ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

Annual review of inspections

2025–26

Department for Education

ISI is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other regulatory requirements are met.

ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

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Foreword

This review of ISI inspections during 2025-26 builds on insights shared in our ISI annual review 2024-25. This is the third year in which we present thematic insights from each section of the national framework for association independent schools, and information on all remits inspected by ISI.

In this review we share an overview of what is working well in schools, drawing on inspectors' reporting of positive aspects of leaders' decision-making and its impact for pupils. We also share insights about what could improve through our thematic analysis of both recommended next steps and areas for action from inspections during the academic year 2025 – 2026.

On inspection we look at the significance of what we see, hear and read in relation to the requirements of the Independent School Standards and the impact for pupils.

ISI's four inspection principles of manageability, collaboration, triangulation and typicality, and proportionality guide the practice of our inspectors and form the basis of a shared understanding of our inspection methodology. Inspectors apply these principles through our professional noticing methodology. Inspection evidence is gathered through questions inspectors ask themselves and each other: What do I notice and why does it matter? How does it fit and what more do I need to know?

During this academic year and in anticipation of reaching the mid-point in our six-year inspection cycle we consulted on the reporting of significant strengths during routine inspections of independent schools. The response we had confirmed our proposal to remove significant strengths from the inspection framework and from our guidance to inspectors in the inspection handbook from September 2026.

Following the introduction of our current national inspection framework in 2023, we have revised and updated our inspection frameworks in our other inspection remits: British Schools Overseas and Private Further Education.

Our ISI BSO framework, introduced in May 2025, aligns closely with the national inspection framework for independent schools in England. We have increased our presence in the international education sector and continue to recruit senior leaders in international schools as ISI BSO inspectors.

Ofsted's monitoring of BSO inspectorates again highlighted the quality of ISI BSO inspections and praised the 'system wide rigour' of our inspection methodology. We are seeing increased demand for ISI BSO inspections across the world.

Our inspector training is focused on the continuous development of the skills and knowledge needed to consistently deliver high-quality inspections.

This year has seen the introduction of a new initiative with the Chartered College of Teaching that will provide external assurance for our inspector training, and an externally validated accreditation pathway for ISI inspectors.

As are other organisations, we are focusing on the appropriate use of technology to enhance processes and support human decision-making at the heart of inspection.

We continue to value the many conversations and engagements we have with stakeholders about the role of inspection in the wider regulatory and assurance process. We are mindful of the privilege it is to inspect schools and seek to share our thinking and the outcome of our work through this review. I hope you enjoy reading it.



Vanessa Ward
Chief Inspector-CEO

About ISI

ISI is accountable to the UK Government and appointed to inspect a range of education settings in England and British schools overseas.

These cover over 1300 association independent schools and further education colleges which together educate over half a million children and young people.

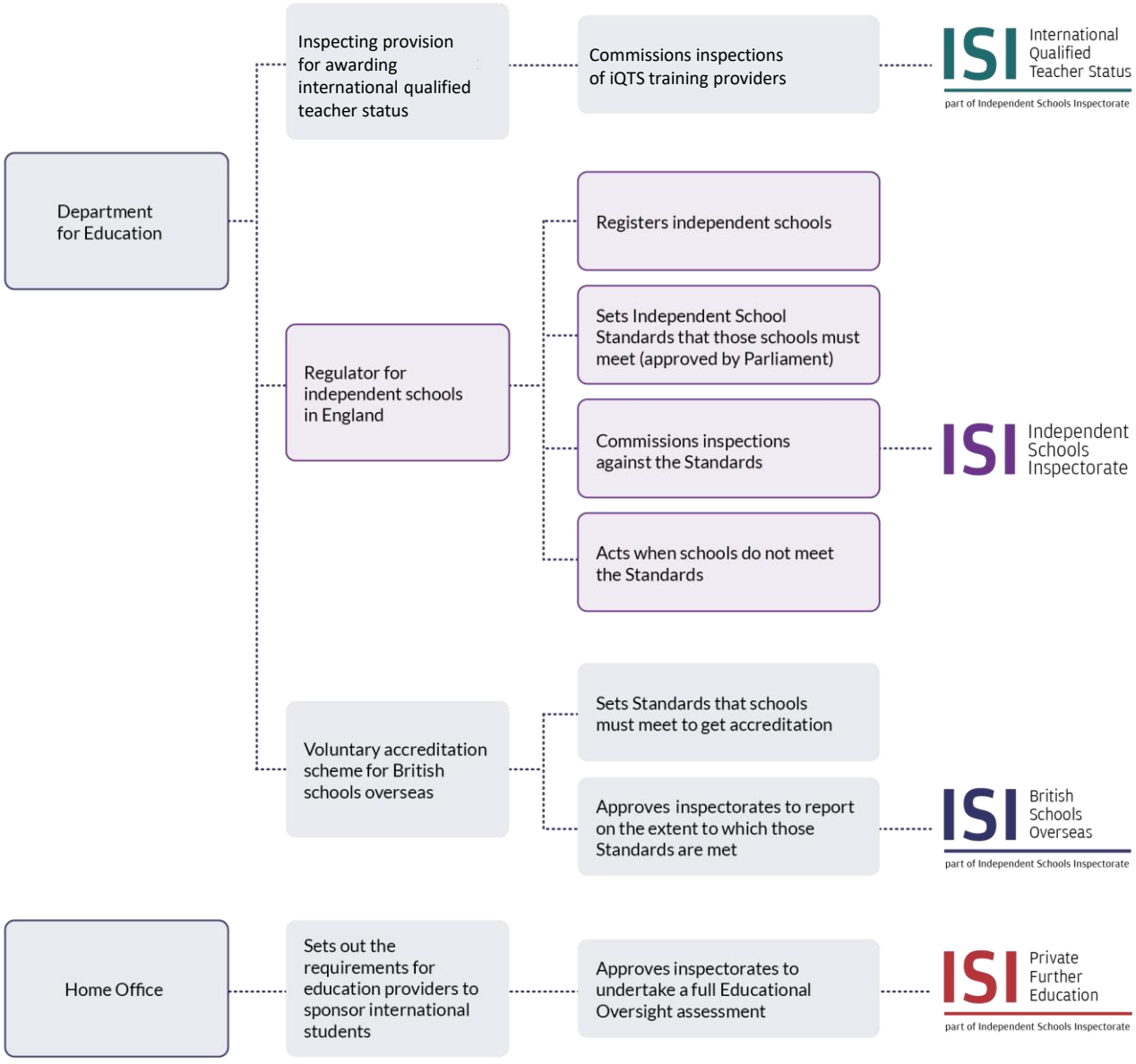
We are appointed by the Department for Education to inspect providers of courses leading to international qualified teacher status.

ISI is formally approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations affiliated to the Independent Schools Council:

- The Association of Governing Bodies of Independent Schools (AGBIS)
- The Girls' Schools Association (GSA)
- The Heads' Conference (HMC)
- Independent Association of Prep Schools (IAPS)
- The Independent Schools Association (ISA)
- The Independent Schools' Bursars Association (ISBA)
- The Society of Heads

This approval is outlined in section 87A of the Children Act 1989 and section 106 of the Education and Skills Act 2008.

Ofsted inspects independent schools in England which are not members of associations affiliated to the Independent Schools Council.



