CATHOLIC SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE INSPECTION OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS, COLLEGES AND ACADEMIES

Report on the national moderation of the

Quality Assurance of Inspections

October 2026

Table of Contents

Executive summary 3

Introduction 5

1 Quality assurance of inspections 8

2 Post-inspection evaluations 14

3 Strategic discussion and updates 24

Conclusion 32

Executive summary

The national quality assurance meeting on 8 October 2026 found substantial evidence of professional, knowledgeable and compassionate inspection. Schools and inspectors particularly valued constructive relationships, effective teamwork and rigorous evaluation conducted with sensitivity to context. The strongest practice combined affirmation of the school's Catholic mission with clear challenge and useful guidance for improvement.

In relation to the post-inspection surveys by schools and inspectors following inspection, of 203 school respondents, 92.1% were satisfied overall, as were 95.7% of lead inspectors and 90.8% of team inspectors. Qualitative comments help explain these results and the occasional mismatch between scores and positive feedback. The review of Template 2 records was also encouraging, with no group judging inspection or QA worse than at the previous meeting. However, submitted QA records covered only 5% of inspections, compared with the expected 10%. Uneven coverage and weaknesses in some records made firm conclusions about national consistency more difficult to establish than in previous years.

Priorities are to sustain professional dialogue throughout inspection, share emerging judgements before final feedback, strengthen evidence recording and its quality assurance, and respond promptly to concerns about conduct or reporting. Preparation and recording must remain proportionate. Framework revision and training should help inspectors recognise the quality described in the directories without relying on artificial or numerical proxies.

Agreed actions and requested follow-up

1. Local review of evaluations. Coordinators to review school and inspector evaluations regularly, check apparent reversals of the response scale against the comments, and follow up individual concerns promptly rather than waiting for national review.

2. Joint observations. ISAAC to clarify expectations for lead and team inspectors undertaking a joint observation when working together for the first time.

3. Joint QA visits. The Chief Inspector to invite inspection schedules and coordinators' availability, then arrange approximately five or six joint visits, subject to capacity. Coordinators to write the QA records. Evidence forms and draft and final reports will support the combined QA and moderation exercise in May.

4. Moderation feedback. The Chief Inspector to clarify access to moderation reports and diocesan feedback, resolve the password difficulty and make the material easier to locate on the website.

5. Inspector training. The Chief Inspector to arrange a spring package for all inspectors and develop northern and southern team-to-lead provision, seeking support from Fionuala Boucher and Julia Cunningham. Dioceses to nominate suitable team inspectors. Training to strengthen recognition of quality in the RED and PLD and avoid inappropriate proxies.

6. Evaluation forms. The Chief Inspector to continue the development work with Naz on bringing evaluations into the inspectorate portal, linking returns to inspections and making local monitoring easier.

7. National records and planning. The Chief Inspector to share the provisional national analysis. Coordinators to check diocesan totals and due-date tables, identify missing reports or incorrect records, and report difficulties using the tables. Checks of cycle coverage need to recognise repeat inspections, school closures, legacy frameworks and SIAMS inspections.

8. Further analysis. The Chief Inspector to examine inspection outcomes by term for the annual report and extend historical analysis as more detailed inspection data becomes available.

9. Ofsted comparisons. The locally developed numerical proxy for Ofsted report cards to be shared with the Chief Inspector for exploratory consideration. It was not adopted as a national measure or an official equivalence with CSI grades.

10. Framework drafting. The Chief Inspector to take the discussion into ISAAC's drafting work, including formation, realistic indicators of quality, chaplaincy, Scripture and the relationship between school implementation and strategic oversight. School and academy trust inspection need to be considered together.

11. Complaints recording. Coordinators to log new complaints promptly, update the same submission as the case progresses and report difficulties to the Chief Inspector. Existing records of previous complaints may remain as they are.

Matters requiring further development

The day also identified further work on evaluative QA recording, alignment of scores and evidence, the scope and audience of Template 2, preparation burdens, AI, and coordinators' involvement during inspections and subsequent complaints. Cross-diocesan and no-notice QA, compulsory lead training, a national updates webinar, changes to inspection length, report-writing timescales, fees and expenses remained proposals.

Introduction

This report records the findings and discussion of the national quality assurance of inspections meeting held on 8 October 2026. Diocesan coordinators and their representatives reviewed evidence about the quality and consistency of Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspections, identified strengths and areas for improvement, and considered priorities for the inspectorate's future work.

The report has three sections. The first considers the quality of inspection and of the quality assurance process itself. The second brings together feedback from schools and inspectors through post-inspection evaluations. The third records the afternoon's strategic discussion, including framework revision, prayer and liturgy, future QA arrangements, inspector training and administrative developments. Throughout, findings and agreed follow-up are distinguished from proposals requiring further consideration.

For the review of inspection QA, participants worked in eight regional groups, scrutinising 27 anonymised Template 2 records. They considered the evidence on two levels: how effectively the QA visitor had evaluated and recorded the inspection, and what the record demonstrated about inspectors' practice. Groups identified "what went well" and "even better if" points and recorded their findings through Microsoft Forms. Seven groups submitted written returns, covering 24 distinct samples; one group completed the exercise but did not submit its form due to a technical error. The report combines these returns with the plenary discussion. It distinguishes weaknesses in recording from weaknesses in inspection: an insufficiently evidenced QA record does not, by itself, establish that an inspection was poor.

For the post-inspection evaluation review, participants considered quantitative summaries and themed qualitative comments from schools and inspectors relating to inspections in 2025–2026. The packs contained 203 school evaluations and 136 inspector evaluations. Eight group returns were received for each exercise, identifying strengths, concerns and possible responses. These were considered alongside the plenary discussion. Numbers of evaluations are distinguished from numbers of inspections represented, since several respondents may comment on the same inspection. Participation also varied between dioceses, so the findings describe respondents' experiences rather than a representative survey of every inspection.

The table overleaf shows those who attended the meeting and the diocese or dioceses they were representing.

Name	Initials	Representing
Philip Robinson	PR	Catholic Education Service
Fiona McGonigle	FM	Arundel & Brighton
Maria Cowler	MC	Arundel & Brighton
Ben McArdle	BM	Birmingham
Jenny Fitzgerald	JF	Clifton
Felicity Hope	FH	East Anglia
Alison Dunne	ADu	Hexham & Newcastle
Adrienne Delaney	AD	Lancaster
Alix Lubomski	AL	Leeds and Hallam
Paul Mannings	PM	Liverpool
Martin Macauley	MM	Middlesbrough
Fionuala Boucher	FB	Nottingham
Helen Brown	HB	Plymouth
Robert Dare	RD	Portsmouth
Martin Johnson	MJ	Salford
Julia Cunningham	JC	Shrewsbury
Leila Coward	LC	Southwark
Nancy Conoboy	NC	Westminster, Northampton and Brentwood

Apologies were received from Fr Bernard Sixtus, who would have represented both Cardiff-Menevia and Wrexham.

