

November 2025

CONSULTATION RESPONSE **SCHOOL INSPECTIONS ARE CHANGING**

About Forces Children Scotland

Forces Children Scotland supports children and young people from serving personnel, reservist and veteran families to reach their potential and thrive. We achieve this by working collaboratively across sectors to drive improvements which reflect and support the unique challenges they face. We amplify their voices, ensuring they are heard and influence the development of policy and practice.

The Forces Context

We conduct a wide range of participation and engagement work with children and young people which focuses on their experiences of education. Children and young people from armed forces communities consistently tell us that accessing education that delivers their rights is a significant challenge. This includes adapting to different educational and learning environments with each new posting, being able to access the subjects of their choice that promote their interests and talents and receiving the right support when faced with military related challenges such as deployment and separation from their serving parent.

The importance of education, learning, and inspection is reflected in the coproduced Forces Children's Rights Charter. The Education Principle in the charter says the following:

My education helps me to be my best self now and in the future (Best learning for me) (Articles 28 and 29)

- My education needs to be about more than my academic achievements.
- If I move or my parents become veterans, my education should be disrupted as little as possible. I get a well-planned move, so I don't miss anything that is important to me. The timing should be best for me. This is easy to negotiate. I know as much as I can about my new school before I move.
- My information comes with me to my new school. It is straight away, and I am part of collecting it.
- I get extra help if I need it, to be my best or catch up. I should not have to explain what I need every time I move. Support should be easy to access.

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- Schools should be assessed on how well they meet forces children's needs, regardless of where I am and how many forces children there are in my school.

The Charter is underpinned by the finding of our report 'It's not just their job, it's our whole lives – An exploration of human rights for children and young people from armed forces families' which showed that forces children's experience of education has an impact on the realisation of their rights, beyond their learning and qualifications. 17% of families with school-aged children experienced a change in school for service reasons in the last 12 months¹. Moving around frequently can create challenges for children and young people from forces families. The Tri-service families Continuous Attitude Survey (FamCAS) reported that families who moved were more likely to experience difficulties with their children's schooling compared to those who did not move². Children and young people end up repeating or completely missing parts of the curriculum^{3 4}.

"I missed two years of primary school due to moving back and forwards between the UK and Germany, also repeating topics between England and Scotland. I wasn't supported with hobbies and interests, so I was bored." Cadence

Our distinctive perspective allows us to contribute confidently to this discussion. Through this consultation response, we aim to show what would make the inspection process more effective for children and young people from forces families.

School Inspections

Forces Children Scotland welcomes the commitment by the Scottish Government to reform the school inspection process. We would like to see this inspection process include mechanisms to hear from those voices less heard and to consider how the inspection process can meet the needs of those with significant educational needs but are a small minority in a school community, such as where only one or two forces children are in a school.

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

¹ [UK Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2023 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk), page 17.

² [UK Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2023 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk), page 30.

³ Children's Commissioner, [Kin and Country: Growing Up as an Armed Forces Child](#), June 2018, page 7.

⁴ [Focus-On-Families-Report.pdf \(dsc.org.uk\)](#)

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Our overarching position on inspections

It is essential to view school inspections through a children's rights lens, particularly in the context of Scotland's commitment to incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Inspections play a key role in upholding children's right to education; they drive improvement across the school system and help ensure that learning works for every child.

Inspections are also a critical mechanism for realising children's right to be heard. While we recognise that current processes provide opportunities for children and young people to share their views, our work shows that there are challenges in how to meaningfully engage children and young people from forces families.

Culture, ethos and improvement

Forces Children Scotland believes the core purpose of inspection is to support school improvement, and we strongly endorse any model with a focus on continuous improvement rather than quality assurance.

We know from our engagement with children and young people from forces families that their needs as a lesser heard group are often not given sufficient consideration in the inspection process. We strongly believe that an improvement process that creates a better learning environment for forces children will achieve better results for all children.

We believe the new inspection framework offers a real opportunity to strengthen an improvement-focused culture, and we have highlighted ways to support this throughout our response. Alongside implementation of the new model, there must be a deliberate effort to build trust in the improvement process. This should involve sustained engagement with school leaders, teachers, children, young people, and families to develop a shared understanding of the process and confidence that their views genuinely shape it.

We need to move away from a quality-assurance model that encourages schools to present only their best side and involve only children who are doing well. Instead, inspection should be seen as a shared opportunity to learn and improve. Only in this culture will we truly hear what children and young people think, including those with different or less positive experiences.

We recognise the challenges of embedding this culture within a system under significant pressure. However, without proactive work to build confidence in inspections, there is a risk that, despite substantial reform, the impact of these changes will be limited.

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Meaningfully involving Forces Children and Young People in Inspection

Children from armed forces families may be reluctant to speak up because military culture strongly emphasises hierarchy, discipline, unity, and putting the mission before individual needs. These values—essential for operational effectiveness—often shape family life too. As a result, children can internalise expectations of loyalty, stoicism, and not challenging authority.

The same respect for the chain of command that makes it difficult for serving personnel to question superiors can influence how children behave in civilian settings. This can make them less confident about voicing concerns, especially in formal, hierarchical situations like school inspections.

Many forces children may therefore need additional support to share their views, to trust that they will be heard, and to feel safe expressing perspectives that differ from dominant military narratives of resilience, sacrifice, and cohesion. Being attentive to these power dynamics is crucial when involving them in any participatory activity.

Our participation principles guide how we ensure forces children are meaningfully involved in change and we believe that they can be used to genuinely shape inspections. Embedding the Lundy Model is essential so that children have the space, support and confidence to share their views, and so their voices carry real influence. Genuine power sharing with children and young people is essential to realise the culture of improvement. For inspections to be meaningful, children and young people must have the opportunity to determine what is prioritised and discussed.

