



# School inspections are changing

## Shape What's Next

### Response

from His Majesty's Chief Inspector  
to the public consultation findings

May 2026



**HMIE**

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland  
Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlam ann an Alba

## His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education response to the public consultation findings

### **Overview**

On 3 September 2025, His Majesty's Inspectors (HM Inspectors) published a public consultation, [\*School inspections are changing: Shape What's Next\*](#), as part of the system-wide review of school inspections. The purpose of this consultation was to gather views to inform how HM Inspectors strengthen inspection as a driver for improvement, public assurance, and best value. This consultation was based on earlier engagement about broad inspection themes and was the first of its kind to be undertaken by the inspectorate.

Under Article 12<sup>1</sup> of the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#), children and young people have the right to share their views about things that affect them, and for adults to take those views seriously. As part of the public consultation, HM Inspectors published a version specifically aimed at gathering the views of children and young people, [\*School inspections are changing: the views of children and young people\*](#).

The consultations ran from 3 September until 26 November 2025. HM Inspectors received 1,142 online responses, with a further 22 email responses. They also received 485 responses from children and young people. HM Inspectors also met separately with 46 children and young people with additional needs and included their views in the consultation responses. An independent contractor was procured to carry out analysis of the findings. These findings are published in the [analysis report](#).

I would like to thank everyone who took the time to engage with the consultation and for the thoughtful and considered responses. I would also like to thank the staff who developed the consultation process, especially for the focus on ensuring children and young people's voices were captured. The approach they took ensured that the respondents had opportunity to share their views and ideas for improvement. This approach has provided rich ideas for further consideration.

### **Legislative landscape**

The [Education \(Scotland\) Act 2025](#) came into effect on 1 March 2026. This legislation establishes the office holder of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland (HMCI), removing the inspection function from Education Scotland. I took up the role of HMCI at the end of March 2026, and the new independent Inspectorate, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), commenced service on 1 April 2026.

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#### <sup>1</sup> **Article 12**

1. States 'Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.'

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

The [Education \(Scotland\) Act 2025](#) sets out the purposes of inspection as:

- recognise effective practice adopted by relevant educational establishments
- promote improvement in the quality of education by identifying areas for improvement
- establish where support may be required to make improvements
- share effective practice
- share evidence to inform the development of education policy
- provide assurance to the public that the quality of education is being assessed and establishments are being held to account accordingly

Alongside the creation of HMIE, the [Education \(Scotland\) Act 2025](#), states that I must establish an Advisory Council. The Advisory Council is being formed to represent the views of those affected by inspection, including learners and practitioners, parents, carers and staff members. It will comprise 15-24 members drawn from stakeholder groups and representatives who meet the criteria as set out in the [Education \(Scotland\) Act 2025](#). The function of the Advisory Council is to provide me with advice in relation to exercising the functions set out in the Act.

The first stage in forming the Advisory Council, is the appointment of the Advisory Council Chair. Recruitment for this role is currently underway. The Advisory Council will meet quarterly, with the first meeting likely to take place in autumn 2026. The legislation includes specific requirements about how I am to engage and respond to the Advisory Council.

I will ensure that the considerations of the Advisory Council take into account the outcomes of the consultation. This means that there are a number of areas raised in the public consultation which I wish to discuss with this Council and wider stakeholders before I reach any final decisions.

My initial responses to the consultation are outlined below. As HMCI, I have outlined my vision for the future of HMIE, and for the aspects that will form the basis for initial discussions with the Advisory Council.

### 1. People involved in inspection

The consultation asked a number of questions about who else apart from HM Inspectors should be involved in inspection. It asked about the role of associate assessors (senior leaders from educational establishments), lay members (people who are not employed in education) and senior leaders from the school being inspected. It also asked about the involvement of parents, children and young people.

