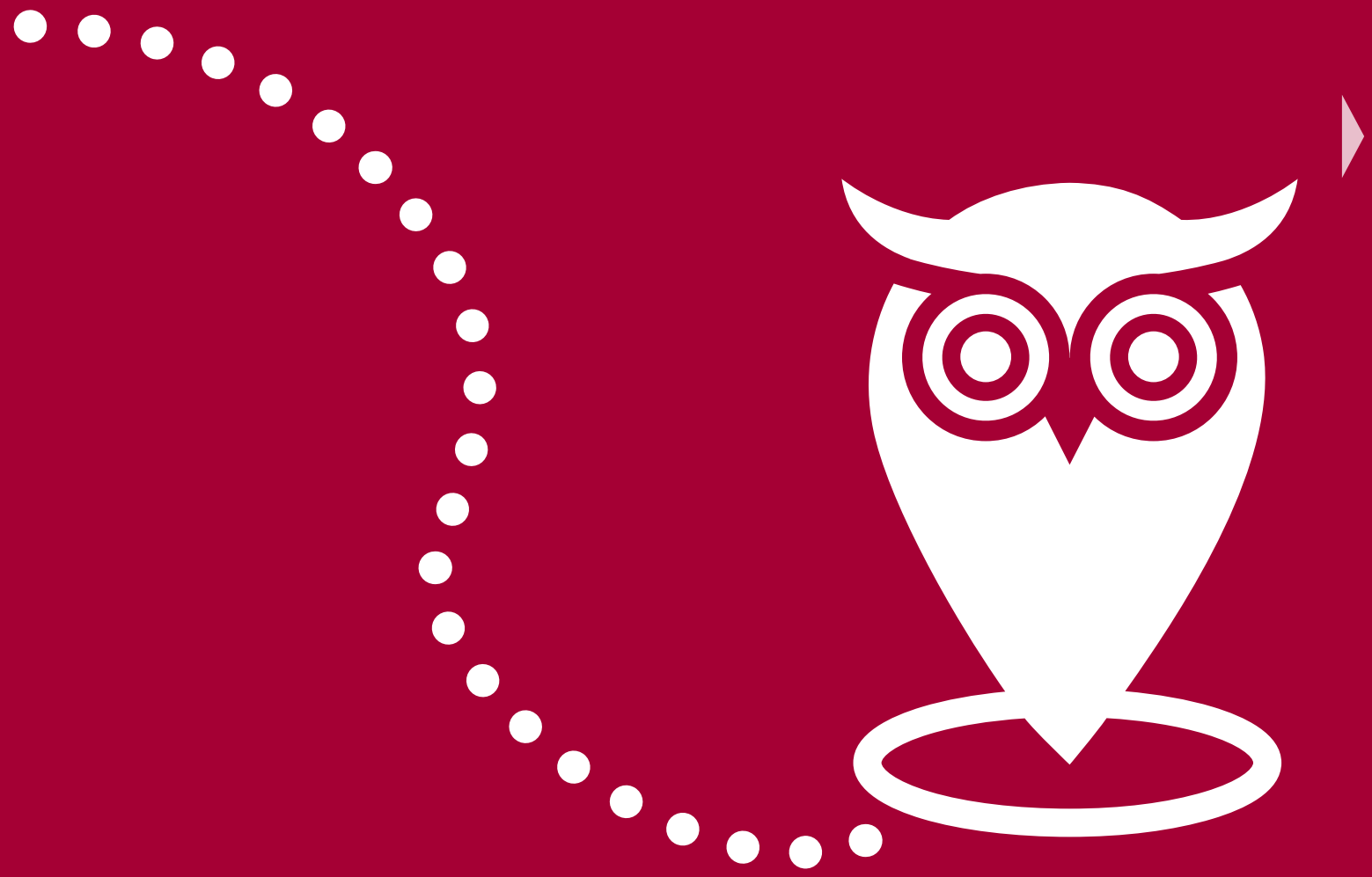
Sample

SSAT's Inspection Tracker Insights

Every School, Every Inspection, Every Need.



ssat the schools, students and teachers network

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About SSAT's Inspection Tracker and Insights Reports

SSAT has been tracking every 'need to improve' comment in every Ofsted report for schools that have been inspected since September 2023. Our aim has been to provide an unprecedented level of analysis of the challenges facing schools as perceived by our inspectorate.