Inspections must actively seek a wide and diverse range of perspectives, not only those who are most confident or visible. From our perspective, this must include children and young people from armed forces families. Flexible, child-led and creative approaches, rather than standard focus groups, help children express their experiences in ways that feel meaningful to them.

Strong communication and trusting relationships are central, especially given the impact of military culture on children's willingness to speak openly. Informal conversations, time for connection, and activities that help children feel safe and comfortable all strengthen participation.

Finally, forces children must see how their views shaped outcomes. They tell us that when their views are sought, they do not know what impact it has and do not see any change. Clear, accessible feedback that closes the loop is vital for ensuring they feel respected, valued and heard.

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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?

Agree

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?

There is a limit of 700 characters

Meaningful participation requires embedding the Lundy Model, so children have space to share their views, feel heard, and see their contributions influence outcomes.

Inspections must actively seek a diverse range of voices, not just those of confident or high-achieving children and should include forces children in schools where there is a high population. Enough time for flexible, child-led, and creative approaches, beyond standard focus groups, are essential, including informal discussions, activities, and games that build trust and comfort. Clear, accessible feedback is vital, so children understand how their views have shaped inspection findings.

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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

We encourage using engagement methods that allow school staff to share their views anonymously, enabling honest feedback. We recommend considering approaches that capture a holistic perspective of school improvement from across the entire staff team. We recommend that methods take account of the hierarchy within schools, the power dynamics and the prevalent assessment and grading culture. The approach should foster a culture of learning and improvement rather than quality assurance and grading.

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?

Engaging parents and carers is essential for a holistic understanding of the school community. The new inspection process should actively seek diverse parent and carer voices and experiences. We know that parents from forces families can have an apathy to getting involved in formal school structures. Outreach is key, particularly for forces families, who may be less likely to engage due to frequent school moves, perceived stigma, or unfamiliarity with the Scottish education system. Support should be provided to enable them to share their unique perspectives and awareness of other systems. We strongly encourage HMIE to embed an equalities-focused approach in parent and carer engagement.

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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?

None of the above

Do you have a different view on how often inspections should take place?

To foster a culture of improvement and learning there should be an ongoing process of lighter touch inspections that develop relationships, are strongly linked to self-evaluation processes that have embedded children and young people's genuine and representative participation in what is evaluated and are linked to the Local Authority Quality Improvement activity. Given the change in culture which can quickly occur with a change of leadership, there should be trigger points for inspection based on change of leadership or another significant change.

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

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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

Forces Children Scotland is concerned that the current grading system negatively affects the culture of inspections. Children and young people from forces families report that it can lead to only certain children and young people having a voice and therefore not all experiences represented. Removing grades could help shift the focus from quality assurance to improvement, making inspections less pressured for schools, staff, and pupils and fostering a culture of inclusive participation to ensure learning. The approaches outlined above offer a clear picture of a school's strengths and areas for improvement, particularly when shared alongside a defined set of agreed improvement actions.

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

In line with our participation principles, meaningful involvement of children and young people, especially those with additional needs, requires careful planning and time. We do

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not recommend a specific notice period for inspections but encourage HMIE and schools to agree this collaboratively with children, young people, and parents. Our priority is that whatever the notice period, the process is continuous and remains focused 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				
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?

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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) updates to the framework would help schools use it more effectively.		X				
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

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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				
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	x				

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school improvement					
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				
School leadership	x				
Senior phase pathway planning and vocational learning	x				
Skills development	x				
Staff wellbeing and professional	x				

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learning culture					
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

We welcome the reflection of all elements of the Forces Children's Rights Charter within the above list. To strengthen the inspection framework there should be greater emphasis placed on additional support for learning, recognising that forces children face unique challenges such as long or unexpected separations, which can affect engagement and achievement at key points of their learning journey. Given the higher number of transitions they experience, inspections should also assess the quality and timeliness of school onboarding, offboarding, and record transfers throughout a child's school journey, not just at post-school stages, and quality of support for learning gaps and strengths.

Section 7: Reporting on the outcome of inspections

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

Other (please comment in the box below)

Three inspection reports – one with detailed information for schools and local authorities/proprietors of independent schools, shorter, easy-to-understand version for parents and carers, AND an accessible version for children and young people addressing specifically the issues they raised during the pre-inspection and inspection.

Consideration should be given to meaningfully involving children and young people in how their report should be presented, using formats such as short-form videos.

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

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Sharing inspection findings with children and young people is essential to show that their views have been heard.

Communication should use multiple channels, including a child-friendly inspection report that clearly shows how their input shaped the findings and improvement plans. Direct feedback, such as through assemblies, and creative methods like videos, animations, or posters, should also be considered.

All information must be made accessible to ensure every child and young person can engage with it and where possible co-created with them.

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

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

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 many of the points in this question are important to include in the inspection report. One key area currently missing is accurately reflecting the experiences and views of children and young people. Reports should feature direct quotes and clearly show how pupils' views have informed the inspection findings and the proposed improvement plans.

We would also like to see terminology such as 'areas for development' reframed in improvement and learning language, such as 'clear summary of strengths and opportunities for learning and improvement' and 'examples of innovative practice', thus supporting the culture change we are calling for in the About Us section.

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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?

N/A

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

Continuous improvement should be recognised as an ongoing process for all schools, including those already performing well. We believe that providing all schools with some form of follow-up from inspectors will reinforce an improvement-focused approach and support the culture change needed within inspections.

For more detail, please contact Meg Thomas, Deputy CEO and Policy Lead, Forces Children Scotland:

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