

# FE Self-Evaluation

## Using the New Inspection Toolkit Framework

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This toolkit has been created to give FE Colleges a clear, practical way to measure themselves against Ofsted's new inspection arrangements (from November 2025).

It takes the official grade descriptors and presents them in plain English, with straightforward explanations and clear next steps for improvement.

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## Foreword

This toolkit has been created to give FE Colleges a clear, practical way to measure themselves against Ofsted's new inspection arrangements (from November 2025).

It takes the official grade descriptors and presents them in plain English, with straightforward explanations and clear next steps for improvement.

Our aim is simple: to help leaders and governors quickly see where the college is strong, where more attention is needed, and how to move provision forward.

By turning the Ofsted framework into an action-focused self-evaluation tool, we hope to support colleges in building confidence, accelerating improvement, and achieving the very best outcomes for learners.

## Introduction

This self-evaluation toolkit has been developed to support Further Education and Skills providers in preparing for inspection under the revised Ofsted framework, which is being introduced in November 2025. It translates the official inspection toolkit into a practical resource that college leaders can use to reflect on their current position, identify strengths, and plan for improvement with confidence.

The structure follows the new Ofsted scorecard approach. Each section of the inspection framework is presented in a table format with three clear components:

- **Grade Descriptor** – adapted directly from Ofsted’s published descriptors, using the most recent terminology (Exemplary, Strong, Secure, Attention Needed, Causing Concern, and Met/Not Met for safeguarding).
- **Explanation for Grading** – a plain-English interpretation to help leadership teams understand how the descriptors apply in practice within a college setting.
- **Next Steps** – concise, actionable recommendations that highlight how providers can move from their current position to the next level, ensuring ongoing improvement and readiness for inspection.

This resource is not intended to replace Ofsted’s official guidance, but rather to simplify and operationalise the framework so that senior leaders, governors, and middle managers can:

- Benchmark their current provision against the inspection expectations
- Pinpoint priority areas for development with clarity
- Use the “Next Steps” as a springboard for strategic planning and quality improvement

By combining the latest Ofsted documentation with practical sector insight, this toolkit is designed to reduce complexity, support reflective conversations, and accelerate college improvement planning.

## Safeguarding (Whole-Provider Level)

Safeguarding is a limiting judgement in the *Ofsted Further Education and Skills Inspection Toolkit (2025)*. It is assessed on a “Met / Not Met” basis and underpins all other inspection findings. Inspectors consider how effectively leaders and staff create a safe learning environment, respond to concerns, and ensure learners are protected from harm, including online risks. This section enables leaders to assess their safeguarding culture, policies, and practices, ensuring they are fully compliant.

Grade Descriptor	Explanation for Grading	Next Steps
<b>Met</b>	The provider has established an open, positive culture of safeguarding. All staff are vigilant, reporting is clear, and learners feel safe.	Maintain vigilance; review culture and systems periodically; share best practices.
<b>Not Met</b>	Safeguarding is weak or inconsistent: the culture is closed, reporting is unclear, and learners may be at risk of being unsafe.	Immediate safeguarding audit; retraining; overhaul policy, oversight and transparency.

**Rationale for your choice:**

## Leadership & Governance (Whole-Provider Level)

Strong leadership and effective governance are central to delivering sustainable improvement, as outlined in the *Inspection Toolkit (2025)*. Inspectors judge how leaders set a clear strategic vision, maintain financial oversight, and ensure accountability for the quality of education. This section enables colleges to self-assess the effectiveness of governance structures, leadership capacity, and strategic planning.

Grade Descriptor	Explanation for Grading	Next Steps
<b>Exemplary</b>	Leadership is visionary, consistently adaptive, with a strong track record of sustained improvement. Governance provides high-quality strategic oversight, challenge, and support.	Share leadership strategies with peer institutions; publish case studies; mentor other providers.
<b>Strong</b>	Leaders set high expectations, manage risk well, and respond coherently to challenges. Governance holds leaders to account and contributes to improvement.	Refine strategic planning, strengthen governor training, and deepen analytical challenge.
<b>Secure</b>	Leadership and governance achieve expected effectiveness: responsibilities fulfilled; strengths and weaknesses acknowledged; improvement underway.	Close gaps in oversight, strengthen performance management, and align governance more tightly with strategic priorities.
<b>Attention Needed</b>	Leadership exhibits inconsistencies, as some key areas remain weak, and governance often fails to provide clear challenges or strategic direction.	Undertake leadership capacity review, strengthen board/governance role, clarify strategic direction.
<b>Causing Concern</b>	Leadership is failing to address significant weaknesses; governance is ineffective or inactive, with no coherent vision or accountability.	Urgent external review; reconstitute governance; invest in leadership support and capacity building.

