



Consultation response

School inspections are changing

School inspections are changing

Children in Scotland response

November 2025

About Children in Scotland

Giving all children in Scotland an equal chance to flourish is at the heart of everything we do.

By bringing together a network of people working with and for children, alongside children and young people themselves, we offer a broad, balanced, and independent voice. We create solutions, provide support, and develop positive change across all areas affecting children in Scotland.

We do this by listening, gathering evidence, and applying and sharing learning, while always working to uphold children's rights. Our range of knowledge and expertise mean we can provide trusted support on issues as diverse as the people we work with and the varied lives of children and families in Scotland.

Our response

We conduct a significant amount of work on education and have been an active contributor to Scotland's ongoing process of education reform. We have also been an active contributor to Education Scotland's Stakeholder Engagement Forum on Inspection Frameworks and Models and we have contributed to ongoing discussions about the development of potential inspection frameworks.

We conduct a wide range of participation and engagement work with children and young people which focuses on their experiences of education. This includes our work with the Inclusion Ambassadors, My Rights My Say Young Advisors and our Education Reform project. It has been a priority for Changing our World over recent years and in 2024 Children in Scotland published a [paper sharing the views of group members](#).

We also deliver a range highly regarded additional support for learning services: [Enquire](#), [My Rights My Say](#) and [Resolve](#).

Through our membership, we also hear regularly about the pressures on the education workforce.

Our unique position allows us to speak with confidence on this issue. Our response to this consultation aims to provide an understanding of what would meaningfully improve the inspection process for children and young people and the workforce. It also draws on our experience delivering improvement-focused work within children's services planning through the use of the [How Good is Our Third Sector Participation in Children's Services Planning toolkit](#).

In responding to this consultation, we have focused on questions where we have specific evidence and knowledge.

Overarching position on inspections

It is vital that we consider school inspections within the context of children's rights and incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Inspections are a fundamental part of realising children's rights to education; they support improvement within the school system and can help ensure that delivery of education works for all children.

The inspection process is also a central route for realising children's rights to be heard. While we are aware that the existing process has mechanisms for children and young people to share their views on their education, we know from our work that there can be issues with how this works in practice. We have highlighted how we believe the inspection framework can more meaningfully embed the views of children and young people in our response to question 1.5.

Culture, ethos and improvement

Children in Scotland sees the inspection process as fundamentally being about supporting improvement within schools and we fully agree with the improvement focused model that it follows.

However, we know from our engagement with children and young people that a school inspection often changes the atmosphere within their school. Members of the Inclusion Ambassadors have described feeling nervous about misrepresenting their school, while we have heard from young people about how teachers change how they teach and how the environment can feel stressed.

"The idea of inspections makes me feel nervous – I don't know what might happen. I would be nervous to say or do something wrong."

Member of the Inclusion Ambassadors

We believe that the new inspection framework and model presents an opportunity to truly embed a more improvement-focused ethos and we have highlighted opportunities for this throughout our response.

We believe that alongside the rollout of the new inspection framework, there should be a specific focus on building trust in the improvement process. This should include sustained work with school leaders and teachers, as well as children, young people and families, to develop an understanding of, and confidence in, the improvement process and how their views and experiences can contribute towards shaping this.

We appreciate there are challenges to embedding this culture in a system which is stretched. However, without action to develop confidence in the inspection culture, there is a risk that despite a deep reform process, change remains limited.

Section 1: People involved in inspection

1.1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that having associate assessors in inspection teams strengthens inspections?

Not sure

1.2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that lay members should be part of inspection teams?

Not sure

1.3. Senior leaders in schools are invited to join parts of the inspection process, such as observing learning alongside inspectors or taking part in professional discussions with the inspection team.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that this strengthens inspection?

Agree

1.4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that local authority staff/proprietors of independent schools should contribute to school inspections by sharing relevant knowledge about the local context, including existing partnerships and support available to the school?