### **HMCI response**

The responses show that the role of associate assessors is highly valued, and I would like to undertake work to strengthen this role even further. I want to strengthen approaches to partnership-working across the whole education system to ensure a clarity of message about best practice and areas for improvement. I see the role of

the associate assessor as being integral to this process. **HMIE will implement a new strategy to further strengthen the role of associate assessors over the coming two years.** This strategy will focus on associate assessor recruitment, professional learning and deployment. Approaches will ensure ongoing development of their skills, enhanced through inspection activity. HMIE will work collaboratively with associate assessors to support continuous improvement in the system, by strengthening their role in building capacity and supporting improvement within their own establishments, sectors, and the local areas they work in.

The survey shows mixed results for the role of the lay member during inspection. This is an area I intend to reflect on further, so that there is clarity about the role and its value as HMIE develop new inspection models.

Overall, there was clear consensus that senior leaders being invited to join parts of the inspection of their school would strengthen inspections. Currently, HM Inspectors plan inspection activity in partnership with senior leaders, but I am of the view that this partnership can be further developed and strengthened. **HMIE will discuss with stakeholders and the Advisory Council ways in which the role of senior leaders and other staff on inspection can be strengthened to build capacity for continuous improvement.** I will ask teams to trial some options alongside the development of a new inspection framework. However, any approaches will need to be balanced with the need for HMIE to continue to provide independent evaluation on the quality of education.

As HMIE explore and develop new models of inspection, and with a focus on system-wide improvement, **I will extend an invitation to local authority officers to engage with and observe other aspects of school inspection.** This could include joining lesson observations, focus group discussions or inspection team discussions.

There is still more to be done to involve children and young people in the whole inspection process. This includes informing them about the work of HMIE, exploring opportunities for further involvement during the inspection and being clearer about the outcomes of inspections and next steps. As a first step in this process, **HMIE will develop a section of the website focusing on keeping children and young people up to date.** I will also look to **establish a group or forum so that young people can help shape the work of HMIE.** Children and young people have been clear that HMIE need to make every effort to listen to them in their own schools, about their own experiences, giving everyone a voice. I am committed to exploring further how **HMIE strengthen opportunities for children and young people to have their views heard during the inspection process, and to have a clear understanding of the outcomes of inspection.** This can be achieved in a variety of ways, and this will be part of future plans. There has been a suggestion that HMIE should consider children and young people being given a role in planning for and conducting inspections. This is not something that children and young people have raised with HMIE directly and, as a result, is not an area that I will take forward at this time.

The consultation responses confirm that HMIE should continue to engage with parents as part of inspection. HMIE will continue to seek the views of parents through pre-inspection questionnaires and focus groups. I recognise that there can be barriers to parental engagement with inspection teams, due to work commitments or other challenges. **HMIE will explore further ways to meet with more parents and ensure a more diverse representation of parents** in focus groups. HMIE are committed to trying out new approaches which may include opportunities for parents to meet in online focus groups at different times.

## 2. How often schools are inspected and how they selected for inspection

The consultation asked about how schools should be selected for inspection and how often schools should be inspected.

### **HMCI response**

As could be anticipated, views on inspection selection and frequency were mixed. This will be one of the priority areas I will discuss with the Advisory Council. Moving forward, I need to carefully balance what is practical against what is desirable and achievable with the resources available. An important consideration is the need for robust inspection evidence that supports improvement across Scottish education. **My view is that the current gap between inspecting schools is too long.** However, decisions about the frequency of inspection will impact on the length of an individual inspection visit. I will therefore discuss this with the Advisory Council to consider how long an inspection should last and how often inspections should take place.

The [Education \(Scotland\) Act 2025](#) makes clear that Scottish Ministers will specify the minimum frequency with which inspections should take place. However, before making these decisions, they must consult me, the Advisory Council and any other persons they consider appropriate. It is my role as HMCI to secure the inspection within the determined frequency. This is an area that I will discuss further with Scottish Ministers and the Advisory Council before any decisions are reached.

**I believe that the flexibility of the current sampling model for selecting schools to be inspected is the correct approach** but, again, this is something that will be discussed with the Advisory Council.