**Rationale for your choice:**

## Contribution to Meeting Skills Needs (for Colleges / Designated Institutions)

The *Inspection Toolkit (2025)* requires colleges to demonstrate how well they align provision with local, regional, and national skills priorities. Inspectors examine employer engagement, curriculum planning, and the impact of provision on workforce development. This section helps leaders evaluate the extent to which their college addresses skills shortages and supports economic growth.

Grade Descriptor	Explanation for Grading	Next Steps
<b>Exemplary</b>	The provider is deeply aligned with local/regional skills strategies; employer and civic engagement is exceptional; curriculum is highly responsive and anticipatory.	Lead regional skills partnerships; publish models of responsive curriculum; co-develop workforce upskilling initiatives.
<b>Strong</b>	The provider consistently demonstrates strong alignment with skills needs, with active employer partnerships and curriculum responsive to local demands.	Deepen employer co-design, improve real-time needs forecasting, and extend stakeholder engagement.
<b>Secure</b>	The provider makes a reasonable contribution: the curriculum is broadly aligned with regional needs; employer interaction is present but uneven.	Strengthen employer liaison, audit curriculum alignment to skills gaps, and refine programme relevance.
<b>Attention Needed</b>	Contribution is variable; some programmes are poorly aligned or outdated; employer engagement is patchy.	Restructure misaligned programmes, strengthen employer input, and review strategic workforce needs.
<b>Causing Concern</b>	The provider fails to contribute meaningfully to local or regional skills needs; the curriculum is disconnected; stakeholder input is negligible.	Undertake major curriculum redesign, rebuild employer relationships, and embed regional skills strategy in mission.



**Rationale for your choice:**

## Inclusion (Whole-Provider Level)

The Inspection Toolkit (2025) emphasises inclusion as central to all provision. Inspectors evaluate how effectively colleges support learners with high needs, those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and those requiring additional support. Inclusion also reflects how equitably learners can access the curriculum and succeed. This section helps leaders consider their inclusive practices and how they remove barriers to participation and achievement.

Grade Descriptor	Explanation for Grading	Next Steps
<b>Exemplary</b>	Inclusive practices are deeply embedded, adaptive, and responsive. Leaders expertly anticipate barriers, dismantle them, and sustain equality of opportunity.	Disseminate inclusion models; support other providers; lead research or networks on inclusive practice.
<b>Strong</b>	The provider consistently identifies barriers, supports disadvantaged or SEND learners well, and ensures most can participate fully.	Strengthen earlier identification, refine targeted support, and deepen staff inclusion capacity.
<b>Secure</b>	Inclusion is generally effective: learners facing barriers receive support; most policies are in place and operational.	Monitor impact more precisely, close residual gaps, and improve consistency in support across provision types.
<b>Attention Needed</b>	Inclusion is inconsistent: some learners experience barriers unaddressed; policy gaps remain; outcomes vary.	Conduct an inclusion audit, train staff, target weak areas, and review intervention design.
<b>Causing Concern</b>	Inclusion is weak: many learners are excluded in practice; learners with barriers are unsupported; policies fail.	Urgent redesign of inclusion strategy, overhaul systems, and enlist external support for inclusion reform.

**Rationale for your choice:**

# Curriculum, Teaching & Training (Provision Type Level)

Inspectors judge how well the curriculum is planned and delivered across different provision types (16–19 study programmes, adult learning, apprenticeships, and high needs). The *Inspection Toolkit (2025)* highlights effective teaching, the use of assessment, and staff subject knowledge. This section supports leaders in reviewing curriculum intent, implementation, and impact across all provision types.

Grade Descriptor	Explanation for Grading	Next Steps
<b>Exemplary</b>	Curriculum is exceptionally well designed and delivered—sequenced, responsive, adaptive. Teaching and training are highly effective, with deeply embedded inclusive pedagogies.	Document exemplary curriculum models; pioneer new pedagogical approaches; share across providers.
<b>Strong</b>	Curriculum is coherent and well sequenced. Teaching and training are effective in most areas; inclusive practice is evident.	Tackle weaker modules, enhance continuous CPD, and peer review across teams.
<b>Secure</b>	Curriculum and delivery meet expected standards: coverage is adequate, teaching is generally effective, and assessment supports progress.	Refine weak areas, develop consistency, and deepen assessment feedback loops.
<b>Attention Needed</b>	Some curriculum elements are poorly sequenced; variability in teaching; learners are not always challenged or supported well.	Redesign weak modules, intensify coaching, standardise pedagogical approaches.
<b>Causing Concern</b>	Curriculum is fragmented or incoherent; training delivery is weak; learners' progress is hindered by poor planning or teaching.	Urgent curriculum overhaul, intensive training intervention, and leadership oversight of delivery excellence.

