

Ofsted – understanding the language of a new framework

As of November 2025, Ofsted changed both how they inspect and how they report on schools. This briefing outlines what these changes mean and how Bristol Diocesan Board of Education will engage with inspections and respond to inspection outcomes.

Overview

The changes in the new inspection framework move inspection outcomes away from the previous “single word” judgements towards a new, more detailed, report card. This was done in response to feedback from the sector in Ofsted’s Big Listen. This enabled Sir Martyn Oliver, His Majesty’s Chief Inspector, to hear from teachers, leaders, parents and children.

The new framework shows a school’s performance under a broader range of headings than previously, allowing us all to see how they are doing in key areas of school’s life across a five-point scale. These outcomes are reported as a series of green / amber / red indicators, to help stakeholders see the profile of a school more easily. More details on this and an example report card are at the end of this document.

Our Engagement

The Diocesan Board of Education is routinely notified of any inspection of our schools, we are a key stakeholder and respected as such. It is expected that an Ofsted inspector, as part of planned inspection activity, will contact the diocese and request a conversation with one of our officers.

The DBE will be in touch with the head teacher following the first notification to share support and outline how we will be present. This includes being at the final feedback meeting, either in person or virtually. Our presence at these meetings enables us to do all we can afterwards in support of the school or trust team, as well as develop a clear picture across the diocese of inspection activity and practice.

The DBE meets with Ofsted to share our insights and feedback, as well as sharing our learning back to schools and trusts to enable the wider system to benefit.



Key Challenges

Clearly, one key challenge to address following the new framework and reporting is the format of the report card – it looks very different. Getting familiar with this format and helping staff, governors, parents and other stakeholders make sense of it is crucial. The previous single word judgements, which most schools have as their current Ofsted outcome, are replaced by this multi-faceted report card and we need to actively help stakeholders understand it.

This will raise questions where we see spiky, or varied, profiles. For example, a school which previously had a headline outcome of “Good” may at their next inspection receive a report card as per the one below - areas which are strong, areas at the expected standard, and perhaps one or more areas that need attention.

Given the wider reporting scale and inspection practice of achieving a “secure fit” rather than a “best fit”, it is now normal that a school may have a range of outcomes. This means that a grade can only be achieved where all indicators within it are met. The previous framework allowed for a grade to be achieved even where some areas had not been met. This is a significant change and means school leaders must be confident that they can evidence across the indicator areas of each aspect. One unmet area will move a school from “expected” to “needs attention”, or green to amber, for example.

Clearly, where an area is graded as “needs attention”, the DBE will want to understand the reasons for that, the work happening to address it and the timescales for reaching the expected standard. There will be some information on this in the drop-down narrative text under each outcome. Inspectors have been encouraged to view the inspection as similar to a MOT, seeing these “needs attention” grades as like the MOT advisory – work needs to be done, but it is not of such urgency as to require strong, or immediate, intervention.

However, there is one area which if it receives a “needs attention” outcome would trigger intervention and that is in “Leadership and Governance”. An outcome of “needs attention” here would refer a school to the RISE programme of support. Bristol DBE is always involved in developing and monitoring this support offer working alongside leaders as they navigate it. Please note that leaving this intervention would only be achieved when all areas move to “expected standard”.

Ofsted have said they will revisit in shorter timescales for areas below the expected standard, which means that schools are not left with these gradings for the full inspection cycle. This



allows for schools to be seen within 24 months to review any area judged as “needs attention”. A school can request inspection sooner if they, and their supporting inspector, feel the school has the evidence required to change a grading. Following a visit to review that evidence, a school’s report card will be republished to share any changed outcomes. Obviously, where we see areas needing urgent improvement, or schools being placed into a category of concern, the DBE will be actively involved in agreeing any necessary next steps which may include significant change for a school or academy.

Given the shift in how Ofsted will describe judgements, another potential challenge we see in the report card is the language. Ofsted has been very clear that there is no “trace across” from the old outcomes language to the new. However, we know people will try to equate the two systems unless we all repeatedly remind our stakeholders that we can’t. Also, the use of the traffic lights means that at a glance, we can see a school may have an area which is amber – what does this mean?

The truth is that under this new report card, the DBE knows that many schools will have an area which needs attention. It is in reading the additional details that stakeholders can see what this is and the progress already being made towards reaching the expected standard. In the move from “best fit” to “secure fit”, as well as the added grading areas, this will happen. As outlined above, it may mean that a school has received this indicator because they have only missed one aspect of the higher grading description. This is important to communicate well. However, we recognise this may present schools with some challenging conversations where their profile shows areas in the amber area of “needs attention”.