This national quality assurance meeting brought together the inspection co-ordinators, or their representatives, from 19 of the 21 dioceses. There were 18 attendees. One diocese sent two representatives, and two attendees represented more than one diocese. Our aim is always to have full attendance and representation at these national quality assurance and moderation meetings. The table below shows the attendance rates for each year since the national quality assurance meetings were first convened.

	Date of meeting	Interval covered	No of attendees	Dioceses represented
2022-2023	29 June 2023	2.5 terms	22	18/22
2023-2024	8 May 2024	3 terms	16	15/22
2024-2025	5 February 2025	2 terms	23	20/21
2025	16 October 2025	2 terms	19	19/21
2025-2026	8 October 2026	3 terms	18	19/21

1 Quality assurance of inspections

Scope of the review

Dioceses have been expected to quality assure at least 10% of their inspections and submit the completed Template 2 records for national review. The table below shows the proportion of inspections for which QA records were submitted in each reporting period. It provides an indication of the coverage of the national QA evidence base, alongside the qualitative findings considered later in this section.

Diocese	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025	2025-2026
Arundel & Brighton	n/a	29%	11%	9%	7%
Birmingham	4%	8%	10%	6%	5%
Brentwood	8%	6%	15%	0%	0%
Cardiff-Menevia	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Clifton	0%	0%	0%	25%	0%
East Anglia	n/a	33%	25%	0%	11%
Hallam	0%	22%	20%	0%	0%
Hexham and Newcastle	0%	3%	5%	19%	6%
Lancaster	0%	0%	0%	13%	0%
Leeds	0%	8%	0%	6%	8%
Liverpool	0%	2%	5%	10%	6%
Middlesborough	0%	0%	43%	9%	20%
Northampton	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Nottingham	0%	5%	6%	20%	10%
Plymouth	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Portsmouth	30%	12%	9%	20%	6%
Salford	4%	2%	7%	9%	10%

Diocese	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025	2025-2026
Shrewsbury	13%	9%	19%	8%	6%
Southwark	0%	3%	6%	11%	7%
Westminster	0%	5%	10%	7%	3%
Wrexham	n/a	n/a	0%	0%	0%
Total	**4.1%**	**4.9%**	**8.1%**	**9%**	**5%**

Following successive improvements, the proportion of inspections supported by a submitted QA record fell from 9% to 5% in 2025–2026. This is the largest decline since these meetings began and represents only half the expected coverage. Four dioceses met or exceeded 10%, while eight submitted no records. The shortfall limits our ability to establish how consistently inspection is being carried out across the country and reduces opportunities to identify and share effective practice.

This needs to be understood in the context of the considerable pressures on diocesan inspection services. Coordinators often combine inspection responsibilities with substantial wider duties, and dioceses face continuing difficulties in sustaining sufficient dedicated officer time. The figures nevertheless show that the existing arrangements have not secured the expected level of QA. We need an approach that is manageable for dioceses while providing sufficiently strong evidence of inspection quality.

The revised arrangements discussed at the meeting are intended to address this. During the coming year, joint visits by the Chief Inspector and diocesan coordinators will provide a smaller, more detailed national sample, bringing together evidence from inspection activity, QA records and draft and final reports. This will support the combined QA and moderation meeting in May. The approach should strengthen shared understanding and enable closer scrutiny of the whole inspection process. Its effectiveness will need to be reviewed, including whether the sample provides sufficient breadth to support national assurance. Dioceses remain free to undertake additional QA in response to local priorities.

Methodology

Coordinators and their representatives worked in eight regional groups to review 27 anonymised Template 2 records. Seven groups submitted written feedback. The SE2 group completed the exercise but did not submit its form. The findings bring together

the available written returns and the plenary discussion, distinguishing the quality of the QA process from the quality of the inspection it records.

The seven returns cover 24 distinct samples. The sample references have been reconciled: NW2's reference to sample 19 means sample 9, and NW1's reference to sample 3 means sample 8. The exercise reviews what the records demonstrate; an insufficient record does not, by itself, establish that the inspection was poor.

The quality of the QA process

What went well

The strongest records were clear, evaluative and closely linked to the criteria. They explained what the visitor had seen and heard, why this supported the appraisal, and the effect of inspectors' actions on the inspection. Groups valued specific examples, references to the handbook and grade descriptors, and explanations of why a criterion had been met partly rather than fully.

There were good examples of triangulation. Visitors compared documents and evidence forms with the discussions they observed, sought leaders' views and considered a range of stakeholder meetings. Some records showed how preparation informed lines of enquiry and how evidence was tested during the inspection. These accounts gave readers confidence in both the inspectors' practice and the visitor's understanding of the task.

Thorough preparation by QA visitors was also recognised. One group noted the breadth of activity covered during a single day in an all-through school. Other records acknowledged difficult circumstances without losing sight of the criteria. The best feedback recognised strengths and identified useful development points in a proportionate and professional way.

Even better if

The main weakness remained the connection between the scores and the commentary. Some records awarded the highest score throughout while describing practice that needed improvement. Elsewhere, a lower score was not accompanied by a clear explanation of what would have made the practice stronger. Intermediate scores such as 2/3 also made the appraisal less decisive. The scoring and the explanation need to tell the same story.

More writing did not necessarily mean better QA. Some records contained lengthy accounts of activities or repeated information without explaining its significance. Others offered general approval, repeated the criteria or used "yes" without sufficient evidence. Several began with detailed commentary but became less specific towards the end. In one particularly weak record, criticism of the inspection arrangements displaced

evaluation of the inspectors against the criteria, leaving the group unable to judge their work reliably.

The scope of the visit was not always clear. Readers needed to know whether the visitor attended day 1, day 2 or both, which activities were directly observed, and where information came from leaders, inspectors or documents. Ambiguous references to "the team" sometimes left it unclear whether a comment concerned school staff or inspectors. Blank sections were also difficult to interpret without knowing the limits of the visit.

