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Simplify Evidence, Empower Educators



# The New Ofsted Framework: How School Leaders can **prepare** with confidence

A clear, practical guide for headteachers — from inspection mapping to narrative confidence.

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# Introduction

This November, inspections will look very different. Instead of single-word judgements, there will be multi-area report cards and inclusion and context are of much higher importance.

For leaders, this change could be unsettling. Another new framework. More headlines. Less time to prepare.

But here's the truth: **you are more prepared than you think.** The hard work you and your staff do every day is still what matters most. The difference now is how you frame, evidence and communicate those efforts.

## This guide will help you:

- Understand what's changed, in plain English
- See the positives and risks through a leader's lens
- Identify practical steps you can take straight away
- Reduce stress by using evidence you already have



# What has **changed**

## 1. No more single judgments

Schools will now receive a report card covering eight graded areas:

- Inclusion
- Curriculum and Teaching
- Achievement
- Attendance and Behaviour
- Personal Development and Well-Being
- Early Years (where applicable)
- Post-16 Provision (where applicable)
- Leadership and Governance

Each area is on a five-point scale. This ranges from:

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

Safeguarding sits alongside as its own judgement - rated as met or not met. A negative result here is fundamental as it can override strengths elsewhere.

## 2. Inclusion stands alone

Inclusion is now a graded area in its own right, moving it from being a background theme to a headline judgement.

This examines how your school supports:

- Pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- Disadvantaged learners
- Those with social care involvement

## 3. Context shapes evaluation

Inspectors will consider your context, such as demographics, local need, and community partnerships. Context isn't an excuse, but it is part of fair evaluation.

This approach ensures inspectors judge schools in light of the communities they serve.



#### **4. Every inspection is now “full”, and there’s a new monitoring schedule**

There are no short, ungraded visits. All routine inspections are full inspections (s5). Ofsted will run monitoring and focused monitoring inspections (s8) when they identify concerns.

Where a school is graded as “Needs Attention” in an area, inspectors will revisit the school and evaluate if that area has now moved to the “Expected Standard”. We do not know the timescale for this reinspection of the one specific area.

However, during that inspection, the lead inspector can convert to a full inspection if there is evidence that the school may now need “Urgent Attention” in that area.

#### **5. Professional dialogue over “deep dives”**

The emphasis will be on respectful dialogue based on evidence presented and learning walks, instead of deep dives. HMI led teams will have an extra inspector to ensure that conversations can take place.

Ofsted will match inspectors to their expertise. For example, primary leaders will inspect primaries. This approach makes the discussion of what is seen ‘live’ and the evidence presented more relevant and credible.

#### **6. Progression is a ladder, not the best fit**

The new scale works like a ladder. Schools will need to reach the first level of the “Expected Standard” before moving to look at “Strong Standard” evidence. Inspectors won’t let strengths in one part cover gaps in another. Instead, they check for consistency across all the criteria.

#### **7. Comparing against others**

For the first time, schools will be able to see how their performance compares with others in the local area. This analysis will be provided by a new Ofsted tool. This adds transparency, but also pressure to understand and explain your data in context.

## Timeline at a glance

- **9 Sept 2025** - Final toolkits and operating guide published
- **10 Nov 2025** - First inspections under the new framework begin (volunteer schools)
- **From 1 Dec 2025** - Routine inspections begin. Inspections will always be announced on a Monday. Initial conversations with the Lead Inspector will now usually be via a video call. Leaders need to ensure the right people are briefed and available at short notice.
- **Week before Christmas** - No routine inspections; Ofsted training period.

## What this mean for you as a leader

### The positives

You're no longer reduced to a single word. Inspectors recognise strengths alongside areas needing attention

Inclusion is visible, not hidden in the margins

Your school's unique context can shape the inspection conversation

Parents get more detail, with a richer narrative

### The challenges

More graded areas mean more pressure points.

Mapping those areas against existing evidence can feel overwhelming, but **Intelligent Evidence** makes it a **one-click process**.

People may misinterpret report cards and focus on weaker areas.

Every inspection is high-stakes. There is no lighter touch visits.

Dialogue counts. Nominees and senior leaders must be confident in telling the school's story.

Inspectors will set clear actions for improvement on areas below the expected standard. Leaders need to be ready to show how they are addressing those actions quickly.

Schools requiring urgent improvement will face up to five inspections in 18 months. Schools in special measures may face six in 24 months. That means significantly more scrutiny, more often.



