported to develop their communication skills. For secondaries, there has been a **gargantuan increase in the focus on foundational skills**, from 0.1% of all secondary needs last year to 4.9% this year so far. Support for students with identified barriers has also increased across both phases, up fourfold for secondaries and fifteenfold for primaries.

### Conclusions

In this post, we have outlined how the new Ofsted inspection framework is impacting on inspection processes. Our key findings for school leaders, so far, have been:

- ▶ Whilst curriculum and teaching remain paramount, a massively increased focus on achievement is something about which school leaders need to be particularly aware.
- ▶ The increased focus on leadership and governance during the inspection process is being reflected in a much sharper focus on leadership and governance next steps.
- ▶ The achievement, curriculum and teaching, and leadership and governance gradings are hardest won and are frequently lower than for other areas of the inspection schedule.
- ▶ Attendance and other foundations for achievement, belonging and thriving of learners are coming under increased focus for 'next steps' in comparison to the 2019 framework.
- ▶ School leaders should be aware that early years' provision for primaries and post-16 provision for secondaries are much more in focus than has been the case previously.
- ▶ Inclusion as a separate strand of the framework appears to be less of a robust focus for inspection teams than inclusion as a lens for looking at other areas of judgement.



# **A rose by any other name? Reading across old and new Ofsted inspection gradings**

*20 February 2026*

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Twice in the past month, the HMCI Sir Martyn Oliver has made an identical claim about the new Ofsted inspection framework judgements, in speeches to the Livery Education Conference (14<sup>th</sup> January 2026) and the Sixth Form Colleges Association (4<sup>th</sup> February 2026). That claim is...

***“There is no read-across from the old grades to the new.”***

In both speeches, he goes on to explain why he thinks that this is important, and I don't wish to dispute any of these thoughts here. But it is a striking claim and one that is doubted by many in the education sector who suspect that the introduction of the exceptional judgement is like the introduction of the grades 9 in GCSEs and A\* in A-Levels (for those of you with long memories).

This blog is an attempt to make sense of the emerging data from reports on inspections conducted between November 2025 and January 2026, to test out the claim that there is no read-across from the four-point grading system of the 2019 framework and the five-point grading system under the 2025 framework. We will be using [SSAT's inspection tracker](#) to do this, as part of our wider work on helping schools and school leaders in their [readiness for inspection](#).

### Reading across: Previous grading

One way in which we can test the HMCI's claim that there is “no read-across” from the 2019 to the 2025 grading systems is to have a look at how well or poorly schools with outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate judgements have done in their new inspection gradings.

To do this, we have given a numeric equivalent to each grading from exceptional (5) to urgent improvement (1) with expected standard given a value of 3. Then we have averaged the total of all gradings for all elements of the new framework awarded since November and linked them with the school's previous overall inspection judgement.

There has been only one previously inadequate school with a new framework inspection report and so we have not included the data here, as it may be far from representative. We have also not included schools without a previous inspection (i.e. new or newly academised schools) but we have included the mean judgements for all schools in the final column.

Finally, we have colour-coded cells with the strongest outcomes for each row in green and the least strong in red, with the middle performance highlighted in yellow.

	Outstanding	Good	RI	All schools
Achievement	4.22	2.79	2.13	2.66
Attendance and Behaviour	4.11	3.03	2.43	2.98
Curriculum and Teaching	4.22	2.81	2.27	2.73
Inclusion	4.33	3.18	2.49	3.09
Leadership and Governance	4.22	3.04	2.38	2.96
Personal Development and Wellbeing	4.22	3.31	2.83	3.25
Mean of all judgements	4.22	3.03	2.42	2.95

What this data tells us is that **previously outstanding schools** are, on average, **performing the best** in judgements for all elements of the new inspection framework. Perhaps more to the point in assessing whether there is any read-across from the old inspection framework, these schools are averaging above the strong standard and towards the exceptional judgement.

By contrast, schools formerly graded as being **requiring improvement** are, on average, **performing the worst** in judgement for all elements of the inspection framework. They are averaging closer to the needs attention judgement than to the expected standard in all areas, other than **personal development and wellbeing**. Even by this measure, though, they are not quite meeting the expected standard when their data are aggregated and averaged.

In the middle, then, are the **formerly good schools**, whose performance against the new inspection framework judgements, sits comfortably in the middle of that shown by the **formerly outstanding and formerly RI schools**. When all the gradings for these schools are averaged out, they sit almost exactly on the **expected standard** score.

The smallest gap between the previously outstanding and previously RI schools are for **personal development and wellbeing** (1.39 grades difference), which is easily the least challenging of the seven judgement areas based on the average for all schools.

The biggest gaps between the formerly outstanding and the formerly RI schools are related to **achievement** (2.09 grades difference) and **curriculum and teaching** (1.95 grades difference). These are the most challenging judgements according to the mean for all schools.

So, by this analysis, what we can see are that:

- ▶ Formerly outstanding schools are averaging at the strong standard and towards the exceptional judgement
- ▶ Previously good schools are coming in at almost exactly the expected standard
- ▶ Schools that required improvement at their last inspection are averaging at the needs attention level of the new framework.

**In short, then, there clearly is a read-across between the old judgements and the new ones, except for the exceptional judgement (more on this below).**

### Reading across: Indicative overall gradings

A second way of testing the claim that there is no read-across, is to have a look at the outcomes for schools with a **previous overall judgement grade** and their average performance across the **new grading system**. This is not unproblematic as it involves our ascribing an indicative overall grading to each school. To do this, we average out each school's grading for each component of the new framework and use it to award an indicative overall grading. So, for example, we would identify a school with a mean grade between 2.51 and 3.5 as being of expected standard.

I appreciate that this methodology runs against the spirit of the changes made since September 2024. We do not publish these indicative overall grades anywhere and only use the data generated to provide helpful analysis for schools and their leaders. Our intention is to help.

The table below is an example of this system-focused data analysis. Across the top are the **overall effectiveness gradings of schools inspected under the new Ofsted framework**. Down the side are the **indicative overall gradings generated using the methodology described above**. To see what happened to schools with previous judgements under the new framework, we have **colour-coded** certain squares dark, medium or light green to **signify the frequency of new gradings**. The darker the colour, the stronger the frequency.

	Outstanding	Good	RI	All schools
Exceptional	22.2%	0.8%	0.0%	0.9%
Strong	77.8%	15.0%	4.3%	14.2%
Expected	0.0%	65.3%	43.0%	61.4%
Needs Attention	0.0%	18.9%	32.3%	20.0%
Urgent Improvement	0.0%	0.0%	20.4%	3.5%

Over **three-quarters of previously outstanding schools** have an indicative strong standard, when all their gradings have been aggregated and averaged. The remaining schools – over one in five – that were **formerly outstanding** had an average grading of **exceptional**.

Almost two-thirds of **formerly good schools** averaged out to the **expected** standard, with almost all the remainder fairly evenly split between the **strong standard and needs attention**. Less than 1% of this cohort achieved a set of judgements that averaged at exceptional.

Although the **expected standard was the most common** indicative overall judgement for schools that were **RI**, there was more chance that the schools would fall **below the expected standard** and only a very small chance (fewer than one in twenty) of a previously RI school achieving an average indicative of a **strong standard**.

