Sector updates

Chris Freestone.

October 2026

Inspection changes so far…..

We are running a course on **18th January 10am-3:30pm** with all the updates for the inspection framework:

Preparing for the updated Children's Homes inspection framework

Ofsted and inspection changes-overarching:

- adopting a set of 'ambitions' which we will use to guide all policy-making for ILACS and SCCIF
- aligning our frameworks more closely with the goals of the government's reforms
- moving beyond headline judgements towards reporting that reflects the real complexity of children's social care
- improving the ways we seek out the voices of children, young people and families
- using Ofsted's system-wide insight to confront the biggest challenges in the care system
- changing the schedule for our ILACS inspections, so they continue to support improvement and focus on the authorities who need it most
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What does this mean ?

- **Report Cards and Grading Scales:** Ofsted launched a consultation in July 2026 to introduce a 5-grade scale and report cards across social care frameworks, replacing old overall scores with more detailed reporting
- **Enduring Relationships:** Proposals include adding a specific judgment focused on children's enduring relationships, aligning with Department for Education (DfE) reforms.
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What does this mean ?

- **Provider Regulation:** Changes apply to the Social Care Common Inspection Framework (SCCIF) for children's homes, fostering agencies, and supported accommodation to better reflect the true complexity of a child's experience



Challenge

- Alongside its pledge to boost the number of fostering places, the DfE wants to shrink the size of the residential care sector, with MacAlister saying in June 2026 that he wanted it to be used for used for "far fewer children and only where it best meets their needs".
- At the same time, he announced a review of the children's home workforce, to define the skills required of staff and registered managers and recommend improvements to training and qualifications.
- Alongside this, the review, carried out by Emmanuel Akpan-Inwang, founder and director of provider the Lighthouse Pedagogy Trust, has been tasked with defining the purpose of residential care. This led to a warning from provider body the Children's Home Association (CHA) that the review risked being skewed by the DfE's drive to shrink the sector.

Challenge

However, in *Keeping Children Safe*, the Labour government signalled its intent to roll out the model. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 includes provisions enabling the government to direct councils to pool the following functions:

- assessing current and future requirements for the accommodation of looked-after children;
- developing and publishing strategies for meeting those requirements;
- commissioning the provision of accommodation;
- recruiting and supporting local authority foster parents;
- developing, or facilitating the development of, new accommodation for looked-after children;
- any other functions related to local authority's duties to accommodate looked-after children specified by the government.

Challenge

The power is due to be enforced from summer 2026.

- Each RCC would be set up under one of three models:
- Constituent councils carrying out the specified functions jointly.
- One council carrying out the functions on behalf of all of the others.
- A separate body being set up to support the councils in carrying out their functions.
- In December 2025, MacAlister said that he intended RCCs to take over the commissioning of care placements nationwide.

Information sharing guidance…..



Information sharing September 2026

- Information sharing to safeguard children and young people - GOV.UK
- The duty has been in place from 30.9.26
- Who is this for :

Education providers, schools, and childcare settings

Social workers and health professionals

Voluntary, charity, and private sector groups working with children

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New guidance

- The guidance is now statutory and reflects the new Information Sharing Duty under section 16LA of the Children Act 2004, which came into force on 30 September 2026.



New guidance

- The **Information Sharing Duty** removes many of the perceived barriers to information sharing and has enormous implications for how we work together. The duty is a substantial move away from making judgements about child protection thresholds to a **general duty** (not judgement) to share information about a child and about others connected to a child to support the statutory duties of other agencies.
- "*Information must be shared where it is relevant to safeguarding and promoting a child's welfare, including where concerns relate to early help, prevention and unmet need... This means when practitioners share information, they can now do so with confidence, even where practitioners may have previously been concerned that statutory or local thresholds were not met.*"

paras 2-3

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New guidance

- The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 deliberately removed old statutory thresholds (like waiting for severe "harm" or a formal child protection enquiry). You must share information without consent when it is relevant.
- **Early Help and Prevention:** Spotting an emerging or unmet need before it escalates.
- **Assessing Overlapping Risks:** Helping another agency build a holistic picture of risk (e.g., if a school notices attendance drops while the police hold exploitation data).
- **Preventing Harm:** When a child or another person connected to them is at perceived risk of harm
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New guidance

- While you do not need *permission* to share the data, the 2026 guidance emphasizes **honesty and collaboration** with the family
- **The Rule:** Wherever it is practicable and safe, you should engage with the child or their carers. Explain *what* you intend to share, *why* you are doing it, and *who* you are sending it to. [
- **The Exception:** Do **not** inform the family or ask for consent if doing so would place the child, yourself, or anyone else at an increased or immediate risk of harm



challenge

- Individually, each piece of information might appear limited. Together, they can create a very different picture of risk. Effective information sharing can help professionals identify concerns earlier, understand patterns, make better-informed decisions and coordinate safeguarding responses.
- But sharing information also requires professional judgement. The question should not simply be "*Can I share this?*" Practitioners also need to consider: Why am I sharing it? Who needs it? Is it relevant? Is it proportionate? What could happen if I do not share it?
- Are you confident of your team in this regard ?
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challenge