## Sector reactions



### Parents and community

Welcome the extra clarity, but headlines may oversimplify the report cards. Leaders should be ready to explain how to read them.



### Teachers and staff

Value the focus on inclusion, but are wary of the added workload.



### Governance and MAT leaders

Welcome more detail, but monitoring and benchmarking may be challenging.



### Unions and professional bodies

Critical of the pace of change, inspector training, and potential for confusion.

**"If this platform can make inspection readiness a by-product of daily leadership, not a scramble every few years, then it's not just helpful - it's transformational."**

**Chris Moore - CEO Link - Salford**



# What school **leaders** can do to prepare



Use this checklist with your SLT and governors. Work through it step by step. ***Print these pages.*** Use the checkboxes as you work through your preparation plan.

## 1. Understand the new inspection landscape

- ☐ Download Ofsted's toolkit and operating guide. Map your evidence against the eight areas, plus safeguarding.
- ☐ Create a one-page inspection map showing lead staff for each area.
- ☐ Ensure SEND, disadvantaged pupils, and EAL learners are visible in your QA cycle.
- ☐ Invite your SENCO or inclusion lead to present regularly to governors.
- ☐ Block time for leaders to join Ofsted's autumn webinars. Share key slides with your team.

## 2. Strengthen your school's narrative

- ☐ Prepare a short context statement covering demographics, challenges, inclusion priorities, and community factors.
- ☐ Identify and develop your nominee/inspection lead; rehearse confident, evidence-anchored dialogue.
- ☐ Look at the sections in the toolkit about what inspectors must consider - have you thought about those areas?
- ☐ Consider key talking points for conversations to ensure clarity and context.
- ☐ Prepare a one-page "How to read our report card" explainer for parents and governors.

## 3. Audit for visibility and impact

- ☐ Run a light-touch audit across the eight areas and safeguarding effectiveness.
- ☐ Prioritise gaps where impact evidence is thin.

**Our platform helps you spot gaps instantly, so you can focus your efforts where it really matters.**



#### 4. Streamline evidence, don't multiply

- ☐ Review your documentation - does it tell you what you need to know?
- ☐ Map what you have to the new areas; address gaps before rewriting.
- ☐ Create a single evidence index. If you use Intelligent Evidence, let it auto-map your documents and flag any gaps.

#### 5. Brief staff with clarity

- ☐ Hold a full-staff briefing: outline the changes, dispel myths, emphasise dialogue over scripts.

#### 6. Prepare for the first term's inspections

- ☐ Track early inspection reports in your region; adapt your narrative accordingly.
- ☐ Establish a weekly SLT check-in to refine your approach.
- ☐ Pre-draft comms for parents and governors to explain your report card when it arrives.

## Calm over panic - it's about preparation

The new framework is significant, but it's not a reason to panic.

Your daily leadership already centres on teaching, safeguarding, and inclusion. That hasn't changed. What's new is the lens through which inspectors will see it.

Approach this with calm preparation, not frantic activity. Focus on clarity, impact, and confidence in your narrative. And remember: you don't need to do this alone. Intelligent Evidence exists to take the legwork out. Think of it as shifting inspection preparation from a pile of folders to a clear dashboard. Inspection readiness suddenly becomes a by-product of daily leadership, and means you can keep your focus where it matters most: leading your school.

**Next Step:** Map one area this week - safeguarding, curriculum, or inclusion. See what's already strong, where evidence is thin, and how your narrative explains the difference your work makes. Small, steady steps now build confidence when the inspection comes.



# How **Intelligent Evidence** can help

You're already doing the important work. What takes time is showing it in a way that's clear, consistent, and inspection-ready.

That's where we help:

**Automatic mapping:** Upload documents once, see them matched to the eight graded areas and descriptors.

**Gap spotting:** Instantly see where evidence is thin without trawling through folders.

**Narrative support:** Pull evidence together into a coherent picture of your school's story.

**Year-round readiness:** Make inspection readiness a by-product of daily leadership, not a panic every few years.

As Chris Moore, CEO of The LINK Education Trust, said recently:

**"If [Intelligent Evidence] can make inspection readiness a by-product of daily leadership, not a scramble every few years, then it's not just helpful - it's transformational."**



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Secure	Covered 0	Missing 18			
Strong	Covered 0	Missing 7			