Using this extrapolated data, the table provides more nuanced findings than the one above. The key insight is that the **better the school's previous grading, the stronger the correlation with the new grading system**. Previously outstanding schools can be more confident, based on this data, of a strong standard or better than good schools can be of an expected standard or better. And previously good schools, in their turn, can be more confident than previously RI schools can be, in self-evaluating at expected standard or needs attention.

**This table, then, would further support the thesis that there is a read-across from the previous inspection grades to the current ones but also suggests that the higher the previous inspection grade, the more confidence schools can have in that read-across.**

## Reading across: Overall gradings over time

One final way of assessing the claim that “there is no read-across from the old grades to the new” is to use the data to explore patterns in the awarding of grades over time. The table below shows the **proportion of improvement needs** we have curated since September 2023, **linked to the overall effectiveness grade** or – since September 2024 when these were no longer used – our **indicative overall grades** (see above for an explanation of these). The colour-coding here simply relates to the 2019 (peach) and 2025 (lilac) frameworks being utilised at the time.

	Exceptional	Strong Standard or Outstanding	Expected Standard or Good	Needs Attention or Requires Improvement	Urgent Improvement or Inadequate
Sep 23 to Jul 24*	N/A	8.5%	68.4%	18.9%	4.2%
Sep 24 to Jul 25	N/A	8.6%	69.1%	17.8%	4.5%
Nov 25	1.8%	24.4%	64.1%	5.5%	4.1%
Dec 25 to Jan 26	0.3%	7.8%	59.5%	29.4%	3.0%

\* Indicates actual overall effectiveness grades. All other rows are based on indicative overall grades.

One line that stands out is the data from November 2025, when the schools inspected were all **volunteers piloting the new inspection framework**. A far greater proportion of these schools achieved indicative overall gradings of strong standard or exceptional than achieved the same gradings after that time, or outstanding gradings in the two academic years before this. This is not surprising given that these schools were likely ready for and confident about inspection.

This table also shows that the proportion of **outstanding** gradings from the 2019 framework and **strong or exceptional** gradings from the 2025 framework, beyond the volunteer cohort of schools, is very similar at 8.5%, 8.6% and 8.1%. This suggests a **read-across from the old gradings** to the new ones at the very highest levels, albeit that they seem to be a little tougher to achieve.

**The biggest change between the old Ofsted framework and the new one is that the expected standard appears to be noticeably more challenging to achieve than the previous good judgement.**

Consequently, the new **needs attention** grading is **more common** than the previous requires improvement judgement was for schools. There has been a notable **reduction** in the proportion of **urgent improvement** gradings compared to the prior inadequate grading, but the data in this area are too small at present for a reasonable level of confidence.

Indeed, the data from the new framework inspections are still too few to reliably draw concrete conclusions from, but they are pointing us in a direction that will be interesting to follow in the months to come, as more of the new reports drop. And that direction appears to be that there is a **strong correlation (or read-across) for the new exceptional or strong standards with the outstanding judgement**, and a weaker, but still noticeable, correlation between the expected standard and the good judgement, and between the **needs attention and requires improvement judgements**.

This table, then, supports the hypothesis that there is a read-across from the old grading system to the new one, but that the boundaries have shifted downwards in the early stages of the application of the new framework. This downward shift is more pronounced for schools fighting for the expected standard over the needs improvement judgement.

## Conclusions

Although we are still in the early stages for the analysis of new gradings for schools, there does appear to be a read-across from the old inspection judgements and the new ones, despite the claims of the HMCI.

Previously outstanding schools are routinely securing the strong standard and are much more likely to achieve exceptional judgements than schools with other previous gradings. The pattern is more nuanced for previously good schools in achieving the new expected standard and for schools that were formerly requires improvement in achieving the new needs attention grade. The read-across, or correlation, is weaker for these schools than for those with high prior inspection outcomes, but it is there, nonetheless.

These findings are bolstered when we look at data on the gradings awarded under the old and new frameworks, regardless of schools' prior gradings. Fewer schools are hitting the expected standard than used to achieve the good judgement and more schools need attention than required improvement in the past. This may be evidence that there is no read-across from the old gradings to the new ones. It may also be evidence that schools close to the expected standard are falling short because of new and as-yet-unfamiliar inspection processes.

Time, and further analysis of the data, will tell.

# The Volatility of the New Ofsted Framework for Primary Schools

*3 March 2026*

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This blog is the third instalment where we are looking at data from our tracking of Ofsted inspection reports, to show how the new framework is playing out for schools. Here we **focus on primary schools** and outline how the new framework and inspection processes appear to more challenging for this sector.

### Recap: The new inspection framework across all education settings

The table below shows the proportion of improvement needs linked to different areas of the new Ofsted framework for all settings. This has been retrospectively applied in the first two columns of data when education settings were, of course, inspected under the previous framework. The final column shows the change in inspection focus since the last academic year.

	All Settings 2023-2024	All Settings 2024-2025	All Settings 2025-2026	Change 24/25 to 25/26
Achievement	0.9%	1.9%	9.8%	+7.9%
Attendance and Behaviour	10.2%	9.7%	13.4%	+3.7%
Curriculum and Teaching	66.4%	65.4%	44.0%	-21.4%
Inclusion	5.7%	7.4%	9.2%	+1.8%
Leadership and Governance	10.8%	10.8%	19.4%	+8.6%
Personal Dev and Wellbeing	4.8%	4.0%	3.8%	-0.2%
Safeguarding	1.3%	0.8%	0.4%	-0.4%

As outlined in a previous blog (*A rose by any other name? Reading across old and new Ofsted inspection gradings*, [Page 13](#)), this shows that there has been significantly less focus on the curriculum and teaching, down by more than a fifth year-on-year on top of a small decrease between 2023-24 and 2024-25. Personal development/wellbeing and safeguarding have also been less likely to be seen as an improvement need (now 'next steps' by inspection teams) and these too are part of a longer pattern of waning attention since we began tracking inspections.

The introduction of the new framework since November 2025, has seen a marginally increased focus on inclusion, although my previous blog (*How the new Ofsted framework is changing inspections*, [Page 7](#)) argues that the data on specific needs, shows that Ofsted are focusing on inclusion as a lens for some of the other judgement areas. There has also been a notable increase in focus on attendance and behaviour, but it is important to note that 'next steps' around behaviour are declining rapidly, with focus on attendance increasing.

The **biggest areas of growth** in terms of inspection focus, since the new framework became operational, are around **achievement and leadership and governance**, with the latter now accounting for almost one in five 'next steps' since November. But these changes are amplified significantly when we look at the same data for primary schools inspected recently.

## Volatility: Primary schools and the new inspection framework

The table below shows the same data for primary settings only. Below this, to aid comparisons, is the same data for secondary settings.