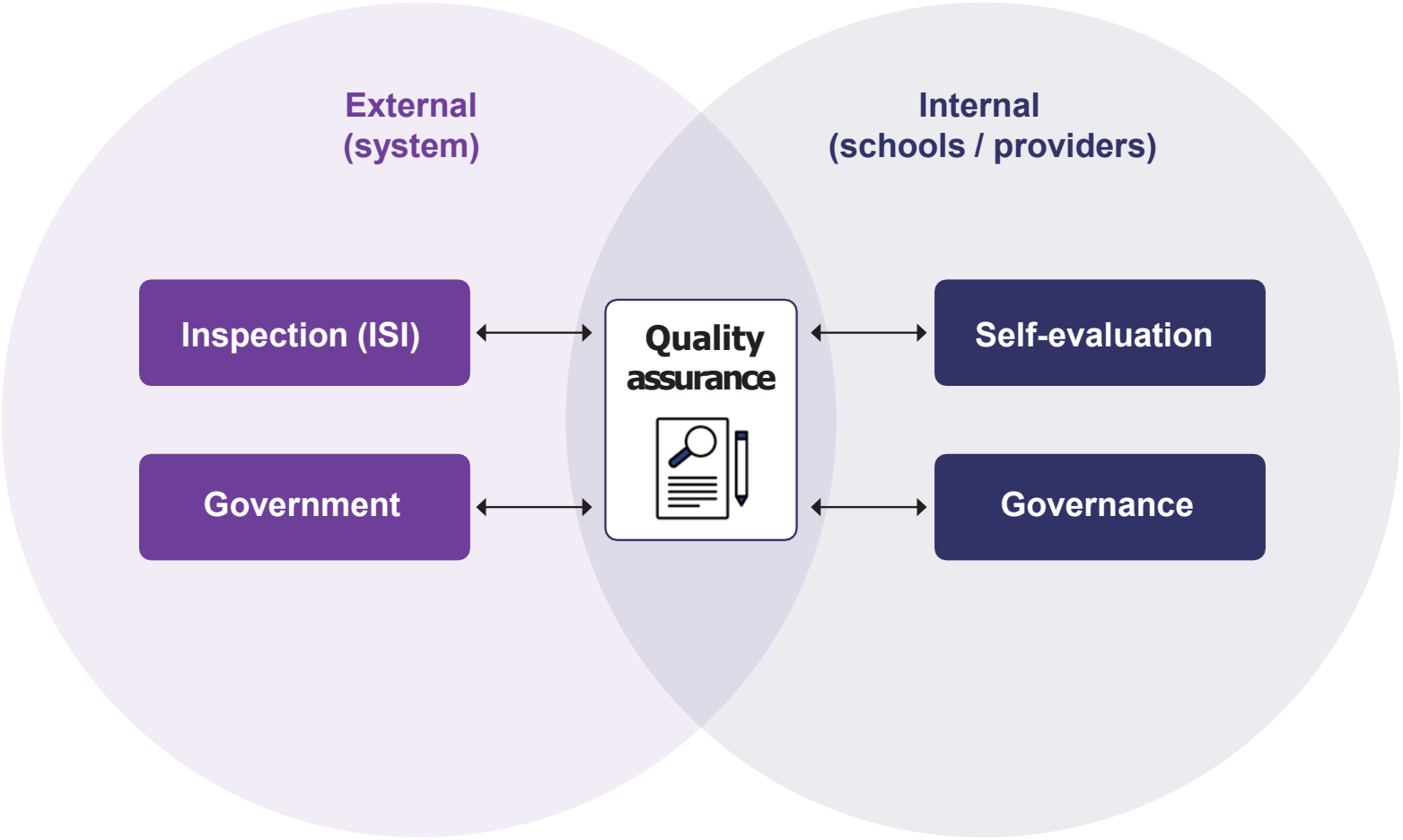
Quality assurance of education

We are committed to promoting rigorous and effective quality assurance in education. We share our methodology in ISI's published inspection handbooks for the benefit of leaders in the sectors we inspect.

The vast majority of our inspectors are serving school leaders, bringing up-to-date knowledge of school leadership. Our training prepares them for the responsibility of evaluating a school's provision through inspection.

This year we launched a core curriculum of online inspector training. The training is aligned to the ISI inspection handbook and provides specific guidance in relation to a range of inspection activities across all areas of the framework. All inspectors are required to complete the full core curriculum as well as other required training.

Our training for inspectors focuses on detailed consideration of the sections of the ISI framework, including how we evaluate provision for pupils who have SEND. We regularly repeat our training on evaluating a school's safeguarding culture and the implementation of appropriate safeguarding policies.



Quality assurance in a continuously improving system

Promoting wellbeing through inspection

Our inspections focus on evaluating all aspects of education through the lens of pupils' wellbeing, as included in the Independent Schools Standards and defined in the Children Act 2004.

Our reports are structured thematically. This page shows how the Standards, the Act and our framework align with our inspection role.

Every inspection evaluates whether arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils meet the requirements of Keeping Children Safe in Education and other related statutory guidance.

Independent School Standards

Part 8, Section 34(1)(c) of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 states that:

"The Standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school actively promote the wellbeing of pupils."

The Children Act 2004

For the purpose of paragraph 34(1)(c) wellbeing is defined by reference to section 10(2) of the Children Act 2004.

- Physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing
- Protection from harm and neglect
- Education, training and recreation
- Contribution to society
- Social and economic wellbeing

ISI Inspection Framework

ISI's inspection framework takes the statutory definition of wellbeing and places it at the centre of evaluation, reflecting its importance in the Independent School Standards.

- Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance
- Section 2: Pupils' education, training and recreation
- Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing
- Section 4: Pupils' social and economic wellbeing and contribution to society

SAFEGUARDING

Sharing knowledge and insight

ISI is committed to working collaboratively with other organisations and partners to promote and share effective practice around the quality assurance of education. This includes activities at both national and international level.

The Department for Education

The regulator for independent schools carefully oversees ISI's work. We share accountability data and thematic insight in regular keeping-in-touch meetings, as well as termly and annual accountability meetings.

We liaise closely with DfE colleagues on matters relating to the impact of legislation and government guidance relating to the independent school standards.

We also communicate regularly to discuss operational matters and to report on the schedule of inspections.

Ofsted

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 lays out new arrangements for information sharing between Ofsted and ISI.

We continue to engage with Ofsted and have focused on developing a common understanding of how our relationship will work, including in light of the 2026 Act.

We inspect early years registered provision on behalf of Ofsted and continue to engage with Ofsted's early education team to ensure a consistent approach to this work.

Estyn

We continue to develop our engagement with other inspectorates. Over this year we have developed further our relationship with Estyn (the Welsh inspectorate), sharing best practice and approaches to inspection, supported by shadow inspections. We have been particularly interested to learn how Estyn uses technology to support inspection.

Education Advisory Forum (EAF)

EAF is a board advisory group made up of highly experienced and qualified experts in their own field, and education specialists.

EAF acts as a stimulus for high-quality strategic thinking to inform the continuous development of ISI's inspection methodology.

Association Inspection Meeting (AIM)

AIM meets termly and promotes understanding and dialogue between ISI and the associations in membership of ISC on the regulatory requirements and quality assurance of education.

Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI)

ISI is represented as a national co-ordinator for the UK at SICI.

SICI is an association of national and regional inspectorates of education in Europe. It was founded in 1995 and there are currently 37 member inspectorates.

In April 2026 we attended the SICI Cymru Workshop in Cardiff Bay. The workshop titled 'Navigating the AI Journey' provided valuable insight into the work inspectorates are doing to incorporate AI into inspection activities.

Regulation

ISI continues with its membership of the Institute of Regulation.

The Institute of Regulation was established in 2021 to provide resources and a professional network for everyone working in and/or interested in regulation.

Inspection of association independent schools in England

Information and insights in this section relate to ISI inspections carried out between 1 September 2025 and 31 July 2026

How we report inspection findings

The focus of ISI inspections is to report the extent to which schools meet the statutory Independent School Standards (referred to as 'the Standards') and other regulations, including those relating to safeguarding, early years and boarding.

These are the requirements that school proprietors agree to meet when applying to register their school with the Department for Education – the regulator for independent schools in England.

Our reports include clear statements on the impact of provision for pupils and the extent to which the school meets the Standards. Our reports also provide a nuanced evaluation of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the school's provision.

Our reporting focuses on the skills, knowledge, and outcomes of decision-making of leadership and management at the school.

All Standards and regulatory requirements are mapped under appropriate sections of our inspection framework.

Recommended next steps

Every ISI inspection report contains at least one recommended next step. These are helpful development points for the school. Recommended next steps are based on evidence collected by the inspectors and are discussed with school leaders as part of the collaborative inspection process.

Areas for action

If one or more Standards are not met, areas for action are included in the report. These clearly refer to the Standard or Standards that are unmet, including outlining the improvement needed.

Early years

Inspectors consider how effectively leaders actively promote the wellbeing of all children in early years when making judgements for the whole school.

A school's provision for children from birth to five is also inspected in accordance with the requirements of the early years foundation stage (EYFS) framework.

Provision for children in a setting that is registered with Ofsted is evaluated and reported separately in accordance with the requirements of Ofsted's education inspection framework and associated guidance.

isi.net/inspections-explained

We use the statutory definition of wellbeing as the foundation of our approach to inspection. This is reflected in the structure of our inspection framework and routine inspection reports:



SECTION 1
Leadership and management, and governance



SECTION 2
Pupils' education, training, and recreation



SECTION 3
Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing



SECTION 4
Pupils' social and economic wellbeing and contribution to society



Safeguarding

Inspection types explained

Routine inspections

Each school is typically inspected routinely once every three years. The inspection report follows the structure of ISI's inspection framework.

Material change inspections

These occur when a school applies to change the terms of its registration with the Department for Education. For example, by changing the age range of pupils.

Additional inspections

These occur when the Department for Education has reason for a school to be inspected urgently.

Progress monitoring inspections

These occur when a school has not met the standards at the previous inspection. Inspectors focus on the extent to which leaders have addressed the areas for action.