Development advice needs to be anchored in agreed expectations. Groups questioned recommendations that appeared to reflect personal preferences rather than the framework or handbook. Equally, a record should not speculate about what would have happened in an activity the visitor did not observe. Where a concern is identified, the action should address it explicitly rather than leaving the reader to infer the next step.

The quality of inspectors' work

What went well

The records generally portrayed professional, knowledgeable inspectors who understood the framework and conducted inspections with care and rigour. Preparation was often thorough, with clear pre-inspection briefings and purposeful lines of enquiry. Groups noted effective use of comparative grade descriptors, consideration of typicality and the use of evidence from several sources to support judgements.

Relationships were a recurring strength. Inspectors were described as courteous, empathetic and skilled communicators. Strong leads managed difficult conversations calmly, responded sensitively to leaders' concerns and maintained constructive dialogue during challenging inspections. Care for the wellbeing of school staff and inspection colleagues was evident. Some records showed the Church's educational mission informing the manner in which the inspection was conducted throughout.

Effective team leadership was also prominent. Leads deployed colleagues according to their skills, sought their views, coached less experienced inspectors and used team meetings to review emerging evidence. Timetables were adapted as new questions arose. Regular headteacher update meetings helped leaders understand the direction of the inspection, and the strongest examples showed emerging judgements being shared before final feedback.

Even better if

Preparation should be shared with team inspectors in sufficient time for them to contribute confidently. One record suggested that more information beforehand would have helped; another raised the effect of timetable changes on the team inspector.

Flexibility was generally a strength, but changes still need to be explained and managed sensitively.

Evidence forms and their quality assurance remained areas for attention. Groups identified incomplete administrative boxes, the need for lead inspectors to sample colleagues' evidence forms, and the importance of doing this early enough for feedback to improve subsequent recording. In one sample, more team meetings and better scheduling of evidence-form QA would have strengthened an otherwise effective inspection.

Communication with leaders needs to remain clear throughout the inspection. Positive initial contact was not always followed by an equally clear explanation of lines of enquiry in school. The feedback also reinforced the importance of sharing emerging judgements before the final meeting. Some records raised questions about duplication of activity and whether inspectors' time and expertise were being used to best effect.

Overall assessment

Four of the seven groups judged the quality of QA better than at the previous meeting, including one which selected "much better"; three considered it about the same. Four judged inspectors' work better and three about the same. None selected worse. This is an encouraging assessment, although the discussion showed continuing uncertainty about how much the records reveal about the consistency of practice nationally.

Of 21 recorded QA-process ratings, eleven were 5, six were 4, three were 3 and one was 1; three substantive entries had no rating. For inspectors' work, 17 usable ratings were 5, five were 4 and one was 3. A further rating of 3 was explicitly disclaimed by the group because the QA record did not provide enough evidence to judge the inspector. An unused fourth entry containing placeholder text and a score of 1 has also been excluded. These are the groups' review ratings on a scale where 5 is best, not the original Template 2 scores or school inspection grades.

Issues arising from the discussion

The plenary raised a question about the purpose and audience of Template 2. RD questioned the balance between its usefulness to inspectors and dioceses and the additional detail needed for national scrutiny. PR distinguished feedback that helps an individual improve from the evidence needed to establish national consistency. Participants recognised the value of specific, affirmative feedback while questioning the benefit of writing lengthy commentary simply to restate that a criterion had been met.

Participants also discussed the difficulty of critically evaluating colleagues whom they know and support. Cross-diocesan QA was suggested as a way to strengthen independence and confidence in the process. The discussion questioned whether pre-

arranged visits always reveal typical practice, and whether visits prompted by difficulties or undertaken without notice might provide additional insight. These were suggestions for consideration, not an agreed replacement for the existing arrangements.

There was uncertainty about whether lead and team inspectors should undertake an initial joint observation when working together for the first time. PR explicitly referred this to ISAAC for clarification. This should be distinguished from the Inspection Handbook's provision for joint observation with school leaders: the discussion concerned observation by two inspectors together.

RD also raised the use of AI in preparation and report writing. The discussion identified a need for policy which distinguishes assistance with administrative tasks from the exercise of inspectors' professional judgement. No detailed policy was agreed during this exchange; the wider implications belong with the strategic discussion.

Follow-up from this session

The explicit referral was for ISAAC to clarify expectations concerning joint observations by inspectors. Other priorities emerging from the exercise were clearer training in evaluative QA recording; alignment of scores, evidence and development points; and a clear statement of which day and activities a visit covered. The purpose of Template 2 and the contribution of cross-diocesan and no-notice visits require further consideration. The arrangements outlined later in the meeting will be recorded in the strategic section of this report.