Agree

1.5. Inspectors already gather the views of children and young people through questionnaires, focus groups, and direct conversations.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that children and young people should have increased opportunities to contribute to inspections?

Strongly agree

If you answered 'strongly agree' or 'agree', what approaches would ensure children and young people can meaningfully share their views during inspections?

We believe that children and young people should have a greater opportunity to contribute to inspections. This includes considering how the views of children and young people are gathered and how the findings of inspections are communicated. There is also a need to ensure that **all** children and young people feel like their views are valued through the inspection process.

The new inspection framework and model provides a key opportunity to respond to these challenges. To do this, we believe that the new inspection framework needs to embed the Lundy Model of child participation within its approach.

The Lundy Model encourages adults to think about how they engage with children and young people through the 'Space' and 'Voice' elements of the model. It also encourages us, as duty bearers, to consider how we ensure their views are given weight and contribute to change through the 'Audience' and 'Influence' elements of the model.

Ensuring a diverse range of views are heard during inspections

There is a perception among children and young people that that only certain groups of children get picked to share their views about school as part of the inspection process. This view was shared by our Inclusion Ambassadors group. In particular, we have concerns that children and young people with additional support needs are often excluded from the inspection process. This is out of line with the [**UNCRC general comment 12**](#) which offers the following guidance:

"States parties cannot begin with the assumption that a child is incapable of expressing her or his own views. On the contrary, States parties should presume that a child has the capacity to form her or his own views and recognize that she or he has the right to express them; it is not up to the child to first prove her or his capacity."¹

To ensure that the inspection process develops an accurate picture of a school, it is vital that a wide range of children and young people have the opportunity to contribute. The new framework and models must respond to

¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, [General comment No.12 \(2009\): The right of the child to be heard](#), p.9.

this challenge and provide clear guidance for inspectors and schools about ensuring a diverse range of views are heard.

It is important to highlight that for some groups of children and young people, there may be barriers to engaging with inspections. This could include barriers relating to school attendance, or due to confidence when sharing views with a new adult.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the inspection process to overcome these barriers by having flexible, child-led approaches to engagement.

Gathering views meaningfully and with purpose

We also believe that the approaches currently used to engage children and young people in the inspection process do not support all children to share their views. We are aware that at present, the 'pre-inspection' phase involves a survey which is shared with children and young people in advance of inspectors visiting. This aims to provide an understanding of the priorities of children and young people. There are then a series of other mechanisms for gathering views while in the school, including observations and focus groups.

We believe that these approaches could be developed further, giving an increased opportunity for children and young people to set the agenda for the inspection.

As part of our Inclusion Ambassadors project, we worked with Glasgow City Council to support them to consider a more participative approach to their reviews of 'co-located provision'. Building on our knowledge of participation of children with additional support needs, we developed an approach where a short engagement pack was sent out for schools to deliver with pupils. This provided space for children to identify key priorities in ways that work for them. These responses would then be sent back to the inspector and be used as the basis for the conversation during the review process. We believe embedding a similar approach within the inspection process would add value as it would make the 'pre-inspection' phase more meaningful for children and young people by giving greater agency over how they share their views, and on what topics.

We also know that for many children and young people, a standard 'focus group' style approach is not the most meaningful way of gathering views and experiences. We know from our work that a range of creative, interactive approaches are key to supporting children to share their views, and we believe that these known participative approaches could be better reflected in inspection processes and practices.

We fully appreciate that embedding these approaches may add time to the inspection process. However, we believe that the added value this would provide would make this an essential consideration. We would also be happy to continue to work with the Education Scotland team to develop these approaches to ensure they can be streamlined.

Communication and relationships

We also believe that we can improve and increase the role of children and young people in the inspection process through improved communication with a greater focus on relationships.