Number of inspections of independent schools in England

Autumn (total: 257)

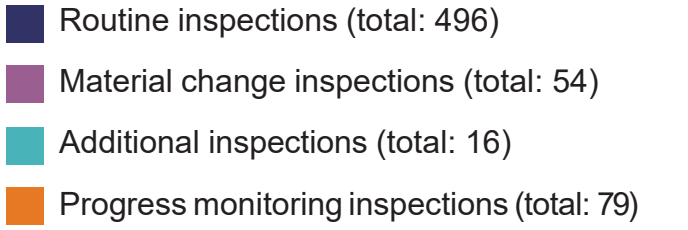


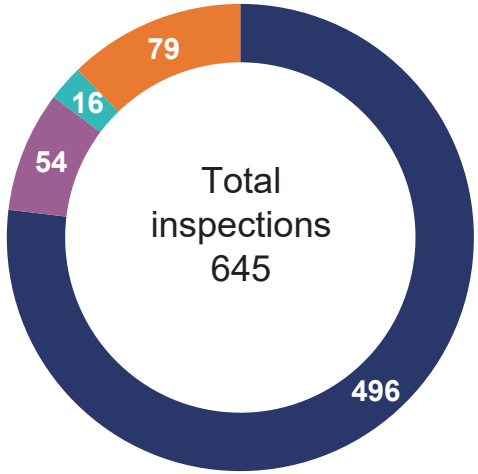
Spring (total: 201)



Summer (total: 187)



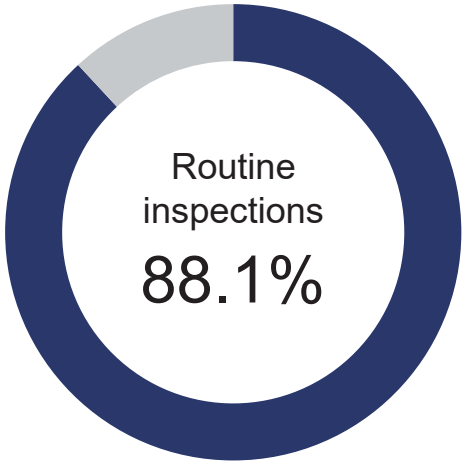




Inspection outcomes

The extent to which schools met the Standards

Inspection type	TOTAL
Routine inspections	88.1%
Material change inspections	96.3%
Additional inspections	50.0%
Progress monitoring inspections	91.1%
TOTAL	**88.2%**









Inspection outcomes

Standards met (by part)

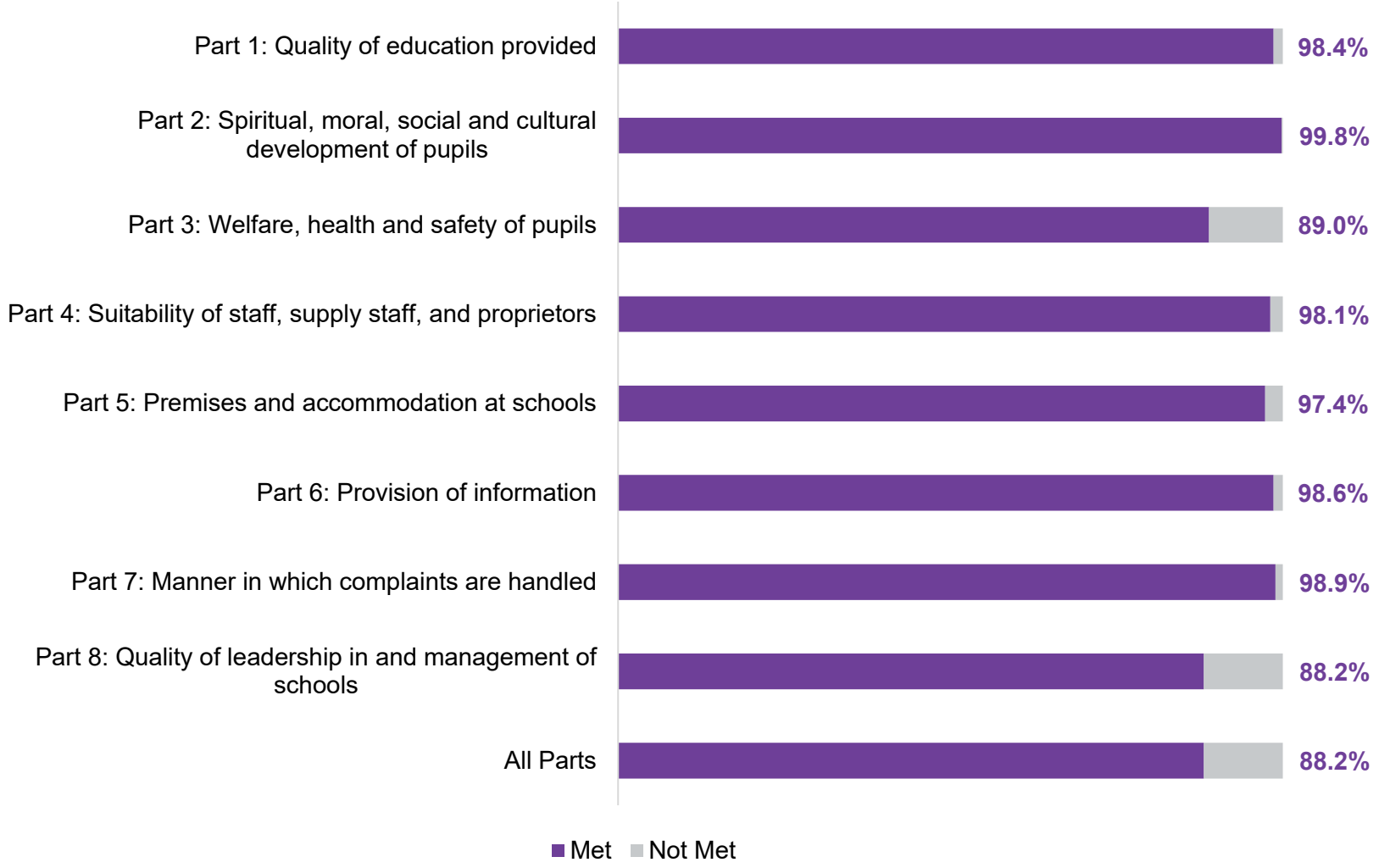
The Standards are split into eight parts and cover all aspects of school life.

In total, 88.2% of schools met all of the Standards.

The majority of unmet Standards related to the welfare, health, and safety of pupils.

This includes situations where safeguarding arrangements did not follow relevant statutory guidance. Inspectors found that in some of these schools, leaders did not have due regard to statutory guidance to manage and improve attendance.

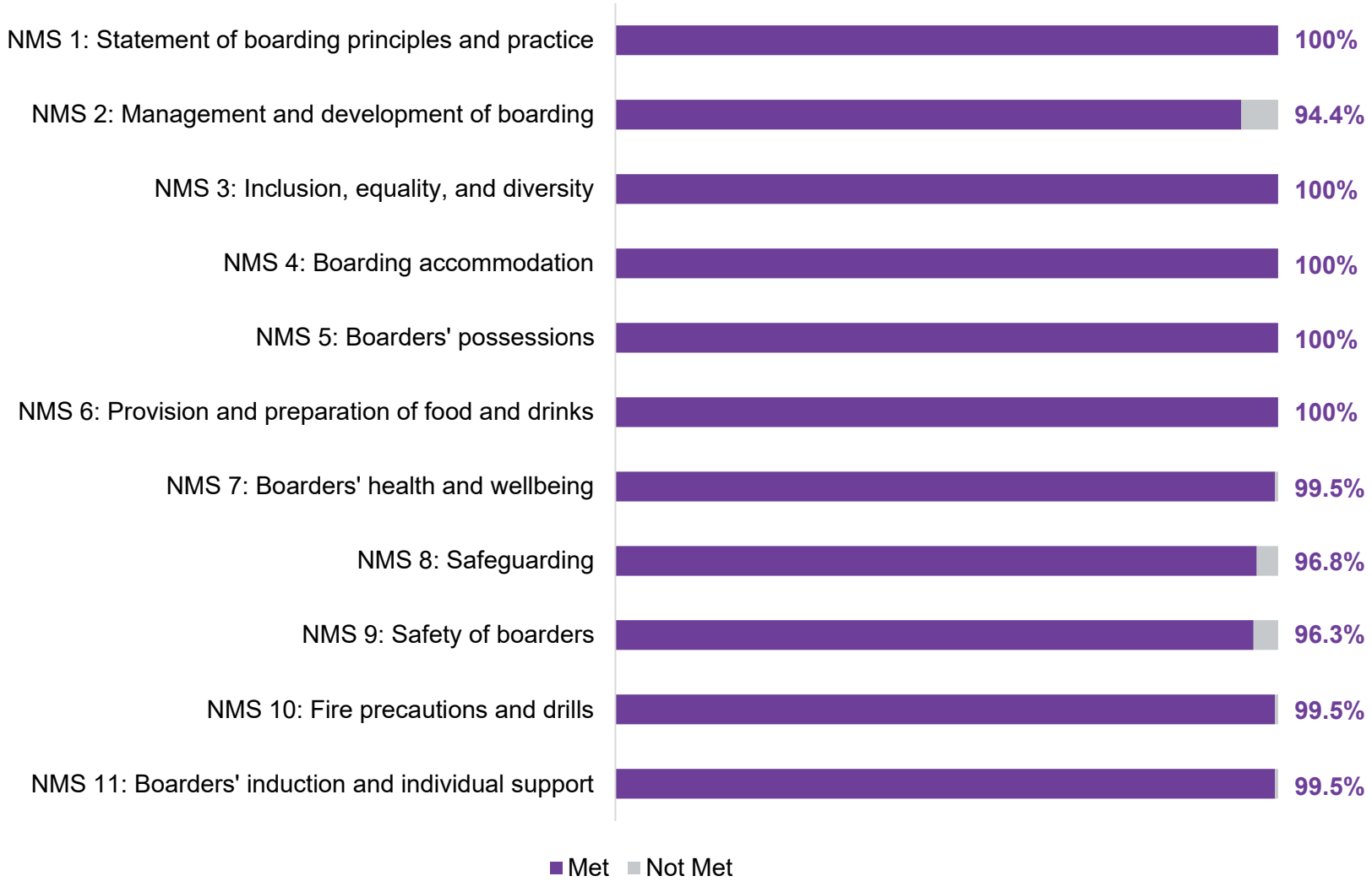
In schools which did not meet the Standards, inspectors found examples where leaders had a limited understanding of the requirements relating to safer recruitment checks.