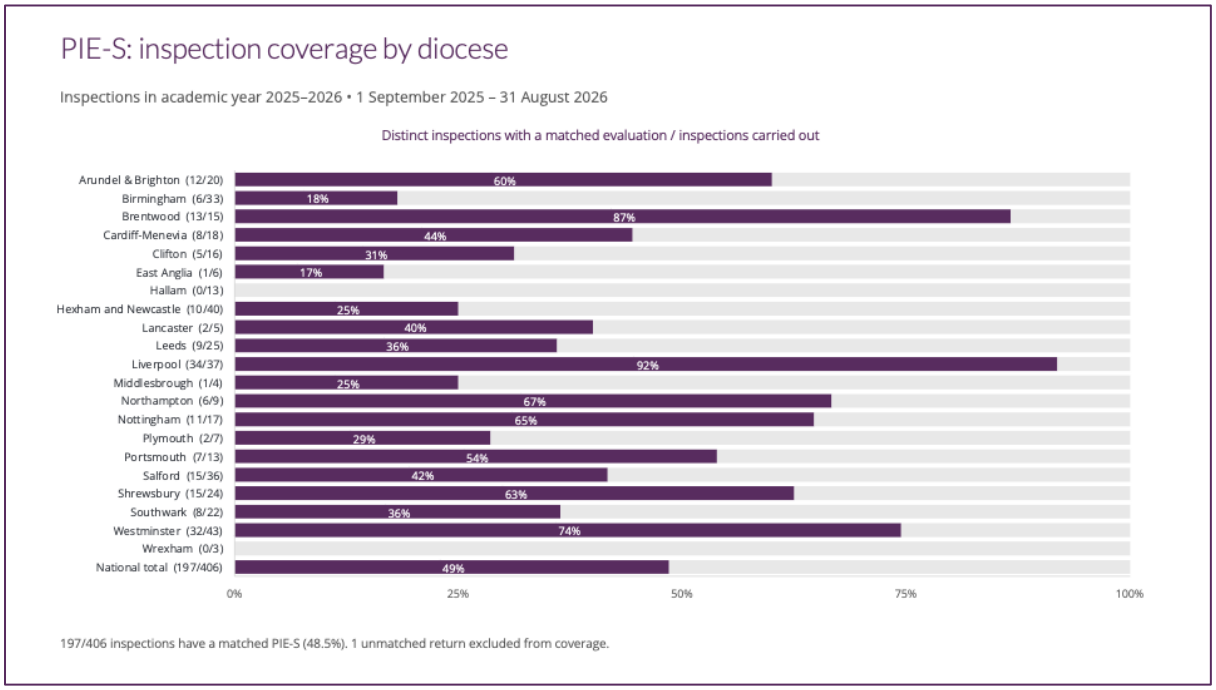
2 Post-inspection evaluations

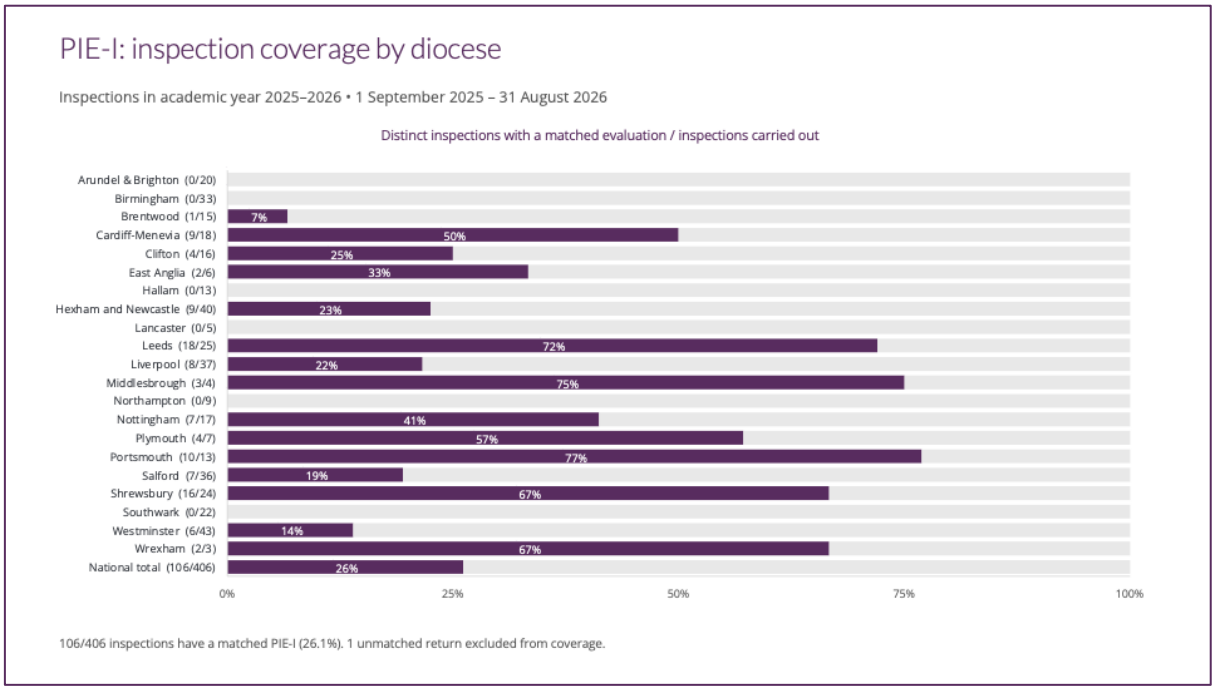
Scope of the review

The meeting considered school (PIE-S) and inspector (PIE-I) evaluations relating to inspections between 1 September 2025 and 31 August 2026. Eight groups submitted findings for each exercise. These are the groups' interpretations of the quantitative summaries and themed comments, rather than eight additional evaluations. The findings below combine those returns with the plenary discussion.

The school pack contained 203 evaluations. Matched returns represented 197 of the 406 registered inspections (48.5%). The inspector pack contained 136 evaluations: 70 from leads, 65 from team inspectors and one from a shadowing trainee. Matched inspector returns represented 106 inspections (26.1%). Each pack included one unmatched evaluation, retained in its questionnaire results but excluded from inspection-coverage counts. More than one evaluation can relate to an inspection, so numbers of returns and numbers of inspections represented are different measures.

Coverage varied substantially by diocese. The school pack ranged from no matched returns in Hallam and Wrexham to 91.9% coverage in Liverpool; inspector coverage ranged from zero in several dioceses to 76.9% in Portsmouth. These are the returns available to the meeting, not proof that a diocese with no matched return had collected none. The findings describe respondents' experience and should not be assumed to represent every inspection equally.