## 3. Grades

The consultation asked about the use of grades in the inspection process, and this is an area where there was no consensus. In my discussions to date with various stakeholders, it remains an area where opinions are strong and often polarised.

### **HMCI response**

I am clear that HMIE needs to have some way of giving clear, consistent and succinct messages on the outcome of inspections: identifying overall performance and identifying where the quality of education requires improvement. I need to provide overall national messages about the quality of education, as well as report back to individual schools and their communities. Where no grading scale exists at all, it can

be harder for stakeholders to understand the overall quality. However, I also recognise that use of the existing scale, articulated simply as single word grades, can be a distraction from improvement. There is a clear message through the consultation about the need to focus more on the language of improvement, and there is opportunity here to review how HMIE do this. **I will further explore and discuss a range of options with the Advisory Council and other stakeholders before reaching a final decision about how the use of overall evaluations or grades are taken forward in new inspection models.**

#### 4. Notification periods

The consultation asked about the notification periods given to schools and, again, there were different perspectives on this issue.

#### **HMCI response**

The current inspection model is grounded in a partnership approach with the system, and I don't want to lose this. Unannounced inspections would impact on HM Inspectors ability to work in partnership with schools to plan inspections. This approach would also impact their ability to gather, collate and analyse views, for example through pre-inspection questionnaires, as part of inspections. I think there is scope to work across the system to reassure headteachers that much of the work to prepare for an inspection has already taken place as part of their own ongoing self-evaluation process. HMIE also need to better reassure children and young people that inspectors look at a range of different evidence presented to them, to get as accurate a picture as possible. I will engage with the Advisory Council and various stakeholder groups further about this matter, but **I have no plans to remove prior notification that a setting is to be inspected.**

#### 5. Pre-inspection information

The consultation asked about the pre-inspection process, including the pre-inspection preparation undertaken by the setting and the use of questionnaires. Gathering the views of children and young people, parents and staff was seen as important from almost all respondents. Continuing with a pre-inspection questionnaire was valued, but other suggestions to gather views were also shared.

#### **HMCI response**

HM Inspectors will continue to use pre-inspection questionnaires to gather the views of stakeholders before inspection begins. They will **review the structure and focus of the existing questions to ensure that these reflect the areas which have been raised with us as important.** They will also **continue to review how these questionnaires can be more accessible to all children and young people and their families and explore additional ways of gathering views.**

Self-evaluation by the setting is central to continuous improvement in Scottish education. Overall, respondents placed high value on inspections continuing to start from the school's own view of its strengths and development needs. As a result, **HMIE will continue to start inspection from the school's own self-evaluation but will**

**explore, and potentially pilot, other ways of obtaining that information,** rather than the school producing a self-evaluation document solely for the purposes of inspection.

## 6. Framework

The consultation asked about the design and content of a new inspection framework. [\*How good is our school? 4th edition\*](#) (HGIOS4) is well recognised across the system as serving the dual purpose of supporting self-evaluation and being used for inspection.

### **HMCI response**

I recognise that a lot has changed in the 11 years since HGIOS4 was published and it now needs to be updated to reflect current educational policy and practice. HM Inspectors have already started working on a new inspection framework and engaging on its content and structure. This work will be discussed with the Advisory Council. Whilst I understand *why* it is being requested, I think that different frameworks for schools in different sectors will add additional complexity and burdens on the system that will not be helpful at this time. However, I recognise that the implementation of the framework may look different in different sectors.

**Therefore, HMIE will continue to develop a single framework for schools and, alongside this, will develop separate sectoral guidance to support implementation. This will include updated guidance on Gaelic education.**

The intention is that **the draft new school framework will be launched in January 2027**. HMIE aim for this framework to be digital, enabling updates to be made more easily, and to enable links to relevant national policy and guidance to be included. Pilot inspections to test the new framework will take place in spring 2027 to ensure that the content supports self-evaluation and inspection. Pilot inspections to try out new methodology using the new framework will take place from the summer term 2027 and into session 2027/28. Depending on the outcome of the pilots, the intention is that the new framework will be used for all school inspections from January 2028. I hope this will align well with plans for implementing the Curriculum Improvement Cycle and allow the necessary time for the system to transition from HGIOS4 to HGIOS5. Moving forward, HMIE will also use the framework to support thematic inspections on particular aspects of education.