Inspection outcomes (Boarding)

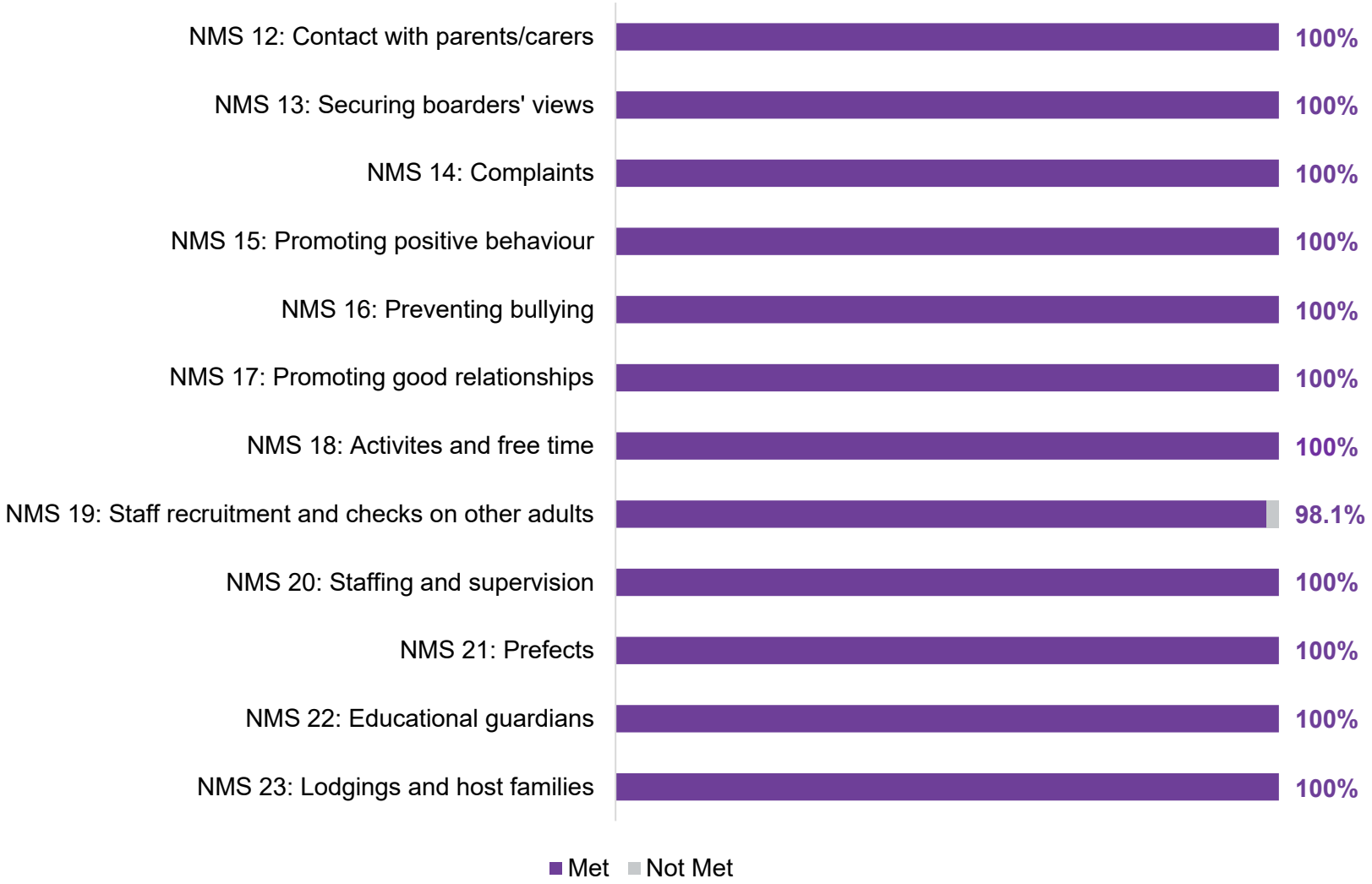
National minimum Standards (NMS) for boarding schools

ISI inspected 216 schools that provide accommodation to pupils.



Inspection outcomes (Boarding) - continued

National minimum Standards (NMS) for boarding schools



Inspection outcomes

Inspections of Ofsted registered early years settings

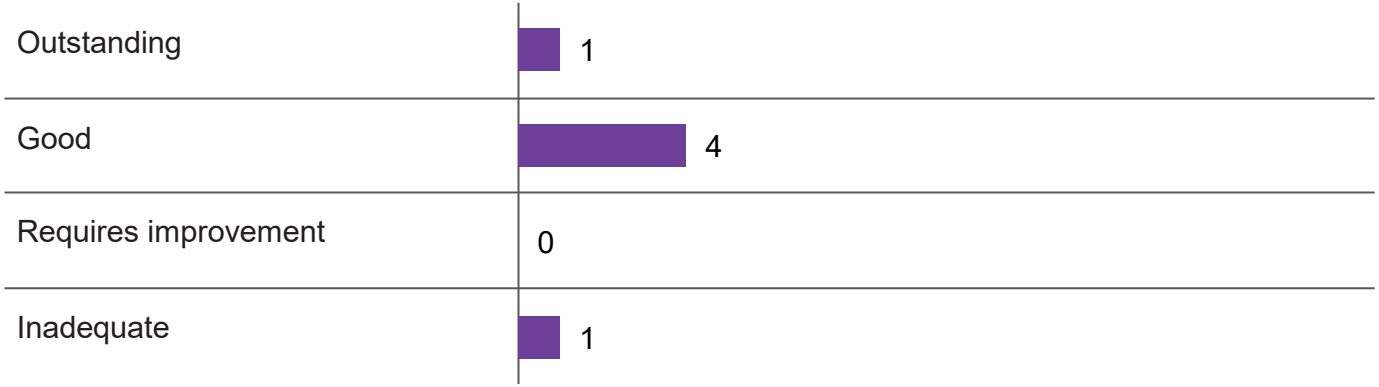
In the academic year 2025-26, ISI carried out 21 inspections of registered early years settings on behalf of Ofsted.

ISI contracts a team of specialist early years co-ordinating inspectors, who carry out the inspection of early years registered settings. Early years co-ordinating inspectors attend regular training to ensure that their knowledge and skills of the requirements of the early years foundation stage framework and effective inspection practice are kept up to date.

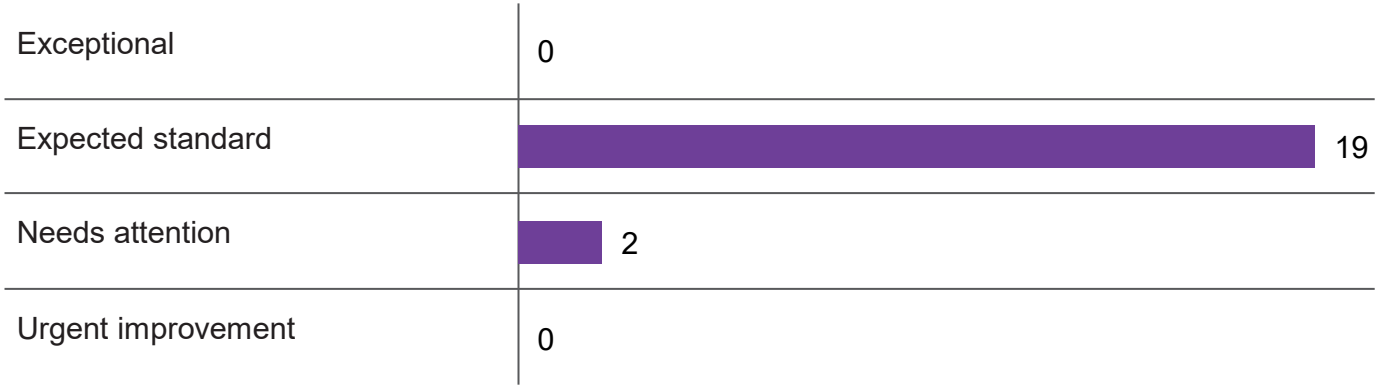
ISI published a revised handbook for the inspection of Ofsted-registered early years settings for use from September 2026. This reflects changes in the early years foundation stage framework and the Ofsted toolkit. The handbook sets out how ISI inspectors carry out inspections of registered early years settings using the Ofsted criteria, while following ISI's core inspection principles of manageability, collaboration, triangulation and typicality, and proportionality.