- Information sharing should be necessary, relevant, proportionate, accurate, timely and secure, with practitioners able to explain the reasoning behind significant decisions. Where appropriate, children and families should also understand how their information may be used and shared.
- The key is ensuring staff are confident enough to make defensible decisions rather than allowing uncertainty about information sharing to delay an appropriate safeguarding response.

challenge

- The guidance aims to allow professionals to build a complete picture of the child
- All too often in the past – as national inquiries show- information has not been shared and harm (sometimes the death of a child) occurs.
- Have you reviewed practice and policy?
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challenge

- We are likely to have a follow-on update to KCSiE and WTTSC



Thinking about inclusion……where are we?



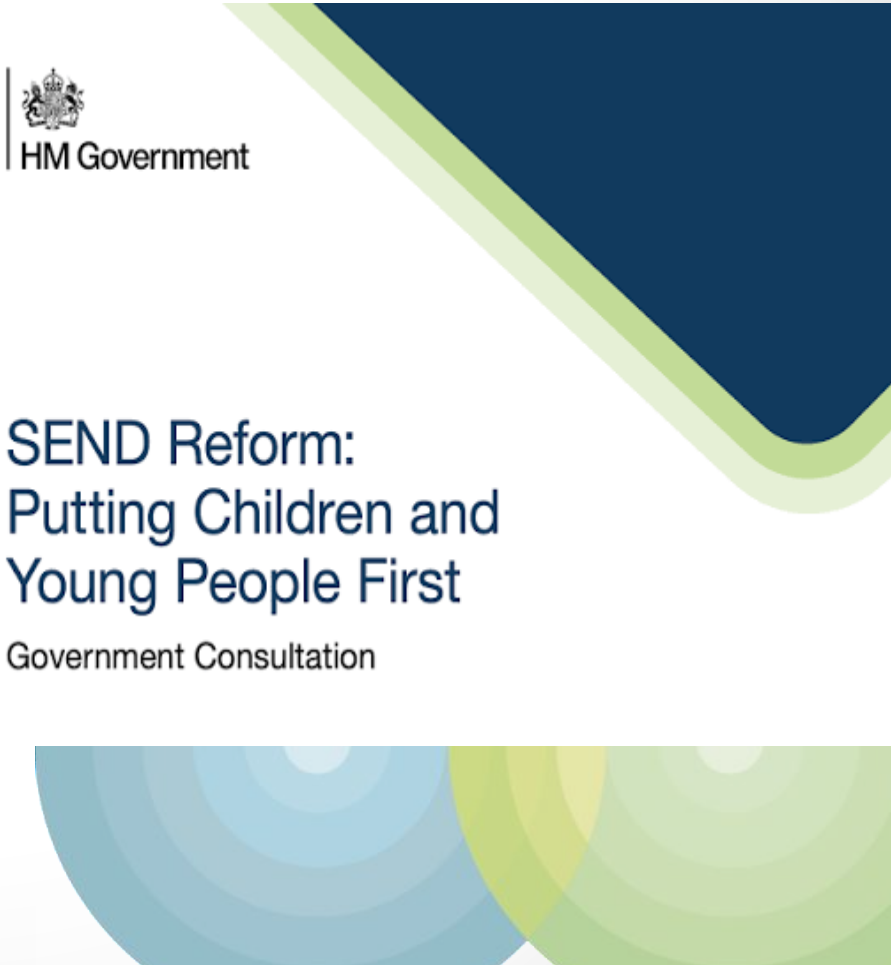
Big changes for schools you need to be aware of:





Continued….


Department
for Education
Every Child Achieving
and Thriving


HM Government
SEND Reform:
Putting Children and
Young People First
Government Consultation

Continued….

- https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/inclusiveteaching
- https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-toolkit-operating-guide-and-information/summary-of-changes
- https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-toolkit-operating-guide-and-information/inspection-information-for-state-funded-schools-for-use-from-september-2026
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Outline timescales

Date	Key Milestones & Requirements
31 December 2026	Mandatory School Inclusion Strategies: Every mainstream school receiving the Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF) must publish an annual inclusion strategy statement on its website.
2026 – 2028	Capacity Building & Standards Publication: Rollout of national workforce training (£200m), local "Experts at Hand" specialist networks, and the official publication of the National Inclusion Standards.
March 2027	Specialist Support Access: Local authorities must launch defined pathways for mainstream schools to directly access speech/language, occupational, and educational psychologists.
2028 – 2029	New Legislation: Expected passage of statutory changes to codify the National Inclusion Standards into legal rights.
September 2029	Framework Assessments Begin: The first school inspections and student assessments officially launch under the reformed inclusive framework.
From September 2030	EHCP Phase Transitions: Existing Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) will safely transition to the new system strictly during major educational milestones (e.g., primary to secondary).

