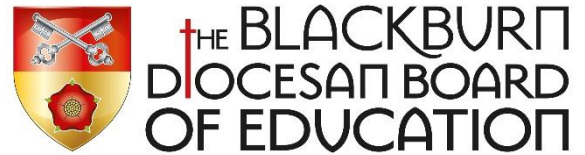


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6th February 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to share some information about the current Ofsted inspection framework, as many parents have found recent inspection outcomes across the country confusing or surprising. My hope is that this explanation will help you understand what sits behind the judgements schools receive, both now and whenever your child's school is inspected in future. Whilst all schools welcome scrutiny and accountability the updated Inspection Framework is still in its infancy and the transition from one accountability model to another can take adjustment for all concerned.

A Shift in Expectations

Ofsted has made a number of changes to how schools are inspected. One of the biggest shifts is that the grade "Expected" is now much harder to achieve than the previous grade of "Good."

If a school receives "Expected", this is something to celebrate—it means the school is meeting a very high bar.

This rise in challenge is partly due to a move away from a "best fit" approach (where inspectors looked at the overall picture) to a "secure fit" model, which means that schools are expected to meet all parts of the criteria in full. As a result, direct comparison between a previous "Good" and a current "Expected" is not always appropriate; they are based on different criteria, different expectations, and a higher standard of evidence.

"Needs Attention" – An Important Clarification

You may also see elements of a report described as "Needs Attention."

Ofsted is clear in its public guidance that:

- "Needs Attention" is not a fail,
- and it is entirely normal for schools to have areas that require further development.

This wording simply reflects where practice is still embedding or where additional focus is needed. Many schools—no matter how strong—will have such areas, particularly during a period in which the inspection framework has changed so significantly.

(Parents can view Ofsted's own explanation here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbl0FvY976g>)

New Criteria and Embedded Practice

Another significant change is that schools are being judged on new areas of practice that were not part of the inspection expectations last year. These new elements are expected to be fully embedded, even though they are still very new. Naturally, this will take time for all schools to implement well.

A Stronger Emphasis on Data

Although Ofsted previously spoke positively about taking school context into account, this is no longer as clear.

Outcomes now place a much stronger emphasis on achievement data, including:

- Overall attainment, not just progress
- Attendance, which has become a major focus

As a result, schools doing excellent day-to-day work with children may nevertheless receive outcomes that feel harsh if their data does not align closely with national expectations—sometimes despite all their best efforts and the particular needs of their pupils.

Greater Scrutiny of Headteachers and Leaders

This inspection framework was introduced with the intention of supporting the wellbeing of school leaders and reducing pressure. Sadly, many leaders are experiencing the opposite.

Inspections now involve greater scrutiny, with more inspectors on site and higher expectations across all areas. As a result, the demands placed on headteachers and senior staff have increased significantly.

As someone who visits schools across the diocese regularly, I see first-hand the dedication and compassion with which our headteachers and staff serve your children. They work tirelessly—often in challenging circumstances—and continue to lead with integrity and care.

I want to thank you for the support, understanding, and kindness you already show to our school leaders, particularly during inspection weeks. Your encouragement makes a real difference, and it is deeply appreciated by those who work so hard for the good of your children and the life of the school.

What Matters Most

I would wish to end by reiterating that our schools, and all those professionals within them, understand the need for external scrutiny and the role Ofsted plays in ensuring that the children within their care are given the very best opportunities.

Even with these national changes, our commitment remains the same:

- We want every child, regardless of background, to reach their full potential.
- High expectations matter because our children deserve the very best.
- Everything our schools do is rooted in helping pupils flourish academically, personally, and spiritually.

Key Points to Remember

- **“Expected” is harder to achieve than “Good”**—and is something to be proud of.
- **“Needs Attention” is not a fail**, and it is normal for schools to have areas identified for further work.
- **New criteria are being inspected immediately**, even though they take time to embed.
- **Achievement and attendance data now have a major influence** on the outcome of an inspection.
- **Leaders face greater scrutiny**, so please support them during inspection weeks.
- Above all, schools remain focused on **our children**, helping them grow into capable, compassionate and confident young people.

Thank you, as always, for your partnership, your encouragement, and the trust you place in our schools every day.

With every blessing,



Mr Iain Parks
Director of Education
Blackburn Board of Education