ISI leaders meet regularly with the Ofsted early education team to promote and maintain consistency in inspection practice and to manage operational matters relating to the inspection of registered early years settings.

September 2025



New Ofsted Inspection Toolkit (November 2025 – July 2026)



SECTION 1

Leadership and management, and governance

Our inspection activity

Inspectors consider how leaders at all levels fulfil their responsibilities effectively and demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role across all aspects of school life relating to the Standards.

Those with governance responsibility, including trustees and proprietors, must assure themselves that leadership skills are in place and that leaders fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that Standards are met consistently.

Leaders and managers must demonstrate their understanding and management of risk, ensure effective safeguarding culture and practice, and actively promote the wellbeing of pupils (as defined by the Children Act 2004).

Where it is working well

Knowledgeable and skilled leaders know their schools well. They ensure consistent implementation of policy and practice in their schools.

Leaders regularly monitor and review school provision and pupils' experiences and take effective action where need for improvement is identified through self-evaluation.

Inspectors found examples where leaders create coherent systems that align vision, governance and daily practice with a consistent focus on pupils' wellbeing.

What could improve

Inspectors found that leaders do not always have sufficiently secure knowledge or oversight to ensure that statutory requirements are met consistently. In some cases, inspectors found that leaders do not ensure that the required information is provided to stakeholders or that the complaints procedures are followed consistently in line with the school's policy.

SECTION 2

Pupils' education, training and recreation

Our inspection activity

Inspectors consider how effectively leaders implement the school curriculum, taking into account pupils' ages, aptitudes and needs.

Teachers' planning and assessment must enable all pupils to develop skills and understanding, acquire new knowledge and make good progress.

Leaders must ensure that pupils develop emotional, intellectual, social and creative skills. This includes ensuring access to a good range and choice of recreational activities.

Where pupils are identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) leaders must ensure that planning and teaching takes their needs into account, so they make good progress.

Where it is working well

Inspectors found that teachers with good subject knowledge use assessment effectively to establish what pupils know and understand. This enables teachers to identify and address misconceptions and to adjust teaching and support in response to pupils' needs.

Inspectors identified effective provision for pupils who have SEND, including appropriate identification of need, targeted support and adaptations that enable pupils to make good progress.

Leaders ensure that pupils experience breadth of educational experiences through clubs and programmes of sport, performing arts and educational trips and visits. These opportunities support pupils to develop their interests and skills whilst participating in the wider life of the school.

What could improve

Where pupils' education, training and recreation recommendations were made, inspectors found that curriculum planning does not always support pupil progression. In some cases, teaching does not fully take into account pupils' needs and prior attainment, which limits the progress made by pupils. In some schools, leaders do not use assessment data to provide appropriate support for pupils who either need additional guidance or those pupils who are ready for more challenging work.

SECTION 3

Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

Our inspection activity

Inspectors consider how effectively leaders encourage pupils' mutual trust and respect for other people, their spiritual and moral knowledge and understanding, and their physical education. Leaders must ensure that pupils receive applicable relationships education or relationships and sex education.

Leaders must also ensure that the school has a behaviour policy which is understood by staff and pupils and is implemented fairly and consistently.

An effective anti-bullying strategy must be in place which actively prevents and minimises bullying at the school. Inspectors also consider the provision and maintenance of premises and accommodation.

Where it is working well

Pupils are well known by staff and receive appropriate pastoral care and support with their wellbeing. Pupils feel that they can seek help for their emotional or mental health when required.

Inspectors found that leaders have clear expectations of positive pupil behaviour and relationships within a respectful school culture. Leaders utilise effective and consistent approaches to dealing with any instances of unkind behaviour or bullying, with pupils taking responsibility and learning from their actions.

School staff support pupils to develop their understanding of and respect for all groups of people from different backgrounds and cultures.

Inspectors found that schools have suitable arrangements in place in relation to fire risk, fire safety, first aid and site security.

What could improve

Inspectors found that in some schools, the attendance policy and practice does not reflect statutory guidance. In some cases, leaders do not publish the required attendance information, and leaders do not follow procedures relating to sustained absence.

In some cases, the curriculum for PSHE and RSE do not meet statutory requirements.

Inspectors also found that, while some schools complete risk assessments and identify necessary actions in relation to health and safety, these actions are not always completed or implemented consistently.

SECTION 4

Pupils' social and economic wellbeing, and contribution to society

Our inspection activity

Inspectors consider how effectively the school prepares pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in British society.

Pupils should receive human, social and economic education, be encouraged to show initiative and understand how they can contribute positively to society more widely.

Inspectors also consider pupils' access to accurate, up-to-date, impartial careers guidance so that they can make informed choices about a broad range of career options, which helps them to fulfil their potential.

Where it is working well

School leaders continue to provide pupils with a range of opportunities to engage with their local community. Pupils take part in charitable work, volunteering and fundraising activities. These opportunities enable pupils to develop their leadership skills and to make a positive contribution to their school and the local community. Leaders support pupils to be effectively prepared for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in British society.

What could improve

Inspectors found in some schools that careers provision, especially in Year 7 to Year 9, is an area for development. Pupils do not always receive sufficient information about career pathways prior to making significant choices about their next steps in education. In some cases, inspectors recommended that leaders should improve pupils' economic education.

Safeguarding

Our inspection activity

Inspectors evaluate the measures that leaders have in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils, as required by statutory guidance.

This includes evaluating the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding practice and culture, effective implementation of policy and working with other agencies.

Where it is working well

Inspectors found that leaders ensure the effective implementation of safeguarding arrangements in line with statutory requirements. School staff take part in suitable training and understand their safeguarding responsibilities.

Safeguarding leaders ensure that safeguarding records are detailed, supported by a clear rationale for decision-making and are securely stored. Safeguarding leaders make referrals when concerns arise and liaise appropriately with the local authority and other external agencies.

What could improve

Inspectors found that leaders do not always ensure the completion of required pre-employment and suitability checks of newly appointed staff. In some schools, the safeguarding policy and procedures do not reflect the current statutory requirements. Inspectors also found that in some schools, staff do not understand how to identify and report low-level concerns about adults, which means that concerns are not acted on consistently or promptly.

Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)

Our inspection activity

The number of registered independent special schools that have become members of independent school associations has risen.

Therefore, the proportion of special schools inspected by ISI has increased from 5% of schools inspected in 2023-24 to 12% of schools inspected in 2025-26.

In the academic year 2025-26, ISI inspected a total of 74 special schools. This includes 58 registered independent special schools and 16 independent schools where there is a high proportion of pupils who have SEND and/or an education health and care plan (EHC plan).

ISI deploys inspectors who have the relevant knowledge and expertise to inspect specialist SEND provision.

ISI provides regular SEND-focused training and guidance to inspectors to ensure the effective inspection of SEND across all inspections as well as in the inspections of specialist provisions. We work closely with inspectors and support them to extend their expertise so that they are confident in leading inspections in this area.

In this academic year, ISI carried out 43 routine inspections of independent special schools, including:

- 32 inspections of registered special schools
- 11 inspections of independent schools specialising in SEND provision.

86% of special schools met the Standards in routine inspections in 2025-26.

ISI carried out 31 non-routine inspections of special schools in the academic year 2025-26, including:

- 22 material change inspections
- Five progress monitoring inspections
- Four additional inspections.

Where it is working well

Inspectors found that leaders put effective systems in place to correctly identify pupils' individual needs. They ensure that targeted support is provided to ensure that these pupils can successfully access the curriculum and make good progress.

Knowledgeable staff provide teachers with specialist guidance to help them make appropriate adjustments to their teaching, including by providing bespoke resources.

What could improve

Inspectors found that leaders do not always ensure that additional support strategies they have identified are consistently put into action by teachers across different subjects.

Inspection of British schools overseas

Information in this section relates to inspections carried out between 1 September 2025 and 31 July 2026

Our inspection activity

ISI is approved by the Department for Education to inspect British schools overseas (BSO).