Timescales to look out for:

Looking to the immediate future:

Key Immediate Adjustments for Schools

- **Inclusion Strategies by December 2026:** Schools must explicitly lay out how they meet predictable, commonly occurring cohort needs using "ordinarily available provision". [
- **Ofsted Integration:** While National Inclusion Standards are not yet legally binding for individual students, **Ofsted inspectors** are immediately incorporating these published school strategies into their active evaluation framework.
- **The "Universal Offer":** Mainstream schools are actively utilizing the new £1.6 billion Inclusive Mainstream Fund to build early intervention spaces and adaptive teaching curriculums ahead of upcoming legislative deadlines.

Inclusion principles for all children

- The 7 principles of inclusion are:
- ambitious leadership and governance that embeds inclusion
- evidence-based support prioritising early intervention
- high quality adaptive teaching with curriculum designed for all learners
- enriching provision beyond the classroom that all children can access
- a safe and respectful culture fostering belonging, attendance, and participation in learning
- strong partnerships with families and wider services
- inclusive environments with continuous improvements to accessibility
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Inclusion bases-these will be new

- Inclusion bases are part of a mainstream school; they are not registered as educational institutions in their own right. Inclusion bases are distinct from general learning resource areas in schools.
- For example, the special educational needs (SEN) department space or areas where children and young people might go for universal or targeted support on an ad hoc basis are not inclusion bases. Specialist bases will generally need to go through a formal set-up process, in line with the relevant guidance
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Inclusion bases

- Inclusion bases typically operate on a continuum, characterised by two main approaches: as an inclusive service, where children and young people access the majority of mainstream classes, or as a specialist space, where children and young people do the majority of their learning in the base.
- At one end of the continuum, bases enable children and young people to spend most of their learning time in mainstream classes, sometimes supported by staff from the base. Children and young people may also access individual or small-group sessions in the base for a few hours each week



Inclusion bases

- At the other end of the continuum, the base is primarily positioned as a separate learning area within the school. Children and young people spend most of their time within this space, joining mainstream classes or the whole-school environment only for selected subjects or activities.
- In some schools, children and young people will access these bases for a time-limited period before beginning full reintegration to mainstream lessons
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Inclusion bases

- At times, children and young people might require more support and time in the base, at others, they might gradually reintegrate to full participation in mainstream classes. Again, schools should prioritise movement along the continuum to mainstream classes, whilst recognising that for some children and young people, long-term access to a base as a dedicated learning area is appropriate.

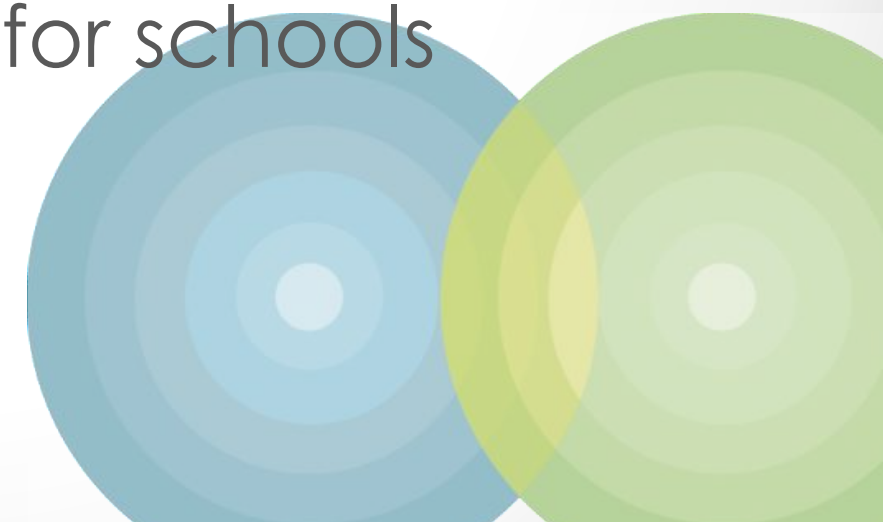
Anything else?



Inclusion and links

- https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2026/03/19/how-ofsted-is-putting-children-known-to-social-care-at-the-heart-of-education-inspections/

- Notes that this is embedded in the adjusted framework for schools inspections



continued

- Keep a track of the SEND changes
- Keep a track of inclusion changes- also likely to link to the new social care inspection framework



Sector updates

- Any thoughts or queries?

Thank you- Chris