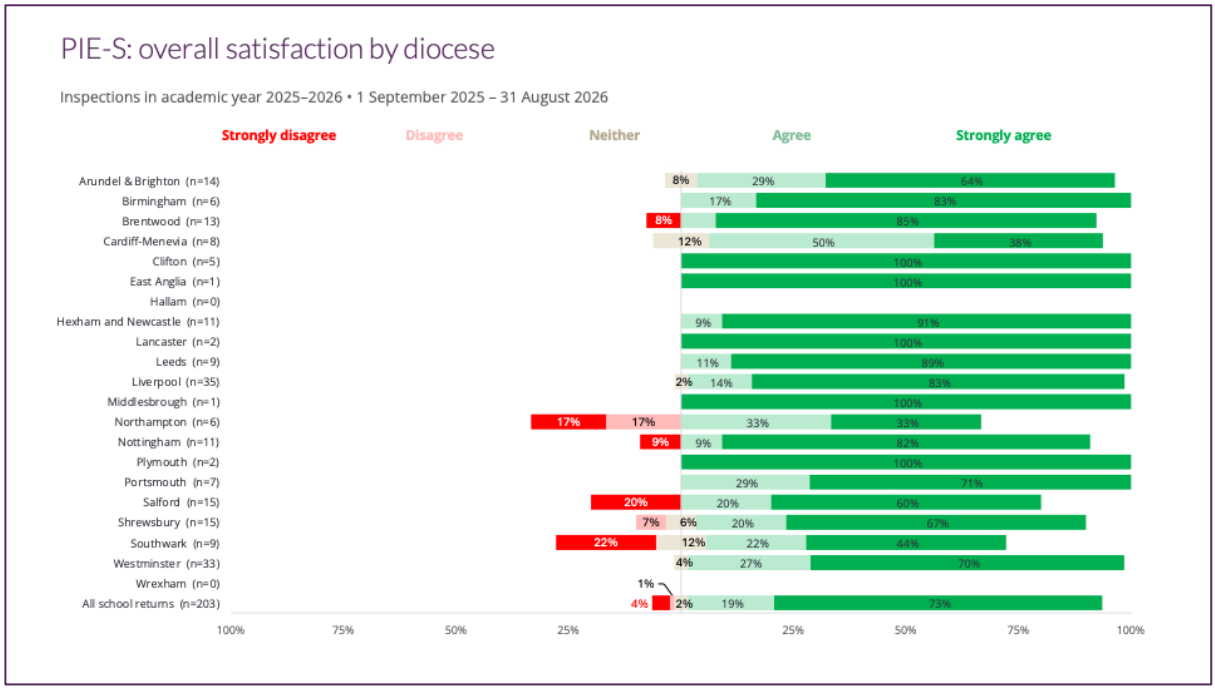




School evaluations: the quantitative picture

The overall picture was strongly positive. Of 203 respondents, 187 agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the inspection (92.1%); six selected neither and ten disagreed or strongly disagreed.

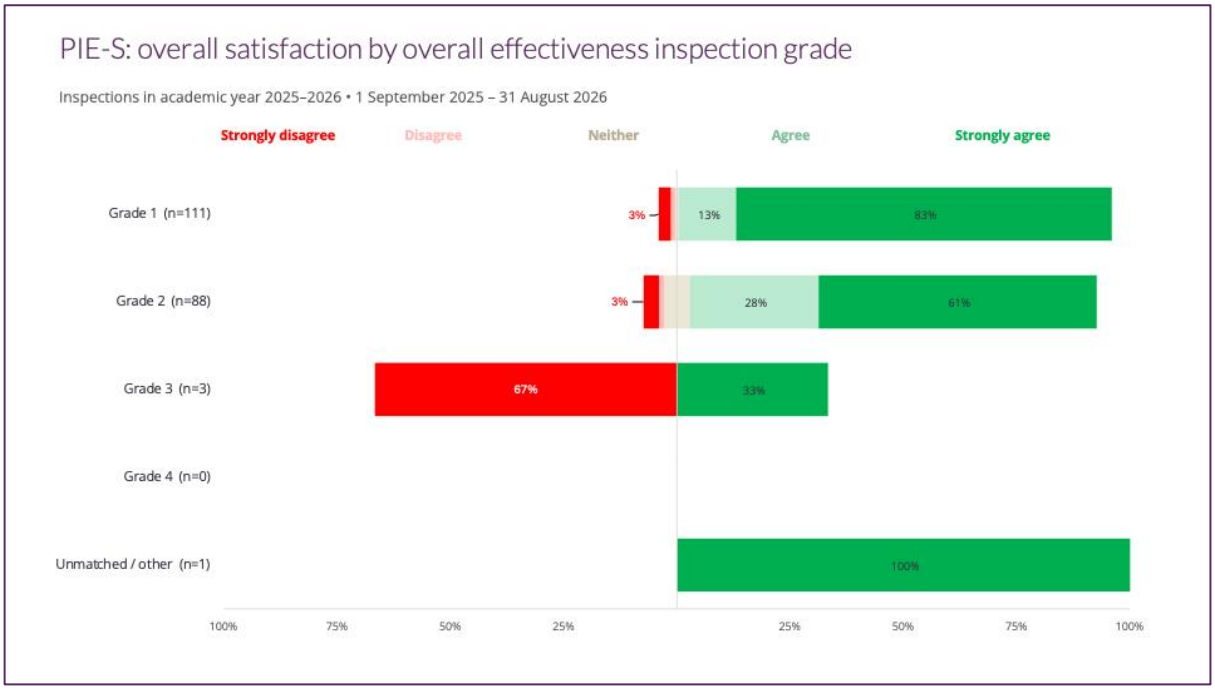
Overall satisfaction was high across most dioceses, with strongly agree responses predominating. Several dioceses received entirely positive responses, while dissatisfaction was concentrated in a smaller number.



These results should not be read as a ranking of diocesan inspection services. Numbers of responses vary considerably, and a single negative evaluation can account for a substantial percentage where returns are few. Several evaluations may also relate to the same inspection. Differences in inspection outcomes and response rates may influence the picture, so the percentages need to be considered alongside the accompanying comments and local circumstances.

Some evaluations contained negative Likert-scale responses alongside strongly positive written comments, suggesting that the scale had been interpreted in reverse. The quantitative results alone therefore do not provide a wholly reliable account of school satisfaction. The qualitative comments, reviewed below, offer a fuller and more dependable picture of schools' experiences and the reasons for their responses.

Overall satisfaction was highest among respondents from schools graded 1 or 2. For grade 1, 96% agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the inspection, compared with 89% for grade 2. The difference was more pronounced in the strength of agreement: 83% of grade 1 respondents strongly agreed, compared with 61% of grade 2 respondents.