BSO is the UK government voluntary accreditation scheme for overseas schools.

The benefits of BSO include being eligible to offer induction to early career teachers who hold qualified teacher status.

To retain BSO status, schools must be inspected every three years and continue to meet all BSO standards.

This year ISI completed 26 BSO inspections in 17 countries.

Ofsted monitoring of ISI BSO inspections

Ofsted monitors approved BSO inspectorates and reports on the quality and effectiveness of their inspections.

Ofsted confirmed that ISI meets the standards required of BSO inspectorates in full.

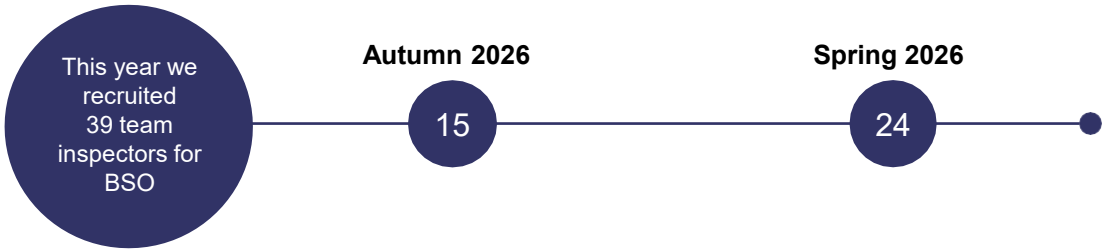
- The conduct and professional knowledge of the inspection teams are a particular strength. Inspectors consistently demonstrate a secure understanding of the schools they inspect, the context in which these schools operate, and the expectations schools must meet to fulfil the requirements of the BSO standards.
- Evidence bases are thorough and detailed.
- ISI's quality assurance helps to develop the expertise of newer inspectors as well as providing rigour and challenge to support inspection teams.
- Inspection of safeguarding is rigorous, well triangulated and woven through different inspection activities.
- Inspection reports are detailed and informative. They align with the findings of the inspection and provide clear feedback to leaders. They accurately identify strengths and areas for improvement in line with the criteria of the ISI framework.
- The inspection of provision for pupils who have SEND has developed since Ofsted's last monitoring report.

BSO inspection framework launched May 2025

ISI has completed the first full year of BSO inspections under the revised framework published in May 2025.

We continue to recruit and warmly welcome new team inspectors from senior leaders in international schools delivering a British curriculum.

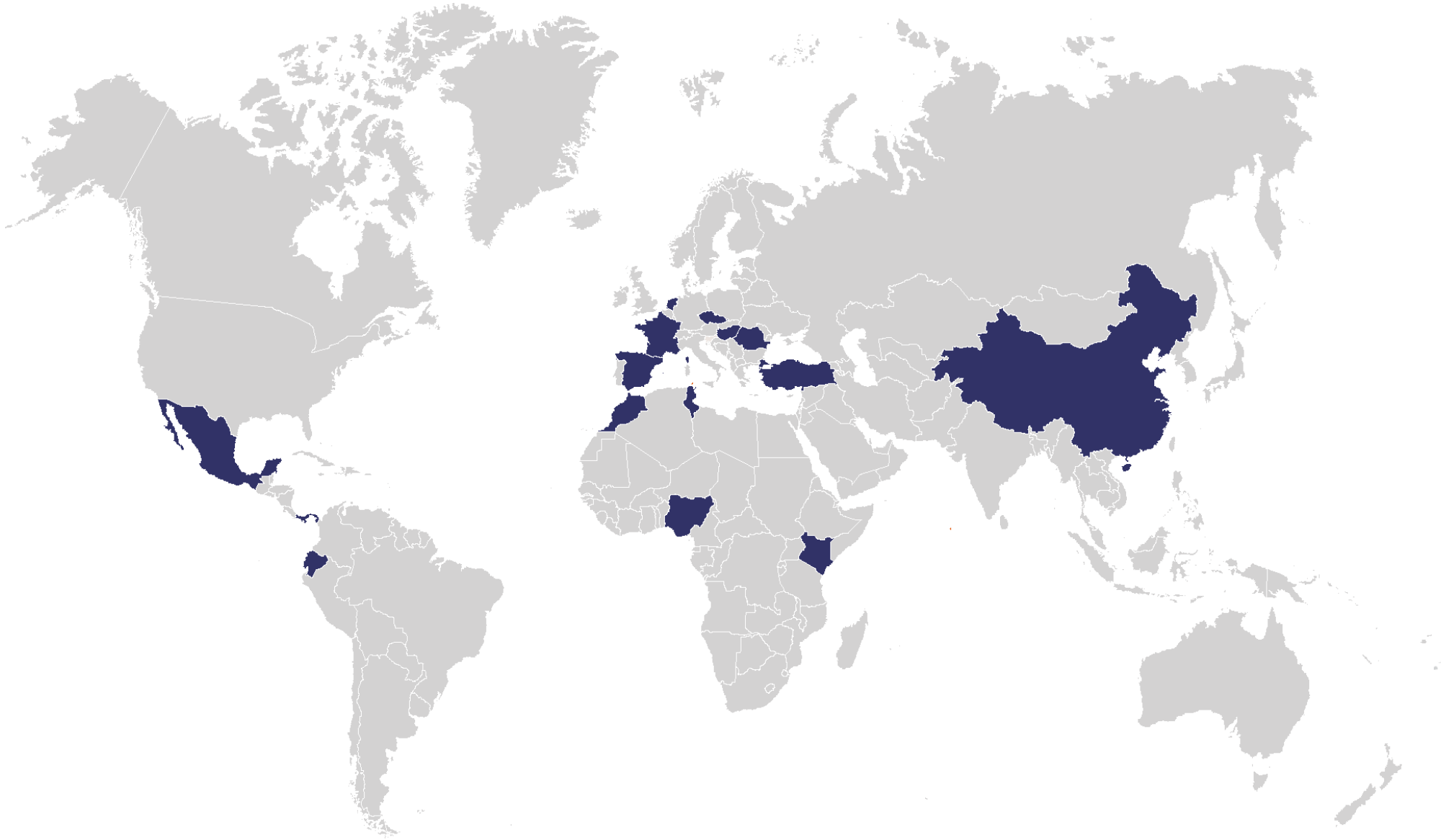
isi.net/about/what-we-do/bso



ISI British Schools Overseas
part of Independent Schools Inspectorate

BSO inspection map

We completed **26** BSO inspections across **17** countries.



Inspection of private further education colleges and English language schools

Information in this section relates to inspections carried out between 1 September 2025 and 31 July 2026

Our inspection activity

ISI is appointed by the Home Office to inspect privately funded further education colleges and English language schools.

Educational oversight of private further education colleges and language schools provides information to the Home Office in relation to those establishments applying for or renewing a licence to sponsor international students to come to study in the United Kingdom.

We consulted on proposed revisions to ISI's student educational oversight framework for Private Further Education Providers from January to March 2026. The proposals related to:

- The scope of inspections and inspection evaluations.
- The principles of inspection methodology.
- The structure of the framework and the inspection report.
- The inspection type, frequency and duration of inspections.

Following consideration of responses, ISI published the revised inspection framework which takes effect from September 2026.

ISI educational oversight inspections:

- report the extent to which colleges and language schools meet the Educational Oversight Standards.
- assess and report on the quality of educational outcomes and provision.
- Assess and report on financial sustainability
- make recommendations to support improvement.

From September 2026, inspectors will make judgements about whether the requirements of the inspection framework are met or not met.

isi.net/about/what-we-do/private-further-education

PFE Inspection Outcomes

24

Number of inspections

Inspection outcomes

15

Exceeds expectations

6

Meets expectations

2

Does not meet expectations

1

Unsatisfactory

ISI Private Further Education

part of Independent Schools Inspectorate

Inspection quality

Information and insights in this section relate to the period between 1 September 2025 and 31 July 2026

Inspector Training

We have recruited 22 reporting inspectors this academic year.

In order to be accredited, inspectors must complete required training and successfully lead an inspection which is monitored by a senior member of ISI staff or an experienced reporting inspector.

This year reporting inspectors have participated in six designated training days, comprising three in-person and three online sessions.

These activities are designed to support professional development and maintain consistency and quality in inspection practice.

Our training model is based on collaborative professional learning and incorporates simulated inspection scenarios, exemplar evidence, structured discussion, professional reflection and updates to policy and guidance.

All inspectors are required to complete the online Inspector core curriculum. This programme is aligned with the ISI inspection framework and handbook and is intended to develop a secure understanding of inspection processes and professional competencies.