Ofsted's own analysis of their inspection reports provides high level data about outcomes for schools, but little exploration of the themes arising from inspection. Other organisations have provided thematic insights, but these have either been drawn from small-scale report sampling or large-scale computational topic modelling. Both approaches are useful but limited.

SSAT's inspection tracker is different. We look at every Ofsted report for every primary school, secondary school, non-association independent school, special school, pupil referral unit, post-16 provider, and other setting (almost entirely made up of 'through' schools). In other words, our insights report based on the inspection tracker is both comprehensive and incisive.

Looking at every need to improve comment in every inspection report, we identify which aspect of the inspection framework they refer to, and which one of sixty common 'needs' they most closely align with. If the focus of the need to improve comment is completely new, we add it to our comment bank to track future instances of the need.

We also track the town, county, and region of the inspected setting so that we can provide an additional layer of insights about regional and local patterns in inspections.

SSAT's inspection tracker also captures the current and previous inspection grades awarded to schools so that we can provide insights about the relative significance (as well as frequency) of needs for schools. In doing so, we hope to offer valuable information for those responsible for school leadership and governance both ahead of and beyond the inspection process.

Our inspection tracker does not seek to add to the accountability burden faced by schools, but to focus instead on the improvement needs of our schools. Some settings emerge from inspection with no need to improve (which we record and analyse) whereas others have seven, eight or nine specific needs identified. Any proportions cited in this report therefore reflect the proportion of needs and not of schools.

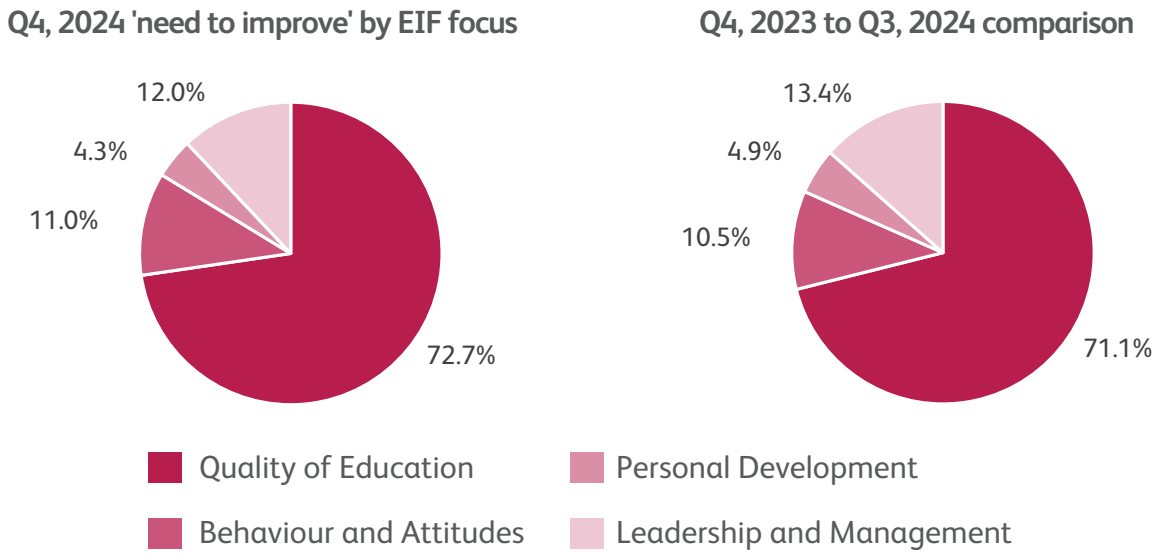
This is the first of our quarterly inspection tracker insights reports. Subscribers will receive four such reports a year: In February for Q4 of the previous year, in May for Q1, in July for Q2 and in October for Q3 and a summary of the previous academic year. Depending upon the level of subscription, we can also offer additional reports focused on the specific needs of subscribers and access to some of our data to enable subscribers to target their improvement work efficiently.