	Primaries 2023-2024	Primaries 2024-2025	Primaries 2025-2026	Change 24/25 to 25/26
Achievement	0.6%	1.5%	10.5%	+9.0%
Attendance and Behaviour	7.3%	8.0%	13.2%	+5.2%
Curriculum and Teaching	70.9%	70.5%	43.4%	-27.1%
Inclusion	5.7%	7.0%	9.3%	+2.3%
Leadership and Governance	10.7%	9.4%	20.1%	+10.7%
Personal Dev and Wellbeing	3.8%	3.0%	2.9%	-0.1%
Safeguarding	1.0%	0.6%	0.5%	-0.1%

	Secondaries 2023-2024	Secondaries 2024-2025	Secondaries 2025-2026	Change 24/25 to 25/26
Achievement	2.2%	3.0%	8.1%	+5.1%
Attendance and Behaviour	23.3%	17.9%	15.1%	-2.8%
Curriculum and Teaching	51.7%	51.7%	48.8%	-2.9%
Inclusion	6.8%	11.2%	8.1%	-3.2%
Leadership and Governance	8.4%	10.9%	15.1%	+4.2%
Personal Dev and Wellbeing	6.7%	4.9%	4.7%	-0.2%
Safeguarding	1.1%	0.4%	0%	-0.4%

This data indicates that **the volatility that comes with a change of inspection schedule has been much more profound for primary settings than for secondaries.**

**Curriculum and teaching** has been a staple for primary inspections since September 2023, accounting for close to three-quarters of all improvement needs throughout the last two full academic years. Since November 2025, this has dropped to much less than half of all improvement needs. By comparison, secondary settings have seen only a small decrease in focus on curriculum and teaching and are now more likely to have a 'next step' focused on curriculum and teaching than primaries. This represents a major change in focus for primary settings.

Across both sectors, we see the increased focus on the **achievement and the leadership and governance** judgements. But these changes are far more significant for primary schools, reflecting again the higher levels of volatility caused for primaries by the implementation of the new framework so far. The **risk of having achievement identified as a next step, for example, has increased six-fold** since last academic year and fourteen-fold since the 2023-24 academic year. The risk of having **a next step for leadership and governance has doubled** since last year.

Primary schools have also seen a sizeable increase in the focus on **attendance and behaviour** (in reality, attendance) where secondaries have seen a not-insignificant decreased focus on this area. Challenges around the **inclusion** judgement have also increased for primaries whilst decreasing for secondaries since last year and it is now **more likely as a next step for the primary sector** than for the secondary sector.

## Volatility: Primary schools and the new ‘next steps’ recommendations

The table below show the most frequent ‘**need to improve**’ comments published in inspection reports for primary schools between September 2023 and July 2025 under the old framework in the left-hand columns. The right-hand columns show the most frequent ‘**next steps**’ for primary schools between November 2025 and January 2026 under the new framework.

The dark red shows where the frequency has decreased by 2.5% or more, light red where the decrease is between 0.1% and 2.4%. The dark green and light green indicate increases of frequency by the same proportions.

Need to improves 2023-24	%age	Next Steps 2025-26	%age
Formative assessment	15.7%	Writing skills	12.5%
Curriculum implementation	12.0%	Curriculum implementation	10.5%
Subject content	8.7%	Attendance and punctuality	10.5%
Prior knowledge recall	6.0%	Formative assessment	8.3%
Reading and phonics	5.8%	Early years	6.6%
Curriculum planning	5.5%	Staff CPDL	4.7%
Writing skills	5.4%	Adaptative teaching	3.9%
SEND provision	5.3%	Communication development	3.4%
Attendance and punctuality	4.1%	Subject content	3.4%
Evaluation of curriculum	3.8%	Addressing barriers	2.9%

What stands out is that all but two of these top ten next steps under the new Ofsted framework, are either significantly increasing or significantly declining in frequency since the 2019 framework was shelved. Interestingly, the next steps that are either decreasing or only gently increasing in frequency are all related to the **curriculum and teaching** provided by these schools.

The increased focus on inclusion as a lens for other judgements is highly visible. **Attendance, foundational skills such as writing and communication** are increasingly coming into focus for Ofsted when looking at primaries, as is the Early Years and other ways in which primaries are addressing the barriers to **learning and achievement** faced by children.

Under this new framework in practice, the early signs are that **primary schools are facing very significant upheaval** not only in terms of the broad areas of the new framework, but also in terms of the specific elements of these headline areas.

## The Impact of Volatility? Primary school gradings compared to other settings

The final table (below) shows the mean gradings for the two phases for which we have enough data to make claims about its reliability, the primary and secondary sectors. To achieve a mean grading, we have given a score of 5 for an exceptional judgement, a 4 for schools achieving the strong standard, and so on down to a 1 for urgent improvement.

This table shows the mean grades for these sectors and has been colour-coded red to show where the mean for the sector is below the mean for all phases, and green where it is higher than the mean for all phases.

Row Labels	Ach Mean	AB Mean	CT Mean	Inc Mean	LG Mean	PDW Mean	Mean of All Judgements
Secondary	2.99	3.20	3.00	3.27	3.15	3.43	3.17
Primary	2.62	2.95	2.72	3.09	2.95	3.26	2.93
Mean for all settings	2.67	2.99	2.74	3.10	2.97	3.26	2.96
Secondary/ Primary gap	-0.37	-0.25	-0.28	-0.18	-0.20	-0.17	-0.24

As can be seen, except for the personal development and wellbeing judgement (which happens to be the least stringent of all judgements), **primary schools are performing less well than is the case for all settings.**

Against the outcomes for secondary schools, primaries are achieving on average almost a quarter of a grade lower across every judgement area. The **starkest difference between primary and secondary schools is for the achievement judgement**, in which primaries are being judged more than a third of a grade lower on average. Primaries are also faring particularly badly, in comparison to secondaries, on **curriculum and teaching** and on **attendance and behaviour**.

## Conclusions: A volatile time for primaries under Ofsted

This blog has shown the volatility of the shift from the 2019 Ofsted inspection schedule to the new 2025 framework since November last year. More importantly, it has demonstrated that this volatility has not been evenly distributed across schools but is falling **more heavily on the primary sector.**

- ▶ The change to seven common areas of inspection from the previous four has radically altered what inspection looks like for primaries, with far less focus on curriculum and teaching and far more focus on achievement and leadership and governance. The scale of this shift in focus is far greater for primary settings than for secondary counterparts.
- ▶ Within these broad headings, we have also shown that the specific improvement needs for primaries are also highly volatile compared to what has gone before. Inclusion as a lens is significantly shaping what Ofsted are focusing on with primaries, with much more attention being paid to how schools build foundational skills and address barriers.
- ▶ Mean grades across almost all elements of the new framework are lower for primaries than for all settings inspected since November, and primaries are faring particularly badly under the new Ofsted framework when compared to secondaries, most notably in terms of the achievement judgement.

### What might be driving or explaining these patterns in inspection data?

During the consultation and implementation of the new framework, several commentators spoke about the frenetic and relentless nature of the new framework for school leaders. Many suggested that smaller schools with smaller leadership teams might struggle with this fast-paced and incessant approach to information-gathering during the inspection process. Perhaps this is a factor that is playing out during the full roll-out of the new Ofsted experience.

Alternatively, perhaps the changes we are seeing in the primary experience of inspection is pointing to something more fundamental still. Is it possible that the new inspection framework, and not just the inspection process, is more secondary-friendly? Whilst a stronger focus on **inclusion** is welcome, might the **enhanced focused on foundational knowledge, habits and skills** be putting **primaries under greater pressure than is the case for secondaries**?