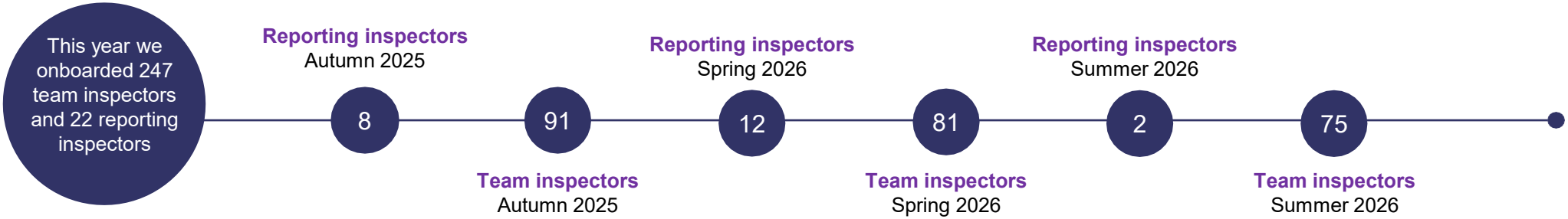
Inspectors submit a training workbook to provide evidence of their engagement with the 46 chapters within the programme. This enables ISI to assess inspectors' understanding of the materials.

Inspectors receive regular feedback on the quality of their work including through post-inspection surveys. We regularly review the quality of inspection evidence and provide developmental feedback to our inspectors.

Code of conduct

Inspectors adhere to a code of conduct. Inspectors are required to uphold the highest professional standards in relation to all who are involved in the process of inspection, before, during and after the inspection.

All inspectors must regularly inform ISI about any conflicts of interest. This includes a duty to inform us of any connections they have to the schools or colleges we inspect.



On inspection

The make-up of the inspection teams is determined by the size and context of the school.

The inspection is led by a reporting inspector, who leads a number of team inspectors.

Inspection teams reach provisional judgments at the end of the on-site inspection and share these with school leaders. Our duty inspectors and senior inspectors provide quality assurance support to inspectors prior to and during the on-site inspection.

The reporting inspector must contact the inspector on duty if the emerging evaluation of the inspection team is that one or more of the Standards is likely to be unmet. The inspector on duty will probe the evidence and provide constructive support and challenge to the evaluation process.

During the inspection, inspectors take care to preserve confidentiality and to protect the privacy of the pupils and staff. Inspectors know what to do if they receive a disclosure relating to safeguarding during the inspection.

Post-inspection

The reporting inspector is responsible for writing the inspection report and submitting the inspection evidence to ISI.

All inspections are subject to rigorous quality assurance which includes consideration of the inspection evidence and the draft inspection report. Some inspections are subject to enhanced quality assurance. This can include live on-site or remote quality assurance and a full review of the inspection evidence.

ISI invites all school leaders to share their reflections on the inspection through a post-inspection survey. We strongly encourage school leaders to respond to the survey. We value the feedback we receive.

ISI has a complaints process that is regularly reviewed.

Updates to surveys and documentation

Following the launch of our updated pre-inspection pupil survey in 2025, we have updated the staff and parent surveys for use in 2026-27. These changes reflect some of the methodological insights gained from our work with Public First, a policy and research consultancy, to review the pupil survey.

We have updated our key documentation following the mid-point review consultation and the decision to remove significant strengths from the ISI inspection framework.

Following consultation with various groups from our inspector work force and taking into account changes to statutory guidance in safeguarding, relationships and sex education (RSE), improving attendance, data protection and complaints, use of mobile phones in schools and restrictive interventions, including reasonable force and seclusion, we have made amendments to our inspection documentation for use from September 2026.

We have incorporated two new independent school standards 16A and 32A (Restrictive interventions, including reasonable force and seclusion) into our key documents.

Hearing feedback

Information and insights in this section relate to the period between 1 September 2025 and 31 July 2026

ISI inspection principles

We have four inspection principles on which our inspection practice is built.

Manageability

Inspections should not cause unnecessary workload for leaders and staff.

Inspectors will not expect or request leaders to produce documentation specifically for inspection.

Collaboration

Inspectors will seek to work alongside leaders and staff where appropriate to do so, discussing evidence and sharing emerging findings.

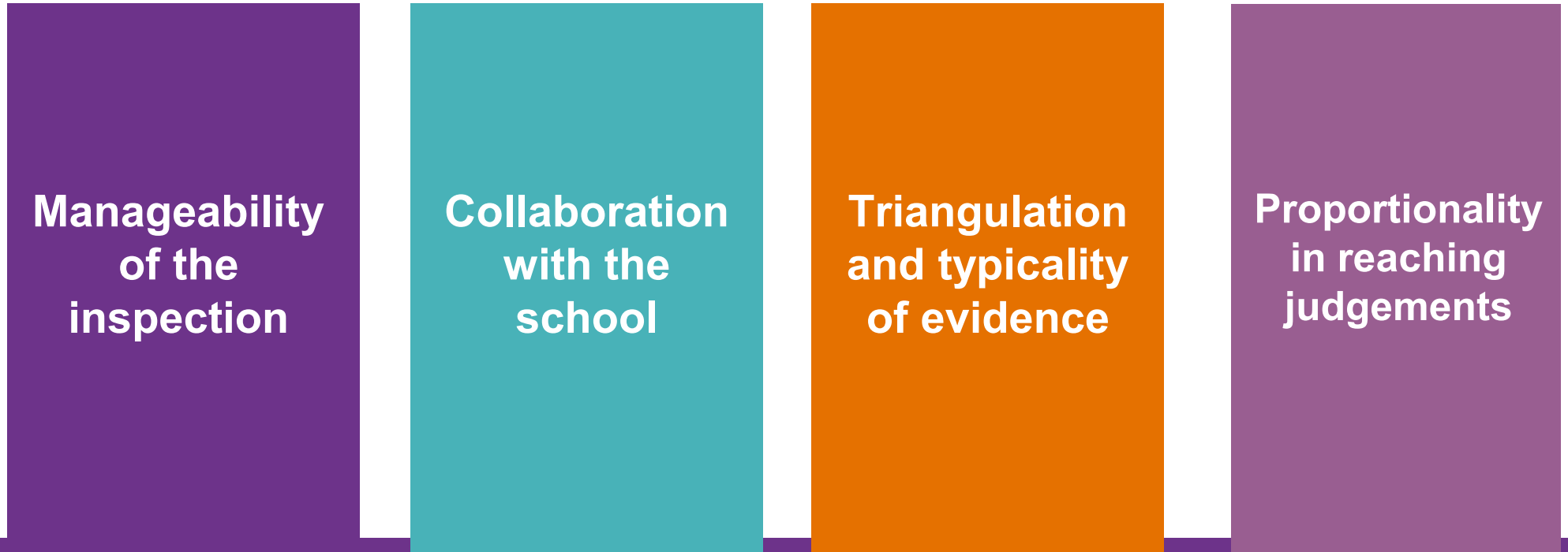
Triangulation and typicality

Inspectors will consider a range of evidence when forming evaluations on inspection.

Inspectors will look for evidence of what would be typical provision for pupils over time.