We have heard from children and young people that they frequently do not get introduced to inspectors and it is sometimes unclear why they are there. This can be a particular challenge when a class is being observed. The new inspection framework and any supporting guidance should emphasise the importance of clear explanations of who the inspectors are and why they are present. (Again, this is in line with the Lundy Model where children should have all of the relevant information available to help facilitate meaningful and purposeful participation)

We are also aware from our work that ongoing relationships with children and young people can be central in supporting them to share their views. As part of our work with the Inclusion Ambassadors (as part of the first stage of engagement work around the new inspection framework), we heard how young people can feel uncomfortable around unknown professionals, particularly when this feels like it is part of a 'monitoring' process.

While we appreciate the challenge of facilitating ongoing relationships within the context of inspections, we believe that more could be done to ensure that young people have the chance to get to know inspectors and to feel comfortable with them.

Communicating with children and young people in informal, relaxed ways can support with this. As can building in time for games, activities and icebreakers to any of the opportunities that children and young people have to share their views. We know these can be vital for quickly supporting young people to feel comfortable and safe to share their views.

Inspection outcomes

We also know from our work with young people that they often feel disconnected from the outcomes of a school inspection. We know from across our engagement work that closing the feedback loop is essential for ensuring that young people feel valued and heard. In the context of

inspections a lack of awareness of the outcome also risks suggesting that the inspection process is not 'for' children and young people.

As the role for children and young people is increased in the inspection process, there also needs to be clear consideration given to the feedback provided to them. This must be accessible, clear and demonstrate how it has responded to their views.

1.6. Inspectors already gather the views of staff through questionnaires, focus groups and direct conversations.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that school staff should have increased opportunities to share their views during inspections?

Agree

If you answered 'strongly agree' or 'agree', what approaches would ensure school staff can meaningfully share their views during inspections?

Please use the box below to share your thoughts however you prefer - a few words, sentences, or longer explanation.

There is a limit of 700 characters

Children in Scotland has less detailed views on how the views of school staff should be gathered. We would however encourage approaches to engagement with school staff to support them to share their views anonymously to allow people to share honest views and experiences.

We would also encourage consideration of the methods of engagement that can be used to support a holistic view of school improvement from across the school staff team. While the creative approaches we have proposed for engagement of children may not be as appropriate for staff engagement, we believe they provide important learning for how approaches to engagement could change.

1.7. Inspectors already gather the views of parents and carers through questionnaires, focus groups and meeting the Chair of the Parent Council.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that parents and carers should have increased opportunities to share their views during inspections?

Agree

If you answered 'strongly agree' or 'agree', what approaches would ensure parents and carers can meaningfully share their views during inspections?

The engagement of parents and carers is vital in ensuring a holistic, rounded understanding of the school community. Children in Scotland is not well placed to comment on the level of engagement with parents and carers at present, nor how well this is set up to gather their views.

We believe that the new inspection process should be firmly committed to hearing from a diverse range of parent and carer voices, views and experiences. The range of approaches outlined here suggest a good range of opportunities for engagement. However, it is less clear what outreach is carried out to support a diverse range of views to be heard.

We would strongly encourage HMIE to consider how it embeds an equalities approach to its engagement with parents and carers as part of the new inspection process. This should recognise that some parents and carers may need additional support to participate or that additional outreach may be needed to hear from certain groups.

Section 2: Inspection frequency and selection

2.1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the current sampling model, where around 10% of schools in Scotland are inspected each year, should continue?

Not sure

2.2. In your view, how should schools be selected for inspection?

Combined approach: a combination of a clear cycle for all schools, with additional inspection based on risk.

2.3. In future, how often do you think each school should be inspected?

N/A

Section 3: Use of grades in inspection

3.1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that using grades in inspections help provide a clear overview of how well a school is doing?

Disagree

3.2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that grades help schools, parents, and local authorities/proprietors of independent schools understand what needs to improve?

Neutral

3.3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that grades can oversimplify what is happening in a school?