Linked to this, there is a question to be asked about why **achievement gradings are so very different for primaries** than for secondaries. Is the enactment of the new framework placing **higher expectations upon the achievements of students in primary settings** than those at secondary levels? Are secondaries being given more latitude around achievement levels? Are they benefitting from having more subject specialists, or for having better resources and support staff capacity to support interventions?

One thing is clear, whatever your feelings about the questions raised above: the switchover from the 2019 to the 2025 Ofsted inspection framework is **changing inspection for primaries quite profoundly**. School and trust leaders should be aware of this, as should be those of us who work to support them in their readiness for inspection.

The background of the slide is a dark red color with a faint, semi-transparent image of a person from behind, wearing a backpack and walking. The person is positioned on the left side of the frame. The overall aesthetic is professional and academic.

# **Attendance and the new Ofsted Framework: Some emergent insights**

*12 March 2026*

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The new Ofsted framework promised to focus on inclusion. Achieving, belonging and thriving sit at the heart of the new inspection processes. As the most critical facet of inclusion, attendance should be reflected in the reality of school's experiences of inspection, not just the rhetoric.

SSAT have been tracking every inspection report published since September 2023. In this fourth post about the data emerging from Ofsted reports since November, we will look at how often attendance is appearing on inspection reports and how this is impacting upon the new gradings.

And, for the first time, we will be correlating Ofsted's data on deprivation and additional needs with attendance and behaviour judgements. Is an inclusion-focused inspection framework proving itself to be sensitive to the challenges to inclusion faced by schools where attendance is more likely to be impacted by cohort needs?

### How frequent are attendance next steps in the new framework?

The first table shows the proportion of 'Attendance and Behaviour' next steps from Ofsted reports under the new inspection framework (right hand column). In the two columns before this, to enable comparisons, we have mapped the old 'need to improve' comments from Ofsted reports in the last two academic years against the new framework.

EIF Focus	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Achievement	0.9%	1.9%	9.8%
<b>Attendance and Behaviour</b>	<b>10.2%</b>	<b>9.7%</b>	<b>12.3%</b>
Curriculum and Teaching	66.4%	65.4%	44.1%
Inclusion	5.7%	7.4%	10.5%
Leadership and Governance	10.8%	10.8%	19.2%
Personal Development/Wellbeing	4.8%	4.0%	3.8%
Safeguarding	1.3%	0.8%	0.5%

From this we can see that the new framework – and the processes that underpin it – has led to a significantly increased focus on attendance and behaviour: next steps for this area of inspection activity are up by a third on those in 2024-25. However, this doesn't tell the full story around what is happening with attendance, which is up by much more as shown below.

Attendance 'Next Steps'	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Attendance and punctuality rates	5.1%	5.3%	9.8%
Regular attendance of vulnerable	0.3%	0.6%	0.8%
Absence coding and data analysis	0.2%	0.3%	0.8%
Use of part-time timetables	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
<b>All attendance 'next steps'</b>	<b>5.6%</b>	<b>6.2%</b>	<b>11.5%</b>

As you can see, all attendance improvement needs have increased under the new framework. Added together, they have come close to doubling in frequency since last academic year and have more than doubled in comparison to 2023-24. The corollary to that is that behaviour 'next steps have dropped significantly under the new framework. All well and good, but there is an issue that has emerged and is having a notable impact on schools.

This problem for school leaders is the way in which the framework, particularly its ‘secure fit’ basis for gradings, links attendance and behaviour. Early feedback suggested that schools with good behaviour were being downgraded because of low attendance rates (more on this below). The response of the HMCI was blunt. In a speech at BETT, he said this was “regrettable” but “was what you wanted” based on consultation feedback. His conclusion? “I did tell you so”.

## How risky are attendance next steps for schools?

Of course, the frequency of improvement needs is only one way of measuring the impact of the new framework. Perhaps a more important measure for school leaders is the level of risk that each ‘next step’ poses for the grades schools receive.

The table below uses the data from inspections to help assess the relative risk of a school receiving a ‘next step’ around attendance (and, for the sake of comparison, around behaviour). To do this, we have done the following:

1. Linked the new grading system to a number (exceptional = 5 to urgent attention = 1).
2. Calculated the mean grade for any next step (in black).
3. Calculated the mean grade for each attendance or behaviour next step.
4. Ordered these from lowest to highest mean grade to illustrate relative risk.
5. Colour coded these for degree of risk (dark red = highest, dark green = lowest).

Attendance and behaviour ‘next steps’	Mean of all grades
Application of behaviour policy	2.07
Addressing high level misbehaviour	2.33
Pupil behaviour and conduct	2.42
Recording/reporting of behaviour incidents	2.42
Support from staff for addressing barriers	2.72
Regular attendance of vulnerable students	2.74
Attendance and/or punctuality rates	2.85
<b>Any ‘next step’</b>	<b>2.87</b>
Absence coding and data analysis	2.88
Use of part-time timetables	3.00
Attitude to learning and engagement	3.50

What the table shows is that ‘next steps’ around attendance are clustered around the mean for any next step, either slightly more risky or slightly less risky than schools in receipt of any next step from their Ofsted report. The riskiest of the attendance next steps is related to the attendance of vulnerable students, which is perhaps to be expected in a new framework and inspection process centred on inclusion.

By contrast, toward the top of this table in the darker shades of red (indicating much greater levels of risk for schools) are many of the next steps related to behaviour. In fact, for the top four on this list, the mean of all grades is coming out closer to the ‘needs attention’ judgement than the ‘expected standard’ judgement. Although behaviour needs are far less frequently identified in Ofsted reports than those for attendance, they carry far greater risk for schools if mentioned.

Of course, any risk assessment will be based upon both the likely severity and frequency of the potential threat. As discussed above, the coupling of attendance and behaviour with a ‘secure fit’ grading system mean that the frequent but non-severe risks around attendance are likely to be as impactful as the infrequent but severe risks around behaviour.

In his speech to BETT, Oliver more helpfully said that he would continue to monitor the outcomes from inspections and think again if needed. This would be a wise move, particularly if we consider attendance and behaviour judgements under new Ofsted framework based on the deprivation and SEND needs for schools.

## How do deprivation and SEND impact on judgements around attendance and behaviour?

One of the new elements of the new Ofsted reporting system is that they identify which quintile schools are in for free school meals, local deprivation indicators, EHCPs and SEN support provision. We have taken the opportunity this has afforded us to begin tracking the gradings for schools in each of these quintiles. The first table below shows the mean 'attendance and behaviour' and 'inclusion' gradings for schools by quintiles of deprivation.

We have highlighted in green the quintiles whose mean grade is higher and red for the quintiles whose score is lower than the mean grading for all schools (shown in the final row).

FSM Eligibility	Attendance and Behaviour Mean	Inclusion Mean	Local Deprivation	Attendance and Behaviour Mean	Inclusion Mean
Well above average	2.87	3.08	Well above average	2.84	3.03
Above average	2.67	2.69	Above average	2.93	2.98
Close to average	3.03	3.13	Close to average	3.02	3.07
Below average	3.03	3.10	Below average	3.01	3.17
Well below average	3.28	3.19	Well below average	3.14	3.11
<b>All</b>	<b>2.99</b>	<b>3.07</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>2.99</b>	<b>3.07</b>

The results of looking at attendance and behaviour gradings this way are, sadly, unsurprising. Schools which are above average or well above average against these two indices of deprivation are achieving gradings well below schools with close to average and above average deprivation.