Keven Bartle
Senior Education Lead

Need to Improve Comments and the Inspection Framework

In the final quarter of 2024, 72.7% of all 3659 identified needs in inspection reports concerned the quality of education provided by inspected schools. This marked a significant increase (+1.6%) on the previous four quarters of inspection activity. There was also an increased focus in Q4 of 2024 compared to the previous year on behaviour and attitudes needs (+0.5%).

The biggest proportional decrease in focus was around leadership and management, with 12.0% of needs related to this section of the framework (a decrease of 1.4% from the previous 12 months of inspections). Need to improve comments about the personal development of pupils fell from an already low level of 4.9% of all inspection needs to just 4.3% in Q4 of 2024.



Variations across settings

The table below shows the proportions of needs by inspection framework for Q4 of 2024 for different settings (note: the data were too small for 'Other' and 'PRU' settings). The outliers have been shown in green for those furthest above the mean and red for those furthest below it.

Setting	All	Primary	Secondary	Independent	Post-16	Special
Needs	3659	3302	525	250	113	105
QE	72.7%	77.4%	61.9%	66.4%	54.0%	61.9%
BA	11.0%	9.0%	21.5%	7.6%	9.7%	12.4%
PD	4.3%	2.8%	5.1%	9.2%	20.4%	2.9%
LM	12.0%	10.9%	11.4%	16.8%	15.9%	22.9%

Primaries were far more likely to receive recommendations about the quality of education than any other setting, whilst personal development and leadership and management were least likely to be identified as needs. Behaviour and attitudes were significantly more likely to be identified as a need for secondary settings, whereas leadership and management was far more likely to be a need for special schools.

The top ten inspection report needs by frequency

The first column of the table below shows the top ten most frequently used need to improve comments for schools that were inspected between October and December of 2024. The second column gives the frequency for the same comment in the preceding 12 months, with the final column showing the difference between the two figures.

Need to Improve	Q4 of 2024	Q4 2023 to Q3 2024	Change
Assessment for checking understanding is not effective.	15.4%	14.2%	+1.2%
Implementation of the curriculum in lessons is problematic.	11.7%	11.3%	+0.4%
Subject content, knowledge and/or sequencing concerns.	6.6%	8.1%	-1.5%
Writing skills are not taught or learned effectively enough.	6.3%	1.8%	+4.5%
Attendance and/or punctuality is poor and needs addressing.	5.6%	5.1%	+0.5%
Adaptations to challenge/support pupils are not always evident.	[illegible]	[illegible]	+2.7%
Pupils with SEND are not supported [illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	+0.3%
Phonics and/or reading planning and delivery is problematic.	[illegible]	7.2%	-2.3%
Prior knowledge recall is ineffective leading to knowledge gaps.	4.8%	4.7%	+0.1%
Evaluation of curriculum implementation/impact is limited.	3.1%	3.7%	-0.6%

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Beyond this list, it should be noted that comment 'curriculum planning is unambitious and/or incomplete' is the need with the biggest drop in frequency. Between Q4 of 2023 and Q3 of 2024, it was the fourth most common improvement need at 7.9%. In the final quarter of 2024, it was the 11th most common need featuring in only 2.5% of identified needs, a drop of 5.4% in frequency.

From curriculum to teaching?

The changes in frequency appear to point to a shift in emphasis for inspection teams away from scrutinising the way in which the curriculum is planned and towards the way in which it is delivered and assessed. In other words, the data suggest that Ofsted's focus is shifting towards teaching effectiveness and away from the curriculum planning. This insight is reflected by the proposals for the new inspection framework, with a new section on 'developing teaching'.

The following table shows how the frequency of need to improve comments related to either teaching (the first three rows) or curriculum (the last three rows) has changed quarter by quarter. Formative assessment has been on an upward trajectory most quarters, as have adaptations and the teaching of writing (with a sharp spike for both in the most recent quarter).