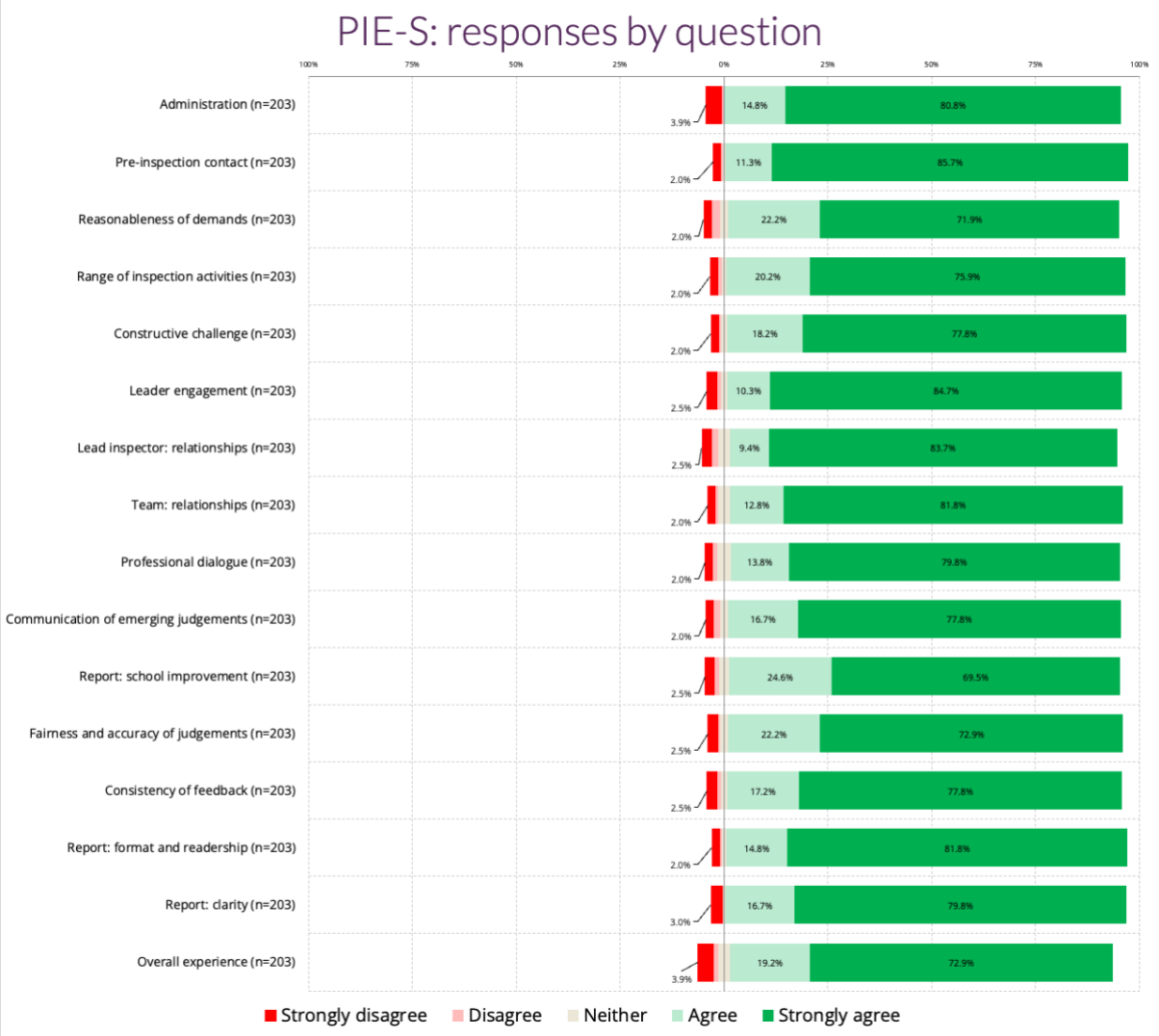
The three evaluations relating to grade 3 inspections were sharply divided: two strongly disagreed and one strongly agreed. This is too small a group to support general conclusions about the experience of schools receiving this grade. There were no evaluations relating to grade 4 inspections.

The pattern suggests an association between inspection outcome and reported satisfaction, but does not establish why respondents answered as they did. Dissatisfaction should not be attributed simply to disappointment with a grade. The

accompanying comments and evidence about the inspection process remain essential to understanding concerns and identifying any action needed.

Every school question attracted at least 92% agreement. The highest agreement concerned pre-inspection contact by the lead inspector: 197 of 203 (97.0%). Opportunities for leaders to engage productively with inspectors attracted 193 positive answers (95.1%), including 172 strongly agree responses.

Relative concerns were visible within this positive picture. Relationships between the lead inspector and staff attracted eight negative answers (3.9%), and administration nine (4.4%). Eight respondents disagreed that inspection demands were reasonable. The report as a vehicle for improvement had the lowest proportion of strongly agree responses, 141 of 203 (69.5%), although overall agreement remained high at 191 of 203 (94.1%). Rounded estimates in the group returns have been checked against the pack's exact counts.



School evaluations: the qualitative picture

What went well

Professionalism, relationships and care were the strongest recurring themes. Groups highlighted respectful, supportive inspectors who combined rigour with sensitivity to staff wellbeing. Schools valued being listened to, having their context understood and receiving constructive challenge from people who appreciated the realities of school life. The most positive accounts described a demanding process made purposeful and manageable by the inspectors' approach.

The Catholic character of inspection was also valued. Schools described an experience that celebrated their community, recognised its mission and affirmed what was going well. Groups noted collaboration, a faith-filled approach and the quality of interaction with leaders and pupils. Affirmation was most convincing where it accompanied accurate evaluation and clear next steps, rather than replacing challenge.

Professional dialogue helped schools understand and contribute to the inspection. Effective teams followed the agreed process, explained what to expect and kept leaders informed. Schools appreciated opportunities to provide further evidence and discuss emerging findings. Many regarded the judgements as an accurate reflection of their school and welcomed reports which recognised strengths and supported improvement.

Even better if

The minority of negative experiences still require attention. PR emphasised the importance of regular local scrutiny of evaluations, where individual circumstances can be understood and concerns followed up promptly.

Sharing emerging judgements remained a priority. Some leaders described being surprised by findings at the end of day 2, without sufficient opportunity to respond. Groups wanted training to reinforce the basic processes, code of conduct and purpose of headteacher update meetings. Good initial relationships need to be sustained through honest, timely discussion of difficult evidence.

The preparation burden was a concern, particularly the CSED and the time spent assembling supporting documents. Groups questioned whether self-grading was helpful and whether the initial telephone conversation could be used more effectively. Comments also raised timing clashes and unclear questionnaires. Reports of inspectors arriving unusually early, leaving late or extending activity to an apparently independent nursery require contextual checking rather than being treated as established breaches.

Reports generally attracted favourable feedback, but a small number of schools described discrepancies between verbal and written feedback, factual inaccuracies, insufficient recognition of context or language experienced as unnecessarily negative. One account accepted the overall inspection grade while challenging aspects of the report. This is an important distinction. Concerns about the report's accuracy, tone or usefulness are not necessarily objections to the overall outcome.

