

DfE announcement, single-word judgements and the Catholic Schools Inspectorate – letter for schools

The Department for Education [has announced today](#) that they are intending to introduce a School Report Card inspection system from September 2025. The details of this, and the necessary legislation to bring it about, will be worked out over the coming months. In the interim year, for state-funded schools, they have instructed Ofsted to scrap the use of the single-word overall effectiveness judgement grade.

We understand that due to the current constraints of legislation, the overall effectiveness single-word judgement grade will remain for all other kinds of setting which Ofsted inspects, including sixth form colleges, non-maintained special schools, and non-association independent schools. Single-word judgement grades will continue to be given for the sub-categories until the current education inspection framework (EIF) is superseded in September 2025. In addition, schools that would have previously been graded as inadequate, will still be labelled either as ‘special measures’ or ‘requiring significant improvement’, with all the attendant consequences of such an outcome. A further announcement is expected from Ofsted in response to their Big Listen tomorrow.

All of this has implications for the Catholic Schools Inspectorate. We will be working closely with the DfE and Ofsted over the coming months to understand the details of new accountability landscape for the secular inspectorate. Once its shape is clear, we will be able to prepare a response and make proposals for the future direction of the National Framework for Inspection. Before any changes can be implemented, these will need to undergo wide consultation and formal approval from the Department of Catholic Education and Formation of the Bishops’ Conference. The September 2024 editions (v3.0) of the CSI handbooks were published this morning, and we do not intend to make any further changes to the Framework until this process of reflection, consultation and approval is concluded.

We understand that there may well be an expectation from school leaders that the Catholic Schools Inspectorate would also immediately scrap the use of the single-word overall effectiveness grade. However, there are several reasons why this is more difficult for us than it is for Ofsted. First, as before, the DfE grant funding is connected to the overall effectiveness grade and we will be required to continue to report this grade to the DfE in this interim year. If we are reporting a school grade to the DfE, it would lack integrity to keep this from school leaders and our own bishops. Second, some Catholic schools (as outlined above) will continue to receive single-word overall judgements from Ofsted. Even for those that do not, it will still be possible to calculate the grade they would have received using the current overall effectiveness grade descriptors. Continuing with our current framework maintains a parity between all kinds of Catholic

school and with those that have already been inspected under the National Framework. Third, our current overall effectiveness grade is tied into judgements on compliance with the requirements of both the Bishops' Conference and the diocesan bishop. Work would need to be done to understand how our current compliance checks would feature in any framework that lacked the overall effectiveness grade and it is likely that a redrafting of the Framework itself would be necessary. This cannot be done quickly or without due process. Finally, any substantive changes to the framework will require the approval of the Department of Catholic Education and Formation who would expect us to have made formal proposals, and to have consulted on these, before seeking their authority to introduce an updated National Framework for Inspection. This will take time, and it would be unwise and confusing to embark on such a process, when we are anticipating a larger review of the Framework within this academic year.

Please be reassured that inspections will continue to be carried out with love, integrity, and compassion. Please also be assured that a review is imminent, and that in the interim we request patience with the pace that integrity necessitates, as we consider reforms to the framework.