Agree strongly

3.4. Do you think school inspections should continue to use grades to summarise how well a school is performing?

No

3.5. If grades continue to be used, what should happen to the current six-point scale? Please select the one option that best reflects your view.

Keep the six-point scale, but change the meaning of each grade

3.6. If school inspections no longer used grades to evaluate and report on key areas, how should inspection reports show the quality of education in a school?

Please select all options that apply.

- **A clear written summary explaining the strengths and areas for improvement**
- **A statement about how effective the school is overall**
- **A statement showing how confident inspectors are that the school can keep improving**
- **Other** (please comment in the box below)

Please use the box below to share your thoughts however you prefer – a few words, sentences, or longer explanation.

There is a limit of 700 characters

Children in Scotland has concerns about how the grading system affects the culture of inspections. Children tell us consistently about the impact of the inspection process on their school environment, highlighting the stress this can cause.

We believe that removing the grading system could provide a mechanism for changing the culture around inspections and making this feel less pressured for all key stakeholders.

The approaches detailed above provide a basis for a clear understanding of a school's strengths and opportunities for improvement. We believe this should be accompanied by a summary of how children experience their school, and a clear list of agreed improvement activities.

Section 4: Notification of inspection

4.1. How much notice do you think schools should receive before an inspection?

Other (please comment in the box below)

Please use the box below to share your thoughts however you prefer - a few words, sentences, or longer explanation.

There is a limit of 500 characters

We have heard from children and young people that they may prefer unannounced inspections as they feel it may gather a more accurate picture. However, we also know that unannounced inspections cause stress for the **whole** school community. As a result, we feel this approach is likely not the most supportive of improvement.

We believe that HMIE will be able to identify the most appropriate notice period to respond to these challenges to ensure the process is supportive. Our primary concern is that regardless of this notice period, the focus remains on improvement and transparency.

Section 5: Pre-inspection

5.1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the self-evaluation summary helps make sure that inspection starts with the school's own view of its strengths and development areas?

Agree

5.2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that schools should be able to use existing documents – like their Standards and Quality Report and their School Improvement Plan – instead of writing a separate self-evaluation summary for inspection?

Agree

5.3. How important is it to gather views from each of the following groups before an inspection?

	Very important	Important	Not very important	Not at all important	Not sure
Children and young people	X				

	Very important	Important	Not very important	Not at all important	Not sure
School staff, including support staff	X				
Parents and carers	X				
Organisations and partners who work with the school	X				

Section 6: Design & content of a school framework

6.1. Which of the following best describes your view on the format of a new school inspection framework?

One main framework for all schools with guidance that can be adapted for each different type of school

6.2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about a school inspection framework?

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Not sure
It is helpful to use the same framework for both inspection and self-evaluation.	X					
Annual (or more regular)		X				

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Not sure
updates to the framework would help schools use it more effectively.						
Including examples of effective practice would make the framework more useful.	X					

The list below shows some of the key areas that could be included in a future school inspection framework. The framework sets out what matters in evaluating the quality of education and helps ensure consistency across schools. Not every inspection will cover every area of the framework. Inspectors may draw on any areas in the framework when planning and conducting an inspection, depending on the focus of the visit.

6.3. How important do you think each of these areas is for inclusion in a school inspection framework?

	Very important	Important	Not very important	Not at all important	Not sure
Attendance	X				
Children's rights	X				
Curriculum	X				

	Very important	Important	Not very important	Not at all important	Not sure
Digital technologies	X				
Health and wellbeing	X				
Inclusion, equity, equality and diversity	X				
Learner achievement	X				
Learner attainment	X				
Learner progress	X				
Learner transitions and planning for progression to positive post-school destinations	X				
Learner, staff and parent voice in shaping and evaluating school improvement	X				

	Very important	Important	Not very important	Not at all important	Not sure
Learning environment	X				
Learning, teaching and assessment	X				
Meeting educational support needs	X				
Outdoor education	X				
Partnerships with communities, other services and organisations	X				
Partnerships with parents/carers	X				
Relationships and behaviour	X				
Safeguarding and promoting welfare	X				
School culture and ethos	X				

	Very important	Important	Not very important	Not at all important	Not sure
School leadership	X				
Senior phase pathway planning and vocational learning	X				
Skills development	X				
Staff wellbeing and professional learning culture	X				
Use of evidence to support school improvement	X				

Do you think anything is missing from this list? Please suggest any other areas you consider important.