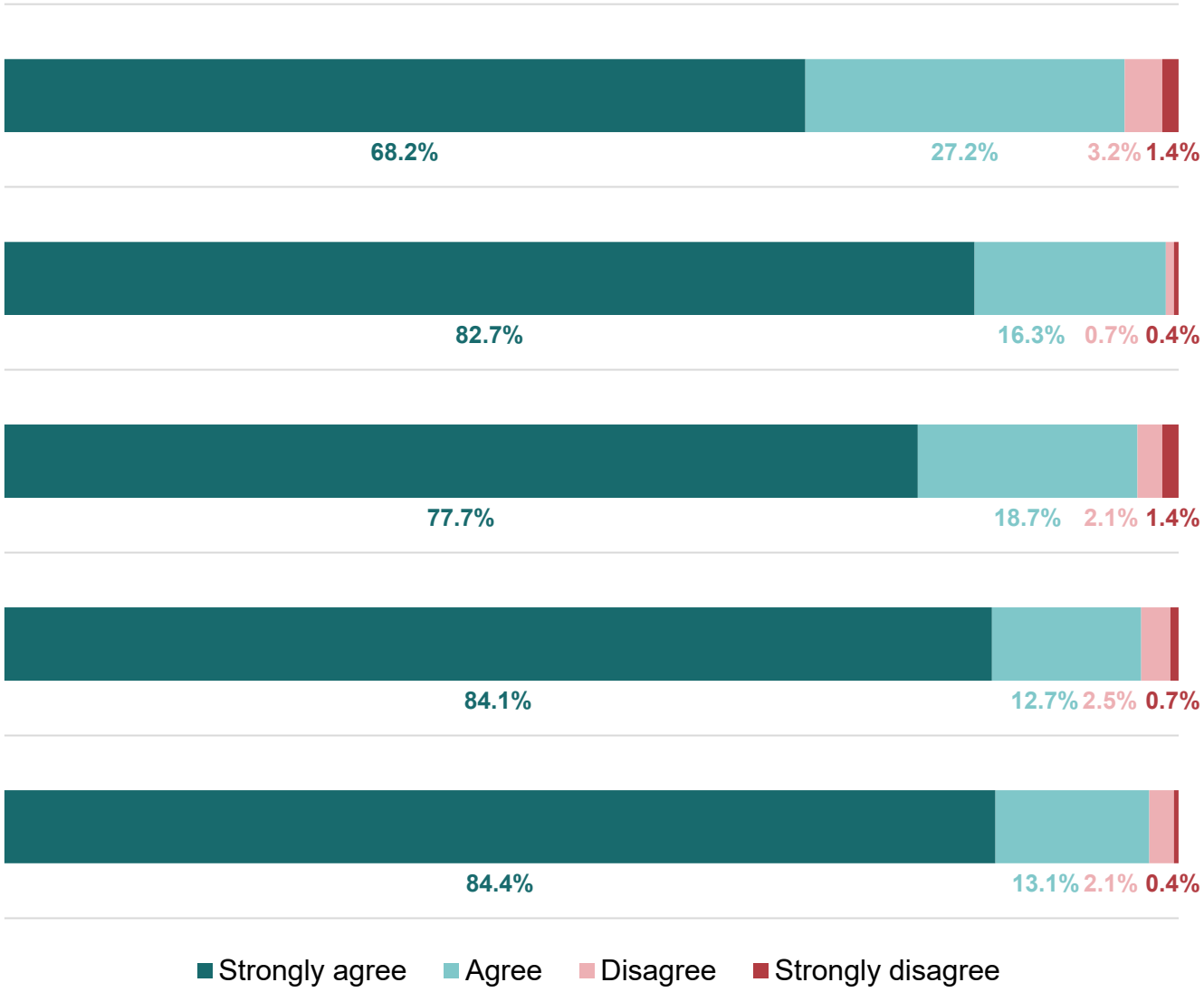
Proportionality

Inspectors will consider the reasonableness of leaders' decision-making and the impact of those decisions on pupils' learning, experience and safety.

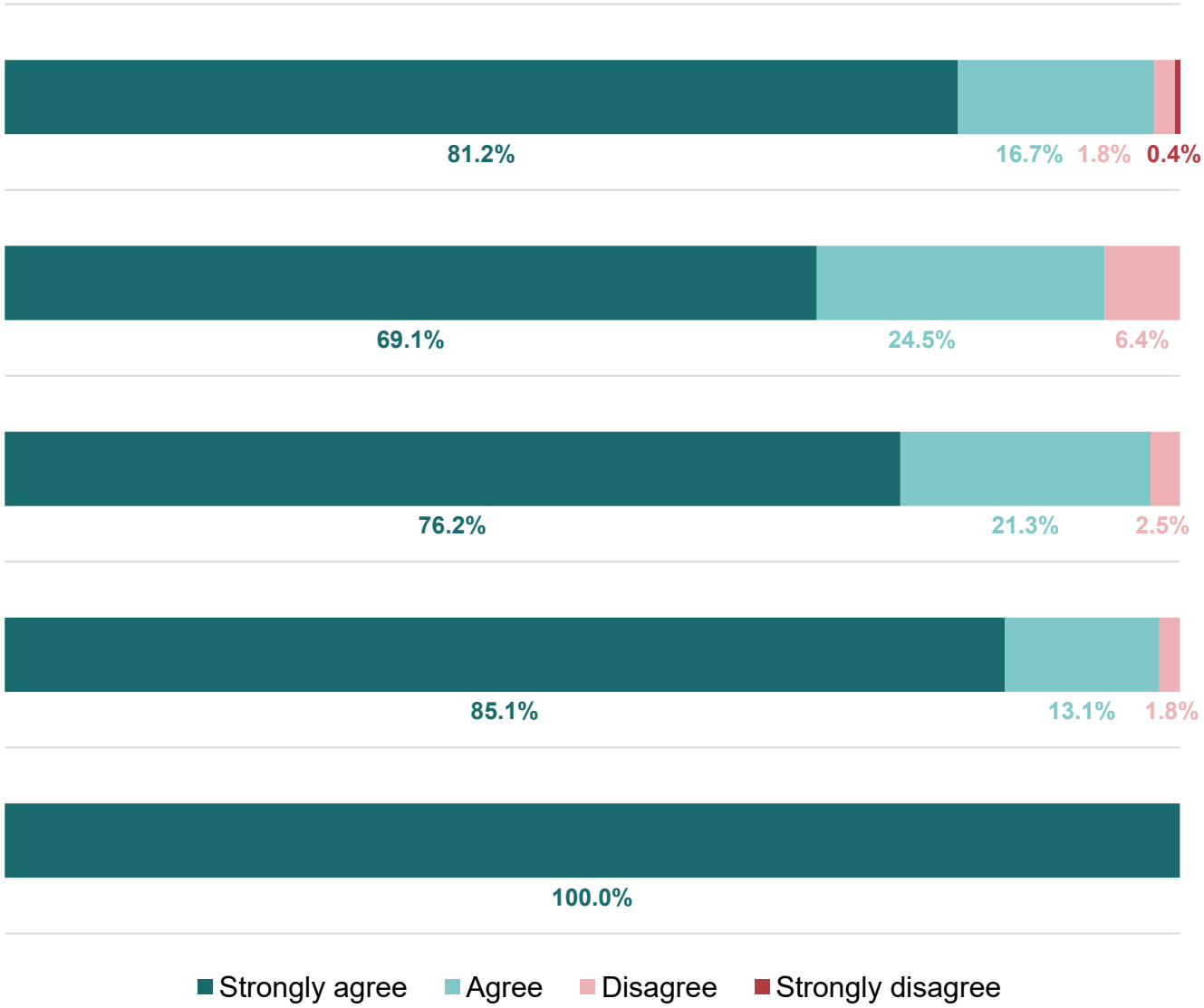


School feedback

We are committed to listening to the views and experiences of the leaders of the schools we inspect. Every school is invited to complete a post-inspection survey following inspections. We received 283 survey responses from leaders in the schools we inspected. We seek to understand school leaders' views of the extent to which ISI inspectors demonstrate our principles in practice. We value the feedback we receive. All responses are read and considered.



School feedback - continued



The reporting inspector provided opportunities throughout the inspection for the school leader/s to raise any issues or concerns about the conduct of the inspection and dealt with any issues or concerns promptly.

The reporting inspector offered school leader/s the opportunity to be involved in some inspection activities.

The inspection team gathered evidence from a wide range of sources.

Inspectors did not expect school leader/s to reorganise the curriculum for pupils during the inspection.

Inspectors worked with professionalism, sensitivity and integrity, treating all with respect and courtesy.

Complaints

From 30 April to 11 June 2026 ISI ran a consultation about proposed revisions to the policy for inspection complaints and set out proposed revisions in relation to:

- handling and management of complaints in each of the three stages in complaints policies
- communication with complainants at stage one and two of the complaint procedures
- how ISI communicates findings in response to a complaint
- the timelines for responding to stage two written complaints
- the role of the independent adjudicator at stage three.

ISI received 167 responses to the consultation. We published a response to the consultation and published three revised complaints policies for use from September 2026.

- Inspection Complaints Policy for association school inspections
- Inspection Complaints Policy for British Schools Overseas inspections
- Inspection Complaints Policy for ISI's student educational oversight inspections of private further education colleges and language schools.

From the 695 inspections completed across all remits for the 2025-2026 academic year, ISI received 61 stage two formal complaints.

Of the stage two complaints completed:

- 44 were not upheld
- 15 were partially upheld
- 2 were wholly upheld.

Of the stage two complaints received during the academic year 2025-2026*:

- 27 related to inspector conduct
- 33 related to the inspection process
- 59 related to the evaluations reached.

* Each complaint can relate to one or more of the categories of conduct, process and evaluations.

ISI reviews the feedback we receive through the complaints process to consider how learning from complaints can inform inspector training, policy and practice, where appropriate.

The role of the independent adjudicator

Following ISI's response to a stage two complaint, a complainant can request that their complaint be referred to an independent adjudicator.

In Spring 2026 the ISI Board appointed six new adjudicators to the pool of independent adjudicators.

The independent adjudicator role is not open to any inspector, employee or person currently or previously providing services other than complaints adjudication to ISI.

To be appointed, independent adjudicators must demonstrate significant experience and understanding of complaint handling and/or quality assurance.

The independent adjudicator considers whether:

ISI followed the complaints policy in handling the complaint; and/or

- whether ISI's decision-making was unreasonable in response to the complaint.

The independent adjudicator writes to the complainant setting out their decisions. The adjudicator may also refer the complaint back to ISI for further review.

Of the 26 adjudications completed in this period, the independent adjudicator found that:

- In one case, ISI did not fully follow its complaints policy in handling the complaint
- in six cases concerns about the reasonableness of ISI decision-making were upheld or partially upheld.

isi.net/who-we-are/make-a-complaint

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