We understand disadvantaged students are far more likely to have higher rates of absence and to be persistently or severely absent. The question is whether we feel that (a) these differences are taking that into account or not, and (b) whether we feel that they ought to do so, or not.

It is also worth considering whether schools that lose out on attendance and behaviour gain on inclusion. On that one, the answer is a qualified 'no'. Schools with well above average FSM are marginally above the mean for all schools for inclusion, but otherwise the pattern holds that the more deprived your cohort and community, the less well you do under new Ofsted gradings.

The table below shows the same information for the different quintiles of additional need, the proportion of students with EHCPs and with SEN support.

EHCP	Attendance and Behaviour Mean	Inclusion Mean
Well above average	2.88	3.07
Above average	2.91	3.16
Close to average	2.99	3.10
Below average	3.16	3.15
Well below average	2.80	2.58
<b>All</b>	<b>2.99</b>	<b>3.07</b>

SEN Support	Attendance and Behaviour Mean	Inclusion Mean
Well above average	2.88	3.07
Above average	2.91	3.27
Close to average	2.90	2.95
Below average	3.14	3.12
Well below average	3.28	3.20
<b>All</b>	<b>2.99</b>	<b>3.07</b>

Here the pattern is more varied for attendance and behaviour but not for schools that are above average or well above average numbers of students with additional needs. These schools, like those with deprivation challenges, receive lower gradings for attendance and behaviour. The difference is that the same is true for some schools that do not have high levels of need.

Again, we know that students with additional needs are likely to have higher levels of absence, including persistent and severe absenteeism. And, as above, the question for inspections is whether greater latitude should be given to schools when grades are given because of this, or not. The inclusion judgement holds up well for schools with above average or well above average levels of students with EHCPs and SEN Support.

## Conclusions

SSAT's inspection tracker now has almost 1000 lines of data from Ofsted reports published under the new framework. The results are becoming increasingly reliable and have allowed us to draw some conclusions about how the new Ofsted framework reflects attendance concerns.

Firstly, we have shown that the new attendance and behaviour judgement area is being used much more frequently than was the case in the final two years of the 2019 inspection framework. And when we look at Ofsted 'next steps' specifically relating to attendance, the new framework is twice as likely to mention attendance than was the case with the previous one.

Although attendance is much more likely to be identified as a next step, this does not carry great risks of lower gradings than is the case for a school receiving any next step. By contrast, early evidence suggests that next steps related to behaviour (although less frequent) are much more likely to be correlated with lower judgements across the inspection areas.

If you are a school with above average or well above average indicators of deprivation or SEND, however, it is much more likely that you will receive judgements for attendance and behaviour than schools with lower levels of deprivation and additional needs.



# **Blowing Hot and Cold: The New Ofsted Framework and the Challenge of Leading on Behaviour**

*14 April 2026*

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In this blogpost, I want to return to a common theme since I began tracking inspection reports in September 2023: the ambivalence of Ofsted with regards to behaviour. I will show how there has been a continued decline in inspection focus on behaviour, and how this has come to make it seem like the very poor cousin of attendance in the new 'Attendance and Behaviour' judgement area. But, drawing upon how the new grading system is playing out for schools, I will also be showing that this low frequency masks a significant risk for schools that are given a 'next step' around behaviour.

### How frequent are behaviour concerns in Ofsted reports since November?

The table below shows the frequency of specific 'next steps' related to behaviour in two ways. The first is percentage of that next step as a proportion of all next steps identified in Ofsted reports published since the start of the new framework, up to those published on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026. The second is the ranking of that frequency compared to all next steps.

The first column of data is for all schools, followed by primary schools and secondary schools. The final row imagines the aggregation of all behaviour next steps as a percentage of and ranking amongst all other next steps. It is worth noting that there have been 60 different next steps for all schools, 53 for primaries and 44 for secondaries.

Behaviour-Related Next Steps	All Schools since Nov 25	Primaries since Nov 25	Secondaries since Nov 25
Pupil behaviour and conduct	0.8% (26 <sup>th</sup> )	0.8% (27 <sup>th</sup> )	1.0% (21 <sup>st</sup> )
Application of behaviour policy	0.7% (31 <sup>st</sup> )	1.6% (31 <sup>st</sup> )	1.0% (23 <sup>rd</sup> )
Behaviour policy and sanctions	0.3% (43 <sup>rd</sup> )	0.2% (48 <sup>th</sup> )	0.7% (27 <sup>th</sup> )
Attitude to learning	0.2% (47 <sup>th</sup> )	0.2% (49 <sup>th</sup> )	0.3% (38 <sup>th</sup> )
High-level misbehaviour	0.2% (51 <sup>st</sup> )	0.1% (50 <sup>th</sup> )	0.3% (42 <sup>nd</sup> )
Recording behaviour	0.1% (56 <sup>th</sup> )	0.2% (47 <sup>th</sup> )	N/A
<b>Aggregated behaviour next steps</b>	<b>2.3% (16<sup>th</sup>)</b>	<b>2.1% (16<sup>th</sup>)</b>	<b>3.3% (11<sup>th</sup>)</b>

If we start the analysis at the end, with the aggregated frequency as a percentage, we can see that behaviour is a surprisingly infrequent identified improvement need by Ofsted. Fewer than one in forty 'next steps' since November 2025 have been about behaviour and that figure is close to one in fifty for primary schools. To put that into even clearer context, improving attendance is appearing as one in ten of every next step identified since November.

Even considering secondary schools, the proportion of behaviour next steps is just one for every thirty identified improvement needs. None of the individual behaviour needs for secondaries ranks inside the top twenty and, if we put them all together as a single need, that need would not make it into the top ten.

To put it simply, there is nothing about the frequency of Ofsted 'next steps' that would suggest that behaviour should be in the top tier of concerns for school leaders whose schools are "in the window". Of course, there is a big BUT coming later in this blogpost, but for now let's probe further on the issue of frequency by looking at how behaviour improvement needs have changed over time.

## What has happened to the frequency of behaviour concerns in Ofsted reports?

The first table in this section of the blogpost adds a column of data about each of the next steps around behaviour for the whole of the 2023-24 and 2024-25 academic years. As with the earlier table, the frequency is shown both as a percentage of all improvement needs and as a ranking within all those improvement needs (of which there were 63 during this two-year period).