Please use the box below to share your thoughts however you prefer – a few words, sentences, or longer explanation.

There is a limit of 700 characters

The above list provides a strong basis for the proposed inspection framework, and we are pleased to see that many of the key areas that children and young people have identified as being important in their education are reflected here.

We know that there continues to be challenges within provision of additional support for learning in Scotland and that this should have an increased level of focus within the inspection framework.

It is also important that consideration is given to how assessments of issues like attendance are made as these issues are nuanced and go beyond a simple % attendance rate.

We would be happy to work with HMIE to ensure the framework responds to these issues.

Section 7: Reporting on the outcome of inspections

7.1. How should inspection findings be presented to different audiences?

Please select the option which best reflects your view.

Two inspection reports – one with detailed information for schools and local authorities/proprietors of independent schools, and a second shorter, easy-to-understand version for parents and carers and children.

7.2. What do you think are effective ways of sharing inspection findings with children and young people?

Please use the box below to share your thoughts however you prefer - a few words, sentences, or longer explanation.

There is a limit of 700 characters

Communicating the findings of the inspection with children and young people is vital for ensuring they feel that their views have been heard.

Communication should take place through a number of routes.

There should be a specific inspection report for children and young people, which clearly reflects how their views have shaped the report and the proposed improvement plans. There should also be opportunities for more direct feedback, for example through an assembly. It may also be worth considering how other methods such as videos, animations or posters can be used.

There needs to be consideration of how this information can be made accessible for **all** children and young people.

7.3. What makes an inspection report useful to you?

Please select all that apply.

- **Language and content which reflects the context of the school**
- **Clear summary of strengths and areas for development**
- **Timely publication after the inspection**
- **Clear explanation of any inspection grades if these are part of the inspection**
- **Examples of effective practice**

- **Recommendations for improvement**
- **Clear explanation of what the school / local authority / proprietor of independent schools is expected to do next**
- **Indication of the support needed to make improvements**
- **Any planned follow-up activity by HM Inspectors**
- **Other** (please comment in the box below)

Please use the box below to share your thoughts however you prefer – a few words, sentences, or longer explanation.

There is a limit of 700 characters

We believe that many of the aspects outlined in this question are important to reflect in the inspection report. A key aspect that we felt is currently missing is in ensuring that the experiences of children and young people are accurately reflected in the report. This should include quotes from children and young people, as well as a clearly articulated link between the views shared by pupils, the inspection findings, and the proposed plans for improvement.

7.4. From the list below, which three features of inspection reporting do you think matter most?

N/A

Section 8 Inspecting nursery classes

8.1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that, when a nursery class is included in a school inspection, its evaluation should be reported separately from the rest of the school?

Agree

Section 9 Inspection follow-up

9.1. In what circumstances do you think HM Inspectors should engage with a school after an inspection?

All schools should receive some form of follow-up

Please use the box below to share your thoughts however you prefer - a few words, sentences, or longer explanation.

There is a limit of 700 characters

A focus on continuous improvement should recognise that this is an ongoing process for all schools, regardless of whether they are already performing well.

We believe that ensuring all schools receive some form of follow up from inspectors will help embed this improvement-focused approach and that it can ultimately help ensure the culture change that is required within inspection.

For more detail, please contact Chris Ross, Participation and Policy Manager, Children in Scotland:

cross@childreninscotland.org.uk