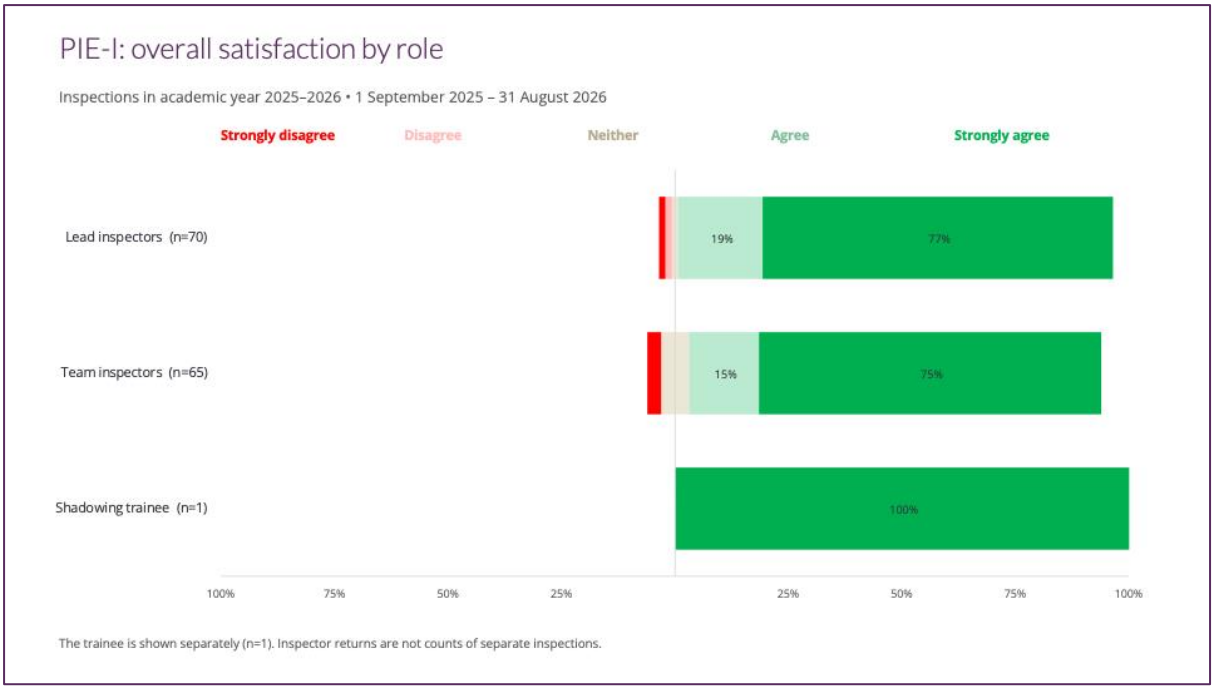
Other issues included conflicting diocesan advice and inspection expectations, uncertainty about prayer and liturgy, the application of the framework in independent schools and the perceived impartiality of complaints. Groups also questioned reliance on articulate pupils as the principal source of pupil voice and asked for guidance on gathering evidence in a wider range of ways. These were identified as areas requiring clarification or training, rather than evidence that every reported interpretation was correct.

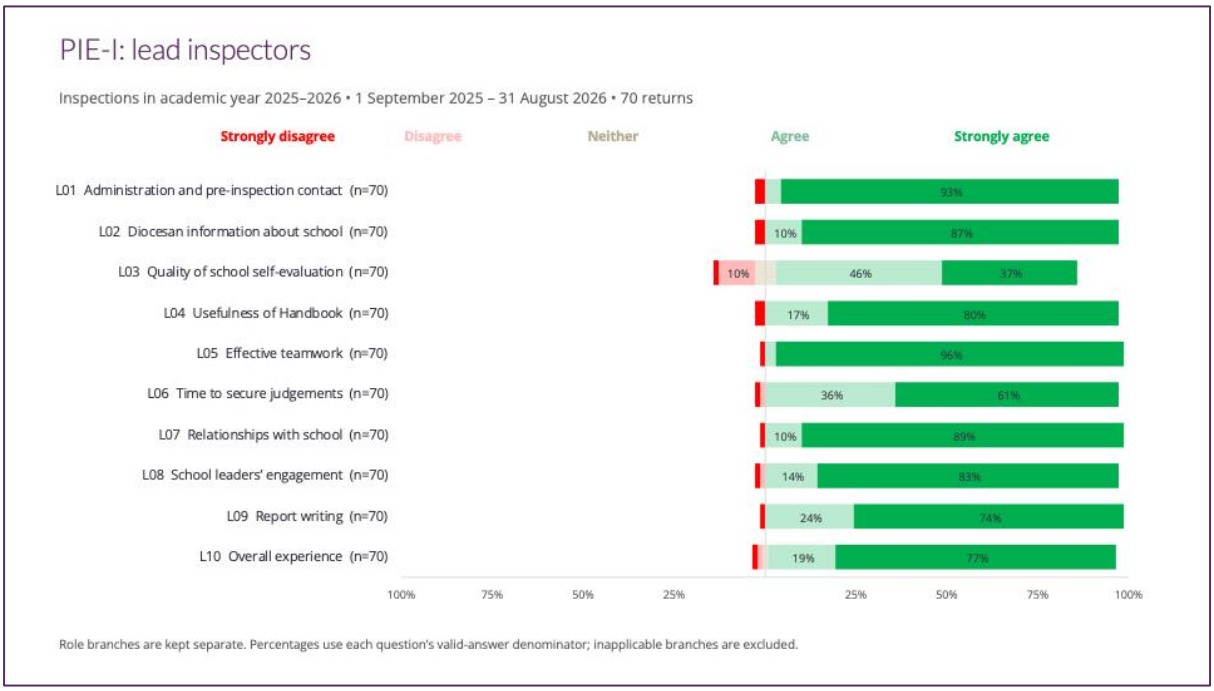
Inspector evaluations: the quantitative picture