Behaviour-Related Next Steps	All Schools 2023 to 2025	All Schools since Nov 25	Change
Pupil behaviour and conduct	1.1% (19 <sup>th</sup> )	0.8% (26 <sup>th</sup> )	-0.3%
Application of behaviour policy	1.9% (14 <sup>th</sup> )	0.7% (31 <sup>st</sup> )	-1.2%
Behaviour policy and sanctions	0.5% (31 <sup>st</sup> )	0.3% (43 <sup>rd</sup> )	-0.2%
Attitude to learning	0.7% (25 <sup>th</sup> )	0.2% (47 <sup>th</sup> )	-0.5%
High-level misbehaviour	0.2% (41 <sup>st</sup> )	0.2% (51 <sup>st</sup> )	No change
Recording behaviour	0.1% (52 <sup>nd</sup> )	0.1% (56 <sup>th</sup> )	No change
<b>Aggregated behaviour next steps</b>	<b>4.5% (9<sup>th</sup>)</b>	<b>2.3% (16<sup>th</sup>)</b>	<b>-2.2%</b>

As earlier, it is worth starting with the bottom line, which shows that behaviour concerns have dropped in frequency by almost a half and have fallen well down the ranking against all improvement needs. In fact, each of the specific needs have dropped down the rankings, even where the frequency of their appearance in inspection reports has not notably changed.

The one 'next step' that has seen the sharpest decline in its prevalence in Ofsted reports is the focus on the consistency in which behaviour policies and processes are applied by staff.

As I have outlined on three previous blogposts it is incredibly striking how behaviour has been fading away from the focus of inspection teams over the past two years. When considered alongside the findings of the [National Behaviour Survey](#) over a number of iterations, as well as many other publications, it is hard to understand why behaviour next steps have been reducing in frequency over such a long period.

## What has happened to the behaviour next steps in relation to attendance next steps?

It has been well documented how attendance and behaviour have become awkward bedfellows within a single inspection area. The table below indicates that there is indeed a problem with the decision to keep the two together, but perhaps not for the reasons one might expect.

The left-hand column shows the individual behaviour 'next steps' as a proportion of all attendance and behaviour next steps in the final quarter of inspection activity of the Spielman era. The middle column shows the same data for the first quarter of inspection activity under Oliver's new framework, with a final column to show how much things have changed.

Behaviour-Related Next Steps	As a proportion of Attendance and Behaviour	As a proportion of Attendance and Behaviour	Change
	Sep-Dec 2023	Since Nov 25	
Pupil behaviour and conduct	18.6%	9.3%	-9.3
Application of behaviour policy	20.5%	5.3%	-15.2%
Behaviour policy and sanctions	6.8%	2.0%	-4.8%
Attitude to learning	5.4%	2.7%	-2.7%
High-level misbehaviour	3.5%	1.3%	-2.2%
Recording behaviour	N/A	0.7%	+0.7%
<b>Aggregated behaviour next steps</b>	<b>36.2%</b>	<b>12.0%</b>	<b>-24.2%</b>

It is worth noting that attendance and behaviour in the final quarter of 2023 accounted for 9.1% of all improvement needs and that that figure has risen to 12.4% of all next steps under the new framework. Which means that the size (not just the share) of the behaviour slice of the attendance and behaviour pie has significantly shrunk, even though the size of the pie itself has significantly grown.

All of which would seem to support the idea that attendance needs might be causing problems for schools whose behaviour culture is in a good place. And this might be the case. But, so far, we have only been considering the frequency of behaviour next steps. To get the truest picture of whether behaviour is the poor cousin of attendance, it is worth considering the relative risk for schools that receive a 'next step' that focuses on behaviour.

## How risky are behaviour concerns in Ofsted reports?

The final table we will be looking at shows the relative risk of the behaviour next steps based on the average grades received for all judgement areas for all schools receiving those next steps. We get to this numerical figure by ascribing an exceptional grade 5, a strong standard grade 4 and so on down to a 1 for each urgent improvement grade.

One point of comparison is the dark blue line which shows the average grade for any next step identified in an inspection report, which is 2.83 (or just below the expected standard). Another point of comparison is the 'riskiness ranking': the lower the number the higher the risk of a low average grading for a school receiving that next step. For a further point of comparison, I have included, in the final column, the frequency ranking discussed earlier in this blogpost.

Behaviour-Related Next Steps	Average Grade	Riskiness Ranking	Frequency Ranking
High-level misbehaviour	1.94	4 <sup>th</sup>	51 <sup>st</sup>
Behaviour policy and sanctions	2.00	5 <sup>th</sup>	43 <sup>rd</sup>
Application of behaviour policy	2.07	8 <sup>th</sup>	31 <sup>st</sup>
Pupil behaviour and conduct	2.21	9 <sup>th</sup>	26 <sup>th</sup>
Recording behaviour	2.42	18 <sup>th</sup>	56 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Average grade for any identified next step = 2.83</b>			
Attitude to learning	3.25	57 <sup>th</sup>	47 <sup>th</sup>

What the table shows is that behaviour next steps, whilst low in frequency, carry a great deal of risk for schools. Four of the six types of behaviour next steps are in the top ten riskiest identified improvement needs. For context, concerns about a school's safeguarding processes (but not their adherence to statutory duties) are ranked 20<sup>th</sup> for risk.

And general comments around a school needing to improve attendance are ranked 30<sup>th</sup> for risk with an average grade of 2.74.

And so, whilst behaviour next steps are quite rarely used by inspection teams under the new framework, when they are used, they pack quite a punch. Where a school is noted for issues with high level misbehaviour, ineffective policy, and inconsistent application, they are averaging at the 'needs attention' level. Only the next step around pupils' attitudes to learning averages above the mean for all next steps and can be considered low in risk.

### **Conclusion: Leading behaviour under the new inspection framework is complex**

In the introduction, I spoke about the ambivalence of Ofsted reports towards behaviour, something I have tried to capture in the title of the blogpost with the idea of the inspectorate 'blowing hot and cold'. By ambivalence, I mean the simultaneous but contradictory messages that are being communicated by the data on how the new inspection framework is playing out. Where does this leave school leaders with responsibility for behaviour?

In terms of blowing cold, there is no doubting the decline in focus on behaviour for Ofsted inspection teams. And this has been going on for some time. The data shows that attendance concerns have come to overwhelmingly dominate behaviour concerns in terms of their frequency within the overall 'Attendance and Behaviour' judgement area. Consequently, as a proportion of all 'next steps' for improvement, behaviour needs have been whittled away from almost one in every twenty needs over the last two academic years, to fewer than one in every forty needs since the November 2025 introduction of the new framework.

But this doesn't tell the full story. Ofsted appear to be blowing very hot when it comes to the impact of behaviour next steps on school judgements. Most of the commonly identified behaviour improvement needs are much more likely to lead – in part, at least – to a string of 'needs attention' or 'urgent improvement' judgements for a school.

The contrast between the low frequency rankings of behaviour next steps and their riskiness rankings - the hot and the cold winds of Ofsted - make the leadership of a behaviour culture within a school very challenging. Apart from "attitude to learning", which is both low frequency and low risk for school leaders, every other potential behaviour concern is a potential tornado or hurricane ready to wreak destruction. As multiple recent surveys have demonstrated, and as the experience of school leaders has shown, such winds can develop with startling rapidity to blow seemingly even the sturdiest of ships off course.

Which is why SSAT are happy to provide a safe harbour for school leaders with responsibility for behaviour. Whether it is through supporting you in [self-evaluating your behaviour culture](#), or helping you [navigate the complexities of your role](#) as behaviour lead with others, or something more bespoke, we are happy to help.