The riskiest need to improve comments for schools

One of the advantages of continuing to track 'indicative' overall effectiveness judgements in our tracker is it allows us to analyse not only the frequency of need to improve comments but also their likely significance for schools. The table below shows the ten needs that had the strongest correlation with our indicative requires improvement and inadequate grades in Q4 of 2024.

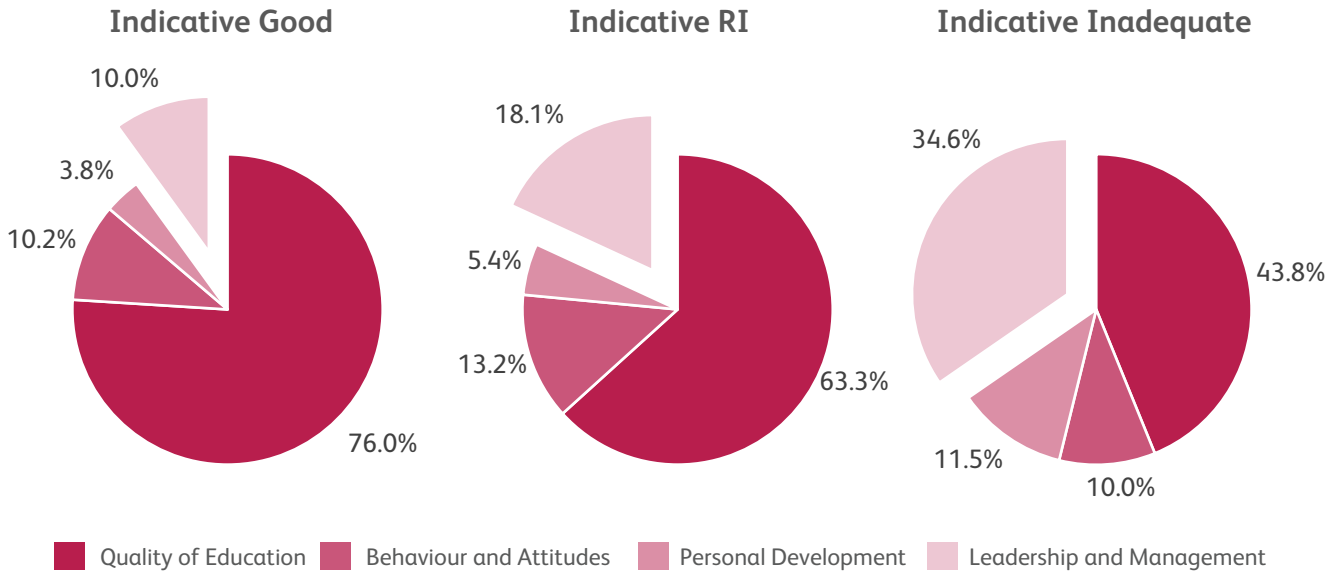
	Outstanding	Good	RI	Inadequate	RI + I	Sample
Statutory safeguarding guidance is not followed or embedded.	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	8 schools
Statutory requirements for PSHE/RSE are not followed.	0%	0%	71%	29%	100%	7 schools
Improvement planning is not effective and/or lacks impact.	6%	25%	31%	38%	69%	16 schools
High level misbehaviour not effectively addressed.	0%	38%	25%	38%	63%	8 schools
Workload and wellbeing issues have not been addressed.	0%	43%	43%	14%	57%	7 schools
Recording and reporting of behaviour incidents problematic.	0%	43%	57%	0%	57%	7 schools
Broad and balanced curriculum is not assured for all pupils.	9%	36%	18%	36%	54%	11 schools
Leader knowledge is not good or poorly developed.	13%	38%	38%	13%	51%	8 schools
Subject leadership is not consistently strong.	0%	50%	44%	6%	50%	16 schools
Governance does not effectively challenge school leaders.	2%	49%	29%	20%	49%	51 schools

It is not at all surprising that statutory requirements around safeguarding heads this list and that statutory provision for personal development is second. Interestingly, and in line with what we have heard about a more nuanced approach to the inspection of safeguarding, 14 schools in that period had safeguarding processes (but not concerns about statutory provision) flagged for improvement with 57% having an 'indicative' overall effectiveness grade of good. As a result, and in contrast to the previous year, this need does not appear on the list of riskiest needs.