As an educator in Scotland, I am proud of the strong reputation the 'How good is our school?' brand has with other educators around the world. Whilst I am open to persuasion, my preference would be to give the new framework the rather unimaginative, but widely recognised, title of 'How good is our school? 5th edition'.

## 7. Reporting

The consultation asked about the way HMIE reports on the outcome of inspections and what would prove helpful.

### **HMCI response**

HMIE will continue to provide assurance to the public on the quality of education. This will be achieved through publishing inspection findings in line with the [Education \(Scotland\) Act 2025](#). I am also required, under the [Act](#), to publish a report on the performance of Scottish education. Individual inspection reports will contribute to this overall national report.

Respondents to the consultation had a clear preference for there being two inspection reports, as currently. I recognise that a clear summary of strengths and areas for improvement are of central importance. HMIE is exploring a range of options for reporting to fulfil statutory functions. Reports of individual school inspections must be clear, succinct, and accessible for a range of audiences, including children and young people. **I have asked that HM Inspectors seek to improve feedback to children and young people on the outcome of their school inspection.** Recognising the opportunities to report differently that technology brings, HMIE will continue to evaluate options for reporting as models of inspection are developed.

#### 8. [Inspecting nursery classes](#)

The consultation asked about the reporting of inspection findings when the school had a nursery class.

#### **HMCI response**

I recognise the unique value of early learning and childcare in supporting and enhancing the education and care of our youngest learners. In September 2025, HMIE and the Care Inspectorate published the [Quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors](#). This shared framework supports self-evaluation and is also used by HMIE and the Care Inspectorate to carry out inspections of early learning and childcare settings. This includes inspections that HMIE undertakes independently and in partnership with the Care Inspectorate as part of a shared inspection.

Because this framework is new, and the consultation was broadly in favour of nursery evaluations being published separately, **HMIE will continue to inspect nursery classes using** the [Quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors](#) for the time being.

#### 9. [Inspection follow-up](#)

The consultation asked in what circumstances inspectors should engage with a school after an inspection.

#### **HMCI response**

Responses to the consultation show there is a desire for all schools to receive some form of follow-up from HMIE to support improvement. However, the [Education \(Scotland\) Act 2025](#), is very clear that the role of HMIE should be independent. This means that it is not appropriate for inspectors to carry out follow-up improvement visits to schools if this is not required. I also do not have the resources available to undertake this level of activity without compromising our responsibilities as set out in

the [Act](#). It is my view that HMIE can further strengthen partnership working with stakeholders across the education system. This will include the development of the role of associate assessors and the invitation to local authority officers to be involved with inspection processes. HMIE supports improvement through strengthening the sharing of good practice and providing clear reports on the performance of Scottish education and associated recommendations.

**HMIE will continue to carry out further inspection activity when a school is not providing a sufficient quality of education and inspectors do not think the school has the capacity to improve without additional support or external evaluation.**

## **Conclusion**

All the above responses are in connection with the consultation carried out at the end of 2025 about school inspections. It is a requirement of the [Education \(Scotland\) Act 2025](#) that I establish an Advisory Council and that this Council will help advise me on an inspection plan. This inspection plan will clearly identify the work of HMIE over a three-to-five-year period and will be published as soon as reasonably practicable. The plan will cover the totality of the work of HMIE as well as school inspections. In the responses above I have shared my own vision for HMIE and my own thoughts on the consultation of school inspections. The inspection plan will be the main vehicle for taking forward and reporting on future actions. I look forward to working with a variety of stakeholders across the education system to establish and drive forward this plan.

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