## Rationale for your choice:

## Achievement (Provision Type Level)

Achievement focuses on the outcomes of learners, including progression, attainment, and destinations. According to the *Inspection Toolkit (2025)*, inspectors look for evidence that learners achieve qualifications, progress to further education or employment, and achieve positive long-term outcomes. This section allows colleges to measure performance and identify gaps in achievement across learner groups.

Grade Descriptor	Explanation for Grading	Next Steps
<b>Exemplary</b>	Learners consistently make exceptional progress across all groups and achieve strong outcomes; progression to destinations is outstanding.	Publish high-impact strategies, contribute to policy debate, and support sector improvement.
<b>Strong</b>	Most learners make strong progress, attainment is above expectations, and destinations for many are positive.	Close remaining gaps, push higher attainment, and refine transition support.
<b>Secure</b>	Learners achieve expected outcomes; progress is in line with benchmark; destinations are broadly positive.	Monitor cohorts more sharply; intervene in underperforming groups; enhance support for progression.
<b>Attention Needed</b>	Some groups underperform; outcomes or progress are not consistent; destinations are weak for parts of the cohort.	Target interventions, review programme structure, and strengthen progression pathways.
<b>Causing Concern</b>	Many learners fail to make adequate progress or achieve, attainment is low, and destinations are weak.	Immediate improvement plan: redesign assessment, curriculum, support; external scrutiny and support.

**Rationale for your choice:**

## Participation & Development (Provision Type Level)

This section reflects how well colleges support learners' broader development, including attendance, attitudes to learning, employability skills, enrichment opportunities, and preparation for life in modern Britain. The *Inspection Toolkit (2025)* makes clear that personal development and participation contribute to learners' confidence and future success. Here, leaders can evaluate how effectively their college develops learners beyond academic achievement.

Grade Descriptor	Explanation for Grading	Next Steps
<b>Exemplary</b>	Learners actively engage in enrichment, personal development and exhibit outstanding behaviour, attitudes, and progression beyond the curriculum.	Lead development programmes; publish innovative models; extend stakeholder partnerships.
<b>Strong</b>	Learners benefit from a wide range of development opportunities; behaviour and attitudes support progression and participation.	Broaden enrichment offerings; link more with external partners; evaluate impact.
<b>Secure</b>	Participation and development are adequate: learners have access to enrichment; behaviour and attitudes generally meet expectations.	Fill gaps in opportunities; strengthen learner voice and engagement mechanisms.
<b>Attention Needed</b>	Some learners lack access to developmental activities; behaviour or attitudes occasionally detract from learning.	Audit participation offer; target disengaged groups; re-energise developmental programme.
<b>Causing Concern</b>	Learners seldom engage in enrichment, attitudes or behaviour are poor, and personal development is weak.	Urgent redesign of participation programmes; embedded pastoral support; external review of culture and engagement.

**Rationale for your choice:**

## Moving Forward with Confidence

Completing this self-evaluation is not just about preparing for inspection — it is about strengthening your college's vision, culture, and outcomes for learners.

By mapping your provision against Ofsted's new framework, you now have:

- A clear picture of current strengths
- A practical set of next steps for improvement
- A shared language for governors, leaders, and staff to work from

This audit is fully incorporated into CollegeiP, our complete platform for driving college improvement. CollegeiP not only supports self-evaluation and self-assessment, but also:

- Improvement planning aligned to inspection priorities
- Staff appraisal and professional development records to build capacity and track growth
- Policy management to ensure compliance and consistency
- Whole-college self-evaluation integrated with daily improvement processes

With CollegeiP, your leadership team can move forward with confidence — not just to meet Ofsted expectations, but to exceed them. By embedding this framework into your ongoing improvement cycle, you'll be able to evidence progress, accelerate change, and deliver first-class outcomes for learners and communities.

First-class improvement begins here — with CollegeiP.

## References

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## Further Reading

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