Given findings outlined earlier in this report, it is not surprising that, of the ten items in this list, six relate to leadership and management judgements. This includes the most frequent of these risky need to improve statements the effectiveness of governance. As governance is both a frequent and impactful risk, it should be a key focus for all schools.

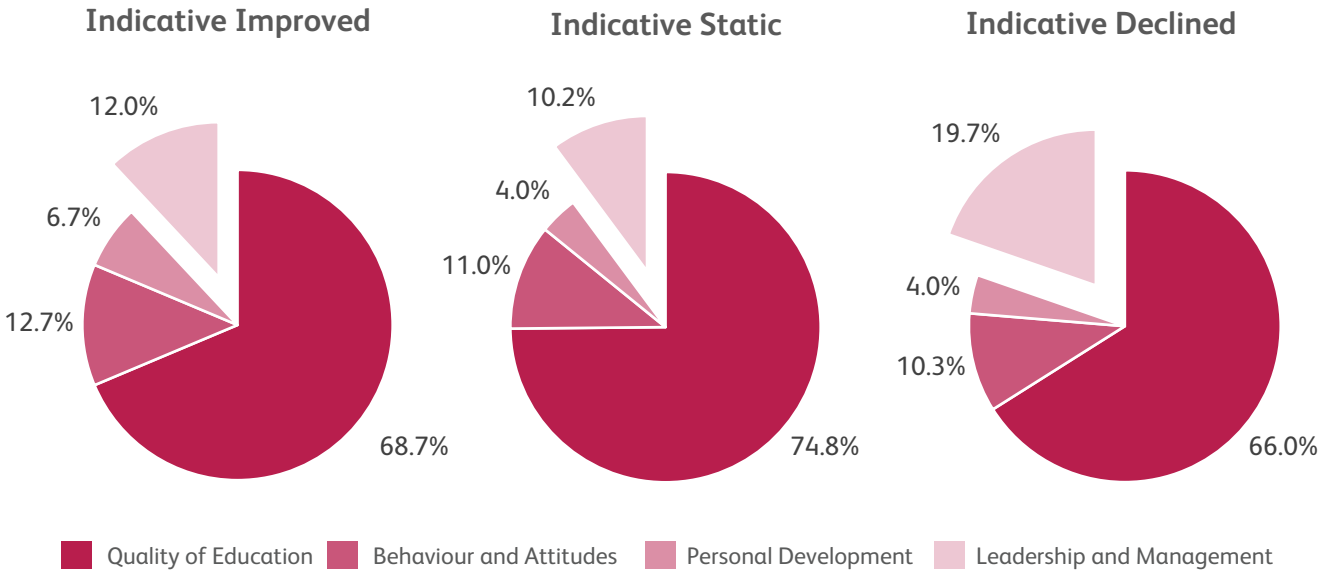
What happens when leaders are seen in inspection reports?

The pie charts below show the proportion of needs comments in Q4 of 2024 for each section of the inspection framework for schools with indicative overall effectiveness judgements of good, requires improvement and inadequate. We have highlighted the leadership and management needs of the charts in order to illustrate their importance.



It is very striking that the proportion of needs about leadership and management almost doubles in frequency with each drop in the indicative overall grading. Only personal development between requires improvement and inadequate replicates this pattern, and behaviour and attitudes barely changes as a proportion of needs across indicative grades.

We can look at the same data from Q4 of 2024 differently to capture whether indicative overall effectiveness grades represent improvement, stasis or decline from the previous inspection outcome for schools. This flattens the patterns indicated in the charts above (declined schools include those moving from outstanding to good for example) but is still instructive.



Quarterly Insight: Need to improve comments by region and locality

Each quarter, we will focus a little more closely on one aspect of the data from the inspection tracker. In this quarterly report, we want to drill down a little further into the need to improve comments by region. To do this we will look to pick out interesting regional insights from indicative overall effectiveness grades and then highlight some of the most divergent needs comments from the data at county/borough level.

Regional variations by overall effectiveness and progress

The table below shows our indicative overall effectiveness grades for Q4 of 2024. We have colour coded as green the three regions with the most positive proportions (i.e. greater proportion of outstanding or good and lesser proportion of requires improvement or inadequate). The inverse is true for those regions highlighted in red. The three regions without colour coding are therefore those closest to the mean for each indicative grading.

English Regions	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate
East Midlands	5.0%	76.3%	18.6%	0.0%
East of England	9.2%	78.5%	11.1%	1.3%
London	20.6%	67.1%	9.2%	3.1%
North East	10.0%	74.2%	13.4%	2.4%
North West	6.1%	63.1%	25.8%	5.1%
South East	9.5%	73.4%	12.4%	4.7%
South West	5.2%	63.7%	25.4%	5.7%
West Midlands	8.9%	72.7%	17.1%	1.2%
Yorkshire & Humber	10.6%	76.9%	8.6%	3.9%
All Regions	**9.1%**	**71.2%**	**16.3%**	**3.3%**

And the next table (overleaf) shows the same data for the year preceding Q4 of 2024.

The regions that have the greatest needs identified by this data, both in terms of the most recent quarter and the year preceding it, are the North West and the South West. From October 2023 to September 2024, both had far fewer good outcomes and far more requires improvement outcomes (remember that these were actual indicative overall effectiveness grades at that time). The North West had, on the positive side, more outstanding outcomes but had fewer good judgements and more less than good judgements.

Since October 2024, using our indicative outcomes methodology, both compare negatively with other regions across all four possible inspection judgements, although the North West has had more good judgements than previously and the South West has had marginally more outstanding outcomes than previously.

Appendix 1: Need Comments by Region

This table shows the frequency of individual need to improve comments in Q4 of 2024 by region. For ease of comparison, the table presents the data as a percentage of the parent row, which are the sections of the inspection framework horizontally highlighted.

English Regions	EM	East	Lond	NE	NW	SE	SW	WM	Y&H	All
Quality of Education	**72.8%**	**71.8%**	**73.6%**	**69.2%**	**76.3%**	**74.1%**	**71.0%**	**69.5%**	**69.6%**	**72.4%**
Assessment for checking understanding is not effective.	21.5%	17.0%	27.1%	19.5%	18.8%	25.0%	24.3%	19.8%	20.3%	21.4%
Implementation of the curriculum in lessons is problematic.	20.2%	18.0%	20.2%	8.6%	12.5%	19.2%	14.8%	15.3%	15.3%	16.2%
Subject content, knowledge and/or sequencing concerns.	7.3%	8.2%	11.3%	8.6%	11.8%	8.4%	8.5%	8.0%	7.7%	9.0%
Writing skills are not taught or learned effectively enough.	6.0%	13.4%	3.9%	10.9%	6.7%	7.9%	8.5%	8.0%	13.5%	8.6%
Adaptations to challenge/support pupils are not always evident.	9.4%	11.1%	6.9%	10.2%	3.2%	7.1%	8.1%	9.5%	5.9%	7.6%
Pupils with SEND are not supported well enough.	6.9%	9.5%	3.0%	8.6%	6.9%	7.1%	6.7%	6.9%	6.3%	6.9%
Phonics and/or reading planning and delivery is problematic.	5.2%	6.9%	4.9%	6.3%	10.4%	6.6%	4.6%	7.3%	5.0%	6.7%
Prior knowledge recall is ineffective leading to knowledge gaps.	4.7%	2.3%	6.4%	7.8%	13.0%	4.7%	7.4%	4.6%	5.9%	6.6%
Curriculum planning is unambitious and/or incomplete.	5.6%	2.6%	3.0%	2.3%	4.9%	2.6%	4.9%	0.8%	3.2%	3.4%
Staff knowledge is insufficient for curriculum delivery.	0.4%	3.3%	2.5%	0.0%	3.7%	2.6%	5.6%	3.4%	1.4%	2.9%
Early years curriculum, learning and/or environment concerns.	3.4%	2.0%	1.5%	2.3%	1.2%	1.1%	0.7%	4.1%	2.3%	2.5%
Maths teaching is not consistently effective.	1.3%	0.3%	1.5%	2.3%	1.2%	1.1%	0.7%	2.3%	1.8%	1.7%
Outcomes for some groups or all pupils are not good enough.	1.3%	0.3%	2.0%	3.1%	0.0%	1.6%	0.4%	2.3%	1.8%	1.3%
Communication, language and/or vocabulary is not systematically developed.	1.7%	1.0%	0.5%	2.3%	1.2%	1.1%	0.7%	1.5%	1.4%	1.2%
Oracy, discussion and reasoning skills are not developed.	1.7%	0.7%	0.0%	1.6%	0.9%	0.0%	0.7%	1.1%	1.4%	0.8%
Opportunities to manage own learning are not offered.	1.7%	0.7%	0.5%	0.8%	0.5%	0.8%	0.4%	0.4%	2.3%	0.8%
Work in pupils' books is recorded inconsistently and/or poorly.	0.4%	1.6%	0.0%	0.8%	0.9%	0.3%	0.4%	1.5%	0.5%	0.7%
Basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics not well taught.	0.4%	0.3%	1.0%	0.8%	0.2%	0.3%	1.1%	1.1%	0.9%	0.6%
Broad and balanced curriculum is not assured for all pupils.	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%	0.7%	0.8%	0.0%	0.4%	0.5%	0.4%
Wider reading by pupils is not promoted or assured.	0.9%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	0.4%	0.8%	0.9%	0.4%
EAL learners are not supported effectively enough.	0.0%	0.3%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
Learning environment and/or resources need improving.	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
English curriculum is not planned and/or delivered well.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Behaviour and Attitudes	**9.1%**	**11.5%**	**11.2%**	**14.1%**	**7.1%**	**12.3%**	**11.3%**	**12.5%**	**13.2%**	**11.0%**
Attendance and/or punctuality is poor and needs addressing.	41.4%	44.9%	48.4%	73.1%	52.5%	49.2%	33.3%	48.9%	76.2%	51.1%
Application of behaviour policy is inconsistent.	31.0%	26.5%	29.0%	26.9%	22.5%	27.0%	22.2%	17.0%	17.7%	17.7%
Pupil behaviour and conduct is problematic.	6.9%	6.1%	6.5%	7.7%	7.5%	7.9%	7.4%	2.4%	2.4%	8.3%
Attitude to learning and engagement are problematic.	10.3%	8.2%	16.1%	0.0%	10.0%	9.5%	4.4%	6.4%	2.4%	6.7%
Regular attendance of disadvantaged and/or SEND needs improving.	6.9%	0.0%	0.0%	3.8%	2.5%	9.5%	2.2%	6.4%	2.4%	4.0%

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Appendix 1: Need Comments by Region *(Cont...)*

English Regions	EM	East	Lond	NE	NW	SE	SW	WM	Y&H	All
Behaviour policy, sanctions and suspensions/ exclusions are not working.	0.0%	6.1%	0.0%	7.7%	2.5%	6.3%	4.4%	0.0%	4.8%	3.8%
Absence coding and data analysis fail to identify barriers.	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	7.5%	3.2%	0.0%	2.1%	4.8%	2.4%
High level misbehaviour not effectively addressed.	3.4%	4.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%
Recording and reporting of behaviour incidents problematic.	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%
Support for student welfare, behaviour and attendance is limited.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%	2.1%	0.0%	1.3%
Rates of suspension or exclusions for vulnerable students is high.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
Part time timetables are used inappropriately for students.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
Personal Development	**6.3%**	**4.0%**	**4.3%**	**7.0%**	**3.9%**	**2.9%**	**2.8%**	**3.7%**	**6.3%**	**4.3%**
Personal development offer for pupils is not effective.	30.0%	41.2%	25.0%	30.8%	45.5%	20.0%	36.4%	28.6%	50.0%	35.4%
Extra-curricular offer, including pupil voice and leadership, is limited.	15.0%	35.3%	25.0%	0.0%	18.2%	26.7%	18.2%	57.1%	15.0%	22.9%
Careers and pathways education is not effective for all pupils.	10.0%	11.8%	8.3%	15.4%	9.1%	26.7%	18.2%	14.3%	10.0%	13.2%
Knowledge of other cultures and faiths by pupils is limited.	15.0%	11.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%	9.7%
Fundamental British values not effectively taught/learned.	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	10.0%	7.6%
Statutory requirements for PSHE/RSE are not followed.	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	7.7%	0.0%	0.0%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%	4.9%
Insecure student understanding of risks.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.5%	13.3%	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%	2.8%
Character, social, emotional and/or health education not strong.	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%	2.1%
Equality and diversity knowledge is underdeveloped.	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%
Leadership and Management	**11.9%**	**12.7%**	**10.9%**	**9.7%**	**12.7%**	**10.7%**	**15.0%**	**14.3%**	**11.0%**	**12.3%**
Evaluation of curriculum implementation/ impact is limited.	39.5%	22.2%	16.7%	22.2%	26.4%	18.2%	18.3%	38.9%	20.0%	25.0%
Monitoring and evaluation processes are ineffective.	18.4%	13.0%	13.3%	11.1%	13.9%	14.5%	15.0%	13.0%	31.4%	15.6%
Governance does not effectively challenge school leaders.	10.5%	11.1%	13.3%	22.2%	22.2%	10.9%	6.7%	9.3%	5.7%	12.3%
Stakeholders do not feel valued or engaged by the school.	7.9%	18.5%	0.0%	5.6%	5.6%	9.1%	11.7%	9.3%	8.6%	9.1%
Professional learning for staff is not matched to needs.	2.6%	16.7%	6.7%	11.1%	11.1%	7.3%	5.0%	3.7%	8.6%	8.2%
Disadvantaged pupils do not learn and/or achieve well despite PP funding.	2.6%	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%	12.7%	1.7%	5.6%	2.9%	3.8%
Improvement planning is not effective and/or lacks impact.	0.0%	1.9%	3.3%	5.6%	4.2%	3.6%	8.3%	1.9%	5.7%	3.8%
Subject leadership is not consistently strong.	5.3%	1.9%	3.3%	0.0%	5.6%	7.3%	0.0%	5.6%	2.9%	3.8%
Expectations of students are generally too low.	7.9%	7.4%	3.3%	0.0%	1.4%	0.0%	8.3%	3.7%	0.0%	3.8%
Safeguarding records or processes require attention.	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%	5.6%	2.8%	1.8%	8.3%	1.9%	2.9%	3.4%
Recent school changes have yet to become embedded.	2.6%	0.0%	6.7%	5.6%	0.0%	0.0%	8.3%	1.9%	0.0%	2.4%
Sixth form retention, attendance and outcomes issues.	0.0%	1.9%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	1.9%	0.0%	2.2%
Statutory safeguarding guidance is not followed or embedded.	0.0%	1.9%	6.7%	0.0%	1.4%	1.8%	3.3%	1.9%	0.0%	1.9%
Leader knowledge is not good or poorly developed.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.6%	1.4%	3.6%	0.0%	1.9%	8.6%	1.9%
Workload and wellbeing issues have not been addressed.	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.8%	3.6%	3.3%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%
Concerns about staffing levels, capacity and/ or deployment.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.6%	1.4%	1.8%	0.0%	0.0%	2.9%	1.0%

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We are SSAT,
the Schools, Students and Teachers network.

We exist to help improve outcomes for all young people. As a membership organisation of schools and academies across the UK and internationally, we work with leaders, teachers and pupils to drive school improvement and innovation, and celebrate their successes. We believe in a **truly school-led system**, with schools working in partnership across and beyond the education sector.

At SSAT's heart are our **membership networks**, bringing together school leaders, teachers and pupils. We have been working with schools for 40 years, and continue to **offer insight and understanding** into teaching, learning and system leadership. Our **professional development** and **school improvement programmes** help leaders and teachers to further outcomes for all young people, and develop leadership at all levels across the system.

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