# **Double Trouble: What Ofsted reports tell us about doubled disadvantage for schools**

*15 May 2026*

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One of SSAT's core values is a commitment to "achieving deep social justice". This is one of the reasons why I am proud to work for them, having come from a disadvantaged background. In receipt of free school meals throughout my childhood, educational achievement helped me to become the first in my family to go to university. This, in turn, enabled me to become a school leader serving communities with high levels of economic disadvantage, a position from which I was able to contribute to social mobility.

My work with SSAT includes what I believe to be the most detailed tracking of inspection outcomes, with a view to assessing whether Ofsted does what it says on the tin. With the new inspection framework, launched in November 2025, the tin says that the aim of inspection is to hold schools more accountable for inclusive practices and notably for children who, like me, come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

As the new framework inspections have developed, SSAT's Inspection Tracker now includes over 3000 'next steps' for schools that have hosted Ofsted over the past six months. This means that the data have settled down into reliable patterns, and so I wanted to pay attention to how disadvantage for schools is playing out in the focus of inspection teams and the gradings that schools are receiving from Ofsted. I also wanted to look at the 'next steps' identified by inspection teams and whether these change the risk of inspection for schools serving communities with higher-than-average levels of disadvantage.

For the purposes of this blogpost, I will be identifying two cohorts of schools from the data produced about levels of disadvantage that accompanies inspection report. To the uninitiated, these data are about the proportion of students in the school eligible for free school meals (FSM) and the level of local deprivation (LD) of the school community. In both cases, schools are identified as being in one of five quintiles: well above, above, close to, below and well below national averages for these indicators.

The two cohorts of schools I will be looking at will be the '**Doubly Disadvantaged**' (DD) and the '**Doubly Advantaged**' (DA). Schools in the DD group are those with above or well above national levels of both FSM and LD. Conversely, schools in the DA group are those with below or well below national levels of both FSM and LD.

### Inspection focus by doubled disadvantage and doubled advantage

SSAT's Inspection Tracker summarises each of the 'next step' improvement needs identified by inspection teams on a school's Ofsted report and links it to a specific area of the 2025 inspection framework. This gives us an indication of how frequently inspectors are using each of the seven core components of the framework in relation to the others.

In the left-hand column of data are the proportions for all schools, followed by the proportions for the Doubly Disadvantaged cohort of schools and then the proportions for the doubly advantaged cohort. I have then highlighted the cells in the middle two columns to indicate whether they are higher (red) or lower (green) than the proportion for all schools. And finally, I have added a column showing the gap between the proportions for the two groups.

2025 EIF Areas	All Schools	DD Cohort	DA Cohort	DD/DA Gap
Achievement	9.2%	12.8%	8.0%	4.8%
Attendance and Behaviour	13.1%	16.1%	8.2%	7.9%
Curriculum and Teaching	43.3%	38.9%	50.6%	11.7%
Inclusion	9.4%	8.1%	11.0%	2.9%
Leadership and Governance	19.6%	18.6%	16.9%	1.7%
Personal Development and Wellbeing	4.8%	5.2%	4.3%	0.9%
Safeguarding	0.6%	0.3%	1.0%	0.7%

The biggest gap between the two cohorts where the DD cohort are more likely to see extra focus from Ofsted is, perhaps unsurprisingly, around **attendance and behaviour**. Schools with higher-than-average FSM and LD are twice as likely (1 in 6 next steps) as schools with lower-than-average FSM and LD (1 in 12 next steps) to have attendance and behaviour as an improvement need.

**Achievement** is the second biggest gap between the two cohorts where the DD cohort receive more focus than DA schools. As with attendance and behaviour, achievement appears as a next step for the doubly advantaged cohort at a rate of 1 in 12 of all next steps, whereas for doubly disadvantaged schools, achievement is referenced in 1 of every 8 next steps on reports.

Sticking with the theme of not being surprised, where the DA cohort are much more likely to see additional levels of attention by Ofsted is around the **curriculum and teaching**. For this cohort, curriculum and teaching appears in more than 1 in 2 next steps, with the figure being just shy of 1 in every 2.5 for the doubly disadvantaged cohort. I will mention here, and come back to it later, that whilst this aspect of the new framework is one of the most difficult to achieve well on, it is also the least risky judgement area for schools in terms of poor overall inspection outcomes.

The second biggest gap where the DA cohort comes under more scrutiny is around **inclusion**. Arguably, it is less surprising that schools with the most need for inclusive practice to tackle economic disadvantage within their student body and community are less likely to have it picked up as a next step by Ofsted. The data indicates that schools with a much smaller proportion of disadvantaged pupils (by family circumstance and within their wider community) may need to look again at support mechanisms for this minority within their midst.

But there are also a couple of potential surprises in the data above.

The first is that on the much riskier (i.e. more closely linked to poor outcomes across the graded areas) **leadership and governance** judgement area, both the DD and DA cohorts receive less attention from Ofsted than all schools. By contrast, the cohort of schools that are doubly close to the national levels of FSM and LD that we are not looking at in this blogpost, have 25% (1 in 4) of their next steps related to leadership and governance. Later in this post, we will look to unpack specific next steps to see if the parallels around frequency are matched by parallels around levels of risk.

The second area of arguable surprise is that doubly advantaged schools have, so far at least, come under more scrutiny for **safeguarding** concerns or failings than the doubly disadvantaged schools. For both cohorts, the frequency is thankfully rare but for DA schools this is 1 in 100 next steps, whereas for the DD cohort it is featured in fewer than 1 in 300 next steps. As with inclusion, there is an argument that schools facing higher levels of doubled disadvantage may be better equipped and/or more experienced in meeting and responding to safeguarding concerns than schools serving doubly advantaged communities.

## Average Gradings by doubled disadvantage and doubled disadvantage

The second table underpinning this blogpost has a look at the outcomes from inspection activity filtered by the two cohorts of doubly disadvantaged and doubly advantaged schools. To do this, we have applied a numerical score for each of the new inspection gradings, with 5 being for the highest exceptional grade and 1 being for the lowest urgent improvement grade. As with the first table, we have aggregated the data for all schools and for each of the two cohorts we have identified. We have kept the colour-coding to indicate grading below (red) and above (green) the mean score for all schools. And, as before, we have included a final column to show the difference between the DD and DA cohorts.

2025 EIF Areas	All Schools	DD Cohort	DA Cohort	DD/DA Gap
Achievement	2.55	2.31	2.86	0.55
Attendance and Behaviour	2.90	2.70	3.16	0.46
Curriculum and Teaching	2.61	2.48	2.83	0.35
Inclusion	2.95	2.89	3.09	0.20
Leadership and Governance	2.76	2.69	2.96	0.27
Personal Development and Wellbeing	3.11	3.06	3.29	0.23
<b>All 2025 EIF Areas</b>	<b>2.81</b>	<b>2.69</b>	<b>3.03</b>	<b>0.34</b>

The most striking thing about this table is that the schools with doubled advantage have higher mean scores for all sections of the new Ofsted framework. The key column to focus on, therefore, is the final one to help us evaluate where the gaps are relatively larger or smaller between the two cohorts of schools.

In doing so, we can see that the biggest gaps are for those areas where Ofsted are more likely to focus their next step comments for doubly disadvantaged schools: achievement and attendance/behaviour. The gap around achievement is more than half an Ofsted grade in favour of the DA cohort of schools and the gap for attendance and behaviour is almost at half a grade, again in favour of the DA cohort.