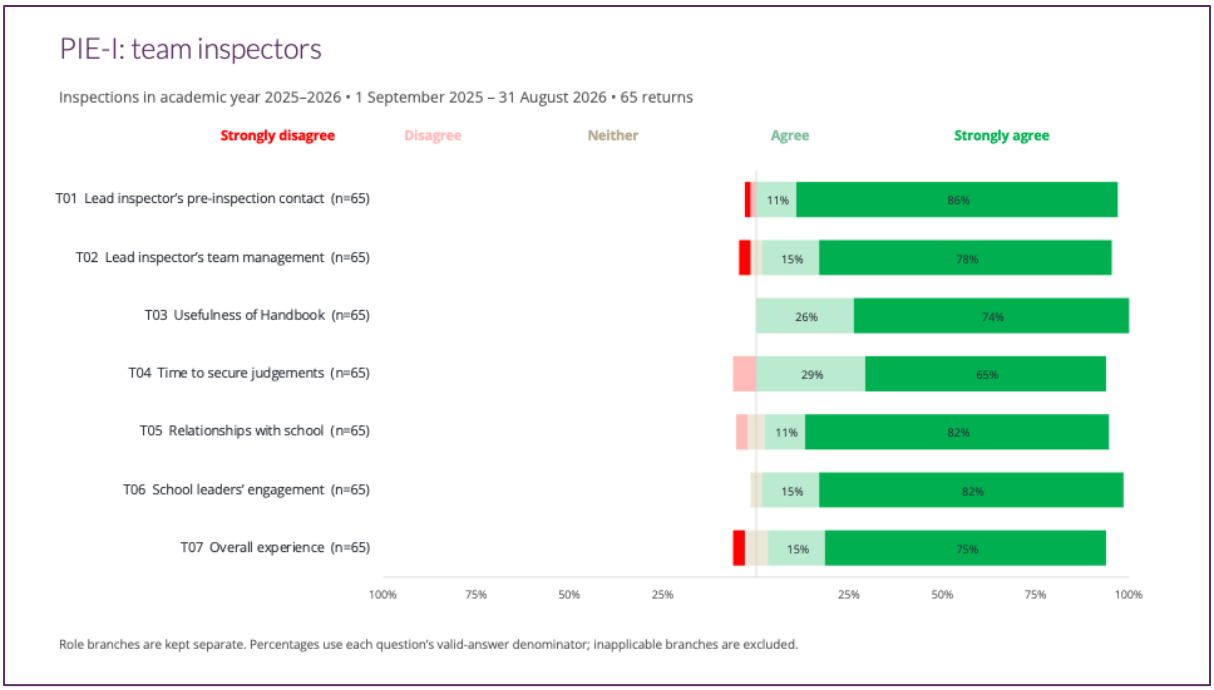
Inspector responses were also very positive. Among leads, 67 of 70 were satisfied overall (95.7%); among team inspectors, 59 of 65 were satisfied (90.8%). The single

trainee answered positively throughout, but one return cannot establish a wider pattern.

Effective teamwork attracted 69 positive responses from 70 leads (98.6%). All 65 team inspectors agreed that the handbook was reliable and useful. School self-evaluation was the lowest-rated lead-inspector question, although 58 of 70 leads still agreed that it was robust and accurate (82.9%).







Inspector evaluations: the qualitative picture

What went well

Inspectors valued constructive teamwork, supportive colleagues and positive relationships with school leaders. Team inspectors described learning from experienced leads, receiving helpful guidance and finding inspection valuable for their professional development. Leads appreciated knowledgeable colleagues and schools which engaged openly with the process. Groups recognised the strength of initial training and the usefulness of the inspection materials.

Good preparation made a difference. Inspectors welcomed clear information, well-organised document sharing, diocesan support and schools which explained relevant contextual or staffing issues. The comments also included sensitive handling of bereavement. These examples show the importance of practical support and professional judgement alongside procedural consistency.

The digital reporting system was recognised as having useful potential. Inspectors could see the benefits of a connected process, even where implementation remained frustrating. PR acknowledged those frustrations and the value of inspectors' feedback in identifying problems that needed fixing.

Even better if

The CSED was the clearest concern shared with schools. Inspectors described documents that were too long, late, insufficiently accurate or accompanied by extensive links and additional material. Schools could be disappointed when inspectors did not pursue every item. Groups proposed reconsidering the format and expectations,

limiting unnecessary material and clarifying submission deadlines. RD identified the workload on both sides as a substantial issue in the plenary.

Time pressure extended beyond gathering evidence to recording it, reflecting as a team and writing reports alongside other employment. Groups questioned the balance of activity across the three key areas, with some comments suggesting disproportionate attention to RE. Suggestions included two-day inspections for all schools, adjustments to report-writing timescales and review of fees or expenses. These were proposals for consideration, not changes agreed at this meeting.

Some inspectors' accounts raised concerns about team leadership and consistency between dioceses. These included inadequate pre-inspection briefing, too few team meetings, concerns not being pursued and emerging judgements not being shared with school leaders. Some also noted that the team had not prayed together. PR stressed that evaluations can reveal matters which would otherwise remain unknown; one difficult inspection had generated several comments and needed to be understood as one case, rather than several independent examples of failure.

Further training was requested on the RED and PLD, grade descriptors, report writing and progression from team to lead inspector. Groups suggested practical case studies, supported lead-shadowing and clearer guidance on RSHE checks and discussions with academy trust CEOs. Digital difficulties included glitches, uncertainty about final submission and the time needed to learn the system. Suggestions about training and support will also inform the strategic section.

Discussion and follow-up

PR asked coordinators to review evaluations regularly, rather than waiting for the national meeting, and to check apparent scoring reversals where the numerical answers clearly conflicted with the comments. The supplied packs retain corrections already verified; no additional scores have been changed for this report. Participation and the matching of returns to inspections remain priorities for improving the evidence base.

PR reported that discussions with Peter's House were already under way about bringing evaluation forms into the inspectorate portal. This would help connect returns to inspections and make local monitoring easier. It was development work in progress, not a completed facility. Groups supported easier access and tracking of outstanding evaluations.

The discussion identified a need for clearer policy advice on coordinators' involvement during a live inspection and the implications for subsequently investigating a complaint. PR distinguished procedural advice from influencing inspection judgements and emphasised the need to consider prior involvement when selecting an investigating

officer. This was a matter for clarification, rather than a new complaints procedure agreed in the meeting.

PR also undertook to examine inspection outcomes by term for the annual report, following questions about possible seasonal variation. Participants offered several possible explanations, but no pattern or cause was established. Finally, PR agreed that training needed to help inspectors recognise quality as described in the RED and PLD, rather than rely on inappropriate proxies. The wider implications for framework revision will be considered in Section 3.

3 Strategic discussion and updates

Purpose of the afternoon discussion

The afternoon considered the emerging national inspection picture, revision of the framework and arrangements for quality assurance, training and administration. The framework discussion was intended to inform ISAAC's drafting work. The presentation Reimagining the Inspection of Prayer and Liturgy provided a discussion starter based on the audit of the PLD against the current framework. PR presented early thinking for challenge and development; the meeting did not adopt new descriptors, a new grading structure or a launch date.

National inspection data and the annual report

PR shared provisional quantitative analysis for 2025–2026 and asked coordinators to check their diocesan figures. Apparent gaps in inspection coverage might reflect missing reports, particularly from earlier years and inspections for which no grant had been claimed. Coordinators were asked to identify omissions so that the national record could be corrected before publication.

The discussion distinguished the number of inspections undertaken from the number of currently open schools inspected during the cycle. Repeat inspections contribute to the former but do not represent additional schools in the latter; closed schools also affect comparisons. Legacy-framework and SIAMS inspections needed to be recognