

State School Self-Evaluation

Using the New Inspection Toolkit Framework

This toolkit has been created to give state schools a clear, practical way to measure themselves against Ofsted's new inspection arrangements (from November 2025).

It takes the official grade descriptors and presents them in plain English, with straightforward explanations and clear next steps for improvement.

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Foreword

This toolkit has been created to give state schools a clear, practical way to measure themselves against Ofsted's new inspection arrangements (from November 2025).

It takes the official grade descriptors and presents them in plain English, with straightforward explanations and clear next steps for improvement.

Our aim is simple: to help leaders and governors quickly see where the school is strong, where more attention is needed, and how to move provision forward.

By turning the Ofsted framework into an action-focused self-evaluation tool, we hope to support state schools in building confidence, accelerating improvement, and achieving the very best outcomes for learners.

Introduction

This self-evaluation toolkit has been developed to support state school education in preparing for inspection under the revised Ofsted framework, which is being introduced in November 2025. It translates the official inspection toolkit into a practical resource that school leaders can use to reflect on their current position, identify strengths, and plan for improvement with confidence.

The structure follows the new Ofsted scorecard approach. Each section of the inspection framework is presented in a table format with three clear components:

- **Grade Descriptor** – adapted directly from Ofsted’s published descriptors, using the most recent terminology (Exemplary, Strong, Secure, Attention Needed, Causing Concern, and Met/Not Met for safeguarding).
- **Explanation for Grading** – a plain-English interpretation to help leadership teams understand how the descriptors apply in practice within a school setting.
- **Next Steps** – concise, actionable recommendations that highlight how providers can move from their current position to the next level, ensuring ongoing improvement and readiness for inspection.

This resource is not intended to replace Ofsted’s official guidance, but rather to simplify and operationalise the framework so that senior leaders, governors, and middle managers can:

- Benchmark their current provision against the inspection expectations
- Pinpoint priority areas for development with clarity
- Use the “Next Steps” as a springboard for strategic planning and quality improvement

By combining the latest Ofsted documentation with practical sector insight, this toolkit is designed to reduce complexity, support reflective conversations, and accelerate school improvement planning.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is a **limiting judgement** under the 2025 framework. It is assessed simply as **Met** or **Not Met**. If safeguarding is “Not Met,” the school’s overall grade will be restricted. Inspectors look for a vigilant safeguarding culture, effective policies, swift and transparent reporting, and staff who are trained and confident in keeping pupils safe.

Grade Descriptor	Explanation for Grading	Next Steps
Met	Safeguarding is effective. Leaders ensure that all statutory requirements are met. There is a strong safeguarding culture, staff know how to identify and report concerns, pupils feel safe, and records demonstrate timely and appropriate action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue regular whole-staff training and refreshers. • Maintain up-to-date safeguarding policies aligned to statutory guidance. • Use pupil and parent voice to test how safe the school community feels. • Ensure governors receive robust safeguarding reports and provide effective challenge.
Not Met	Safeguarding is ineffective. Statutory duties are not fully met. Staff training is incomplete or inconsistent. Records are weak, concerns are not acted upon, and pupils may be at risk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take immediate steps to ensure statutory compliance (e.g. safer recruitment, DBS, training). • Review and rebuild safeguarding procedures and case management. • Deliver urgent training for all staff and governors. • Increase DSL capacity and oversight. • Seek external safeguarding support to verify improvements.

Rationale for your choice:

Leadership & Governance

Leadership and governance are judged at a whole-school level. Inspectors assess whether leaders set a clear strategic vision, raise expectations for all pupils, and hold staff accountable for high-quality provision. Governance must provide effective oversight, challenge, and support. Strong leadership creates a culture of trust, improvement, and sustained success.

Grade Descriptor	Explanation for Grading	Next Steps
Exemplary	Leaders set an ambitious, coherent vision for the whole school. They adapt strategy quickly to meet challenges, inspire staff at every level, and achieve sustained improvement. Governance is highly skilled, providing incisive challenge and robust support, ensuring that finances and resources are used to maximum effect. The school is recognised as a leader in the sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share leadership practices with other schools (e.g. through networks or publications). • Mentor or support other headteachers/trusts. • Build leadership capacity further by developing succession planning and talent pipelines. • Consider extending outreach and partnerships to influence wider system improvement.
Strong	Leaders maintain high expectations and consistently improve outcomes. Governance is active, providing strategic challenge and support. Leaders manage risk well and maintain staff morale while delivering results. The school is securely good with aspects of best practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refine strategic plans with sharper milestones and success measures. • Strengthen governor training to improve specialist knowledge (e.g. curriculum, SEND, finance). • Increase the use of external benchmarking for self-evaluation. • Build capacity for middle leadership to embed sustained improvement across all subjects.
Secure	Leadership meets core expectations. Vision and values are communicated and improvement plans are in place, but impact is uneven. Governance provides oversight and fulfils statutory duties but	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tighten alignment between school improvement priorities and governance oversight. • Provide targeted CPD for leaders and governors to deepen expertise.

	sometimes lacks depth in strategic challenge. Staff performance is monitored, but improvement strategies are not always consistent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the use of data to inform strategic decision-making. • Ensure consistency across departments in monitoring and evaluating quality.
Attention Needed	Leadership shows weaknesses in planning, consistency, or follow-through. Improvement work is reactive rather than strategic. Governance does not consistently challenge or hold leaders accountable. Staff morale or capacity may be fragile. Progress is made but not embedded.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission an external leadership/governance review. • Redefine strategic priorities with clearer focus and shorter timelines. • Strengthen accountability systems (e.g. line management, reporting cycles). • Invest in leadership coaching and mentoring to rebuild capacity. • Re-establish clear communication with staff to rebuild trust and shared direction.
Causing Concern	Leadership and governance are failing to provide vision, strategy, or effective oversight. Improvement plans are absent or not implemented. Governance is inactive or lacks capacity. Weaknesses are not being addressed, and outcomes are declining.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urgently seek external support (e.g. NLE, MAT, local authority, external consultants). • Reconstitute or restructure governance to ensure statutory compliance and oversight. • Produce a short-term recovery plan with measurable, urgent actions. • Provide intensive leadership training or replacement where capacity is insufficient. • Establish robust safeguarding, financial, and curriculum oversight as non-negotiable priorities.

Rationale for your choice:

Inclusion

Inclusion measures how well the school supports pupils with SEND, those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and other groups at risk of underachievement. Inspectors look at equity of access, ambition for all pupils, and the removal of barriers to learning. Schools are expected to create a culture where every pupil feels valued and supported to succeed.

Grade Descriptor	Explanation for Grading	Next Steps
Exemplary	Inclusion is at the heart of the school. Pupils with SEND and disadvantaged groups achieve exceptionally well. Barriers are removed and provision is personalised. The school actively promotes equity, diversity, and respect.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share practice across the trust/local area. • Develop staff expertise in highly specialist SEND areas. • Involve parents and pupils in co-designing provision. • Strengthen outreach partnerships with health and social care.
Strong	Provision for SEND and disadvantaged pupils is consistently effective. Progress is good, and pupils access the full curriculum. Equality and diversity are promoted and respected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen early identification processes. • Expand targeted intervention strategies. • Improve transitions into adulthood/next phases. • Enhance staff training around specific needs (e.g. autism, SEMH).
Secure	Pupils with SEND and disadvantaged groups receive adequate support, though the impact is inconsistent. Access to the full curriculum is uneven. Staff understanding is developing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit curriculum access and adapt planning where gaps exist. • Improve collaboration between SENDCO and subject leaders. • Build stronger parent engagement strategies. • Track outcomes more systematically by group.
Attention Needed	Weaknesses in SEND and inclusion practice are affecting outcomes. Some pupils face barriers that are not addressed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission a SEND review. • Develop rapid action plans for underachieving groups. • Train staff in high-quality adaptive teaching.

	Disadvantaged learners underachieve.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen links with external agencies for support.
Causing Concern	Inclusion is ineffective. Pupils with SEND/disadvantaged learners are significantly underachieving. Equality is not promoted. Some groups may experience discrimination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urgently review the leadership of SEND. • Ensure statutory EHCP processes are fully compliant. • Rebuild trust with families and external partners. • Prioritise safeguarding of vulnerable learners. • Seek LA or external consultant intervention.

Rationale for your choice:

Curriculum, Teaching & Learning

The curriculum is central to inspection. Inspectors consider how broad, ambitious, and well-sequenced the curriculum is, whether teaching enables pupils to learn and remember more, and how assessment is used to support progress. High-quality teaching, secure subject knowledge, and effective implementation underpin this judgement.

Grade Descriptor	Explanation for Grading	Next Steps
Exemplary	Curriculum is ambitious, coherently planned, and expertly sequenced. Pupils build deep knowledge and skills across subjects. Teaching is innovative and inspiring, ensuring exceptional progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share curriculum design externally. • Develop research-informed approaches. • Integrate enrichment and cultural capital at every stage. • Mentor other schools in curriculum development.
Strong	Curriculum is broad and balanced, well sequenced, and delivered effectively. Pupils achieve good outcomes across subjects, and staff understand progression.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refine curriculum sequencing in weaker subjects. • Strengthen assessment strategies linked to curriculum goals. • Provide CPD to deepen subject knowledge for staff. • Ensure cultural capital opportunities reach all groups.
Secure	Curriculum covers statutory requirements but lacks ambition or coherence in parts. Sequencing is uneven, and staff expertise varies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit curriculum for ambition and coverage. • Clarify progression models in each subject. • Provide planning support for non-specialists. • Align assessment more tightly to curriculum intent.
Attention Needed	Curriculum design and delivery are weak. Some subjects lack depth, breadth, or clear sequencing. Pupils do not achieve consistently well.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission external curriculum review. • Rewrite medium-term plans with sharper sequencing. • Provide intensive CPD for subject leaders.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed quality assurance processes for the curriculum.
Causing Concern	Curriculum is poorly designed or delivered. Pupils' learning is fragmented, statutory requirements may be unmet, and outcomes are significantly below expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate action to ensure statutory compliance. • Restructure leadership of curriculum. • Focus on core subjects for rapid improvement. • Develop emergency recovery curriculum. • Seek external support from curriculum specialists.