The smallest difference between average gradings between the DD and DA schools is for inclusion, but even here schools serving doubly disadvantaged cohorts receive on average a fifth of a grade lower than schools with the doubled advantage of lower-than-average free school meals and local deprivation.

Across all inspection gradings for all areas, the DA schools score almost exactly a third of a grade higher than the DD schools. Converting the numbers back into judgements, this means that the DA cohort achieve an average of 3.03, which is marginally above an expected standard for each of the six judgement areas. The DD cohort achieve an average of 2.69, which is marginally higher than a school receiving two gradings of needs attention alongside four at expected standard. Extrapolating from evidence, it is likely that in many cases, those two lower gradings are for achievement and for attendance and behaviour.

## Specific next steps by doubled disadvantaged and doubled advantaged

When we began tracking inspection reports, the focus was about how we can help schools focus on their readiness for their next inspection. The tables below show the top ten next steps (by frequency for each of the two cohorts discussed in this blogpost). The first column of data shows the frequency of the next step for the cohort and is followed by the mean grade across all judgements for that cohort for that next step. This column has been colour-coded with the red indicating that the mean grade is lower than the mean grade for any next step for that cohort (see the bottom line for this) and green where the mean grade for the next step is higher than the mean grade for any next step. Thus, any red cells are indicating a next step for the cohort that is both high frequency and relatively high risk.

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I have added a final column that indicates the mean grade for that next step for the other cohort as a point for interesting comparisons. The spoiler alert is that for every next step in these top ten lists, the DD cohort has a lower average grading than the DA cohort.

DD Inspection Next Steps	Frequency DD	Mean Grade DD	Mean Grade DA
Attendance and/or punctuality rates	13.2%	2.73	2.88
Teacher curriculum implementation	11.9%	2.82	3.06
Assessment for checking understanding	8.0%	2.79	3.02
Foundational skills for learning	5.6%	2.58	2.71
Teaching and learning of writing skills	5.2%	3.01	3.16
Early years curriculum, learning, environment	5.2%	2.86	3.06
Adaptations to challenge/support pupils	4.6%	2.77	3.05
Outcomes for some groups or all pupils	3.8%	2.99	3.18
Special educational needs provision	3.1%	2.56	2.73
Governance challenge and support	2.8%	2.21	2.65
<b>Any Next Step</b>		<b>2.66</b>	<b>2.98</b>

In terms of frequency, what jumps out for the doubly disadvantaged cohort is that attendance/punctuality is notably the most common identified next step by Ofsted and, if you look down to the table below you will see that this focus on attendance is easily more than twice as frequently identified for DD schools than DA schools. The final three entries on the list (outcomes, SEND and governance) do not make the top ten list for schools with below-national levels of deprivation.

Based on this list combining frequency and risk, three key areas of focus emerge for schools with higher-than-average levels of FSM and LD. Most notable amongst these is the quality of challenge and support from governing bodies for DD schools, as this is far closer to an average 'needs attention' judgement than to an 'expected standard' one. SEND provision and the development of foundational knowledge and skills also point to pertinent challenges for the leaders of schools that would fit into this DD cohort.

DA Inspection Next Steps	Frequency DA	Mean Grade DA	Mean Grade DD
Assessment for checking understanding	13.1%	3.02	2.79
Teaching and learning of writing skills	12.7%	3.16	3.01
Teacher curriculum implementation	9.8%	3.06	2.82
Attendance and/or punctuality rates	5.7%	2.88	2.73
Adaptations to challenge/support pupils	5.7%	3.05	2.77
Early years curriculum, learning, environment	4.7%	3.06	2.86
Support from staff for addressing barriers	4.1%	2.85	2.15
Monitoring and evaluation processes	3.7%	2.82	2.54
Provision of effective personal development	2.9%	2.86	2.13
Subject content, knowledge and/or sequencing	2.7%	3.18	2.78
<b>Any Next Step</b>		<b>2.98</b>	<b>2.66</b>

As to be expected from the first section of this post, next steps around curriculum and teaching hold four of the top five places for DA cohort schools in terms of their frequency. Perhaps more interesting is the fact that each of these is linked to much higher-than-average inspection judgements.

High frequency plus low risk levels is a splendid combination for schools seeking to avoid lower than 'expected standard' judgements but it is worth noting that many of these schools may be seeking strong standards, in which case, it is worth such schools taking a hard look at formative assessment, adaptation and teacher delivery of the curriculum. Each of these have a mean grade a long way away from the strong standard.

There are four areas for doubly advantaged schools where there is a relatively high level of risk alongside a clearly high level of frequency. Intriguingly, all of these are around provision beyond the curriculum and teaching, and each is from a different section of the 2025 EIF framework. Whilst there are fewer concerns from these schools about the effectiveness of governance, it is worth leaders and governors of DA schools paying attention to the quality and impact of their monitoring and evaluation processes.

It would be remiss not to mention the gaps between DA and DD schools for each of these identified next steps. A stark way of summarising this pattern is that the same identified next step (whatever that next step might be) has far more negative impact on gradings for schools with above average deprivation than for schools with below average deprivation. Two of the areas where DA schools face next steps with high frequency and high risk – support for addressing barriers and personal development provision – are particularly salient. However risky and more frequent these next steps are for DA schools, the average judgement for DD schools with the same next steps are, on average, almost three quarters of a grade lower.

## Conclusions

Ever since the new framework Ofsted inspection reports started landing, I have been interested (for reasons outlined in my introduction) in crunching the numbers around how disadvantage is playing out under a new framework that claims to be aiming to reduce the impact of disadvantage on students.

This blogpost suggests very strongly that there is a long way to go before that goal can be realised, which is perfectly understandable given the newness of the new inspection framework on the education scene. Instead, perhaps, what has been gifted to us is a benchmark by which we can, in the future, judge whether the 2025 inspection framework does indeed shift the dial on the chronic and chronically embedded effects of disadvantage for student outcomes.

What this post shows is that the first quarter of inspection activity is pointing clearly and loudly towards achievement and attendance as being of crucial importance for schools facing the double disadvantage of having cohorts which include high levels of free school meals and local deprivation. These two areas of the new framework are both much more commonly identified as next steps for DD schools and have the greatest impact on the grading differential between these schools and their doubly advantaged peers.

But the later sections of this post also show that that grading differential is visible across all six core graded areas of the framework for all schools and even for each one of the most frequent individual next steps. These differentials can be as large as three-quarters of a grade, meaning that there is an in-built disadvantage across all areas of the framework for those schools who are already doubly disadvantaged by the needs of their community of children and the wider community of which they are a part.

At SSAT, we will continue to use our inspection tracker over the months and years to come to see whether, crucially, this inspection framework's focus on inclusion is going to be simply a way of seeing the yawning gaps within our education system and society, or whether it will be a game-changer in helping us to close those gaps. I sincerely hope that it will be the latter of these two, but I'm not holding my breath.



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[www.ssatuk.co.uk](http://www.ssatuk.co.uk)

Email: [info@ssatuk.co.uk](mailto:info@ssatuk.co.uk)

Tel: 020 7802 2300

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Registered office: Office 11, 295 Chiswick High Road, London, W4 4HH.