One area which schools and trusts can fully prepare stakeholders for is the area of “achievement”. This area is strongly aligned to published data from national tests and examinations, saying at expected level:

“On the whole, pupils achieve well. Typically, this will be reflected in their attainment and progress in national tests and examinations, which are broadly in line with national averages, including for disadvantaged pupils.”

The focus on inclusion and the performance of those disadvantaged pupils (which has a broad definition to include a school’s contextual cohort) is a thread across the inspection and, again, this is an area which schools must have defined pre-inspection. In so doing, there is time for stakeholders to understand what any inspection will look at and what the likely outcome will be. Where achievement is not in line with national averages, staff and governors

should know and be able to articulate the trend over time, what is already underway to drive improvement and the impact of that on all groups of pupils.

In sharing information about the new Ofsted inspection process and report cards, the DBE strongly advises schools and trusts to help stakeholders to understand both the new language and the likely new profile of their school. Giving staff, governors and parents the chance to see that the system has significantly changed will support conversations once the report card is published. As with so much, if the first time someone sees the language of an Ofsted report card is when yours is published, then there will be a lot of questions and potential confusion.

Key Messages

- The new framework shows a school's performance under a broader range of headings.
- More areas being reported on against more possible outcomes gives a more nuanced report.
- Previously, inspectors looked for a “best fit” where most of the areas were met. Now, to achieve a judgement, inspectors must see a “secure fit” where all elements are met – taking account still of the language of ‘typicality’.
- These changes mean there is no comparison from the old framework language to the new.
- We will see more “spiky” profiles – more judgements and the use of a secure fit will give a more detailed profile and one where areas which “need attention” are more likely.
- The focus on inclusion is significant and reflects the local cohort, your school population and your vulnerable groups - preparing staff and governors for this is vital.
- Outcomes data, published test and exam information, is pivotal to the “achievement” aspect. Sharing your understanding of it, the work you are doing around it and what it means for the vulnerable groups in your schools will equip everyone well.
- Helping all stakeholders understand the report card and sharing headlines of self-assessment will support communications once the inspection has happened; share as much as you can in advance to help them understand the new process and what you think your report card may look like.

The New Framework

The new framework shows a school's performance under a broader range of headings than previously, allowing us all to see how they are doing in key areas of school's life.

The new dimensions are:-

- curriculum and teaching
- achievement
- inclusion
- leadership and governance
- personal development and wellbeing
- attendance and behaviour
- early years and post-16 provision (for schools that have them)

Previously inspectors reported against a four-point system, but now we will see how a school is doing across a five-point scale.

The new outcomes are:-

- exceptional
- strong
- expected
- needs attention
- urgent improvement

This allows us to see what is secure, what needs further development and any areas in need of urgent intervention, as well as spotting practice which is sector leading and should be shared.

The addition of more inspection dimensions (the things being reported on), as well as more possible outcomes (the gradings), means we will see report cards which show a more varied overview. Please note, safeguarding is still reported on as standards either being 'met' or 'not met'.

To hear more from Ofsted on this, you can read the full documents [here](#) or watch their video [here](#). There is also a link specifically for parents [Understanding Ofsted report cards and grades - GOV.UK](#) and a video for them [here](#)

An example report card is here. It has been formatted to make it easier to read at a glance and easier to view on mobile devices.

This is the overview, showing how many areas are recorded under each outcome. As you can see, there are areas in various outcomes – we call this a “spiky” profile.

Here we see the safeguarding outcome with a click down arrow for more detail.

Here we see which dimensions have achieved which outcome. Each has more detail which will reflect the headlines of discussions and evidence from the inspection.

Ofsted
Home > Search > Primary School

Primary School
Address: School Lane, Old Town, Home County, HC4 5DF
Unique reference number (URN): EG12345

Inspection report: 25 June 2024

Exceptional	
Strong standard	● ●
Expected standard	● ● ● ●
Needs attention	●
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met (Exceptional)
Show

Strong standard (Strong standard) [What does this mean?](#)

- Curriculum and teaching (Strong standard) Show
- Early years (Strong standard) Show

Expected standard (Expected standard) [What does this mean?](#)

- Achievement (Expected standard) Show
- Inclusion (Expected standard) Show
- Leadership and governance (Expected standard) Show
- Personal development and well-being (Expected standard) Show

Needs attention (Needs attention) [What does this mean?](#)

- Attendance and behaviour (Needs attention) Show

What it's like to be a pupil at this school
Show

Next steps
Show



DIOCESE OF BRISTOL
TRANSFORMING. TOGETHER.

These last two sections add more layers about the lived experience of pupils and then the next steps for the school to take.

Bristol DBE, with thanks to work by Salisbury DBE