Rationale for your choice:

Achievement

Achievement reflects the impact of education on pupil outcomes. Inspectors look at progress, attainment, and destinations, considering whether pupils meet or exceed expectations across the curriculum. Strong achievement means all groups of pupils, including the most disadvantaged, achieve well and are well prepared for the next stage of education, training, or employment.

Grade Descriptor	Explanation for Grading	Next Steps
Exemplary	Pupils make sustained, exceptional progress. Disadvantaged and SEND pupils achieve in line with or above their peers. Destinations are strong and sustained.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicise and share effective teaching strategies. • Develop advanced stretch opportunities. • Continue longitudinal tracking of destinations. • Research-informed CPD for teaching excellence.
Strong	Pupils make good progress across most areas. Achievement gaps are narrowing. Destinations are secure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tighten support for specific groups. • Strengthen links to employers and universities. • Monitor consistency across subjects more closely. • Expand enrichment opportunities.
Secure	Pupils achieve expected outcomes, but progress is uneven across subjects or groups. Destinations are satisfactory but lack aspiration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit progress by subject and group. • Strengthen targeted intervention. • Improve aspiration-building and careers education. • Develop cross-curricular literacy and numeracy support.
Attention Needed	Outcomes are inconsistent or declining. Disadvantaged/SEND pupils underperform. Destinations are insecure for some.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish urgent intervention plans. • Strengthen use of data to inform teaching.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and redesign support strategies. • Strengthen accountability for progress.
Causing Concern	Achievement is poor. Large groups of pupils are underachieving. Many do not progress to sustained destinations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate review of teaching and learning. • Urgent intervention for core subjects. • External support for raising attainment. • Rebuild aspiration through careers and mentoring.

Rationale for your choice:

Behaviour, Attitudes & Development

This judgement brings together behaviour, attendance, attitudes to learning, and personal development. Inspectors look at how consistently pupils show respect, resilience, and readiness to learn. They also consider enrichment opportunities and how well the school prepares pupils for life in modern Britain. A positive culture of behaviour and development enables pupils to thrive.

Grade Descriptor	Explanation for Grading	Next Steps
Exemplary	Pupils show exemplary behaviour, resilience, and respect. Attendance is excellent. Personal development is embedded across the curriculum. Pupils are active citizens with strong cultural awareness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share strategies across networks. • Develop pupil leadership further. • Expand volunteering and enrichment. • Showcase personal development in community partnerships.
Strong	Pupils behave well, are motivated, and attend regularly. Respect and tolerance are evident. Personal development is effective and consistent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen strategies for persistent absence. • Increase opportunities for pupil voice. • Further embed careers and citizenship education. • Develop more enrichment linked to the curriculum.
Secure	Behaviour and attitudes are generally positive but inconsistent. Attendance is adequate, but some groups are persistently absent. Personal development is delivered but not fully embedded.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve behaviour systems consistency. • Tighten attendance monitoring. • Audit personal development curriculum for gaps. • Provide staff training in restorative practice.
Attention Needed	Behaviour, attitudes, or attendance are weak. Disruption occurs regularly. Personal development is superficial or fragmented.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and relaunch behaviour policy. • Strengthen tutor/mentor systems. • Target attendance of vulnerable groups.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign personal development programme with clear outcomes.
Causing Concern	Behaviour and attitudes are poor. Attendance is low. Pupils' personal development is neglected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate safeguarding and welfare review. • Introduce strict attendance protocols. • Seek external support for behaviour systems. • Rebuild the personal development offer urgently.

Rationale for your choice:

Moving Forward with Confidence

Completing this self-evaluation is not just about preparing for inspection — it is about strengthening your school's vision, culture, and outcomes for learners.

By mapping your provision against Ofsted's new framework, you now have:

- A clear picture of current strengths
- A practical set of next steps for improvement
- A shared language for governors, leaders, and staff to work from

This audit is fully incorporated into [SchooliP](#), our complete platform for driving school improvement. SchooliP not only supports self-evaluation and self-assessment, but also:

- Improvement planning aligned to inspection priorities
- Staff appraisal and professional development records to build capacity and track growth
- Policy management to ensure compliance and consistency
- Whole-school self-evaluation integrated with daily improvement processes

With SchooliP, your leadership team can move forward with confidence — not just to meet Ofsted expectations, but to exceed them. By embedding this framework into your ongoing improvement cycle, you'll be able to evidence progress, accelerate change, and deliver first-class outcomes for learners and communities.

First-class school improvement begins here — with SchooliP.

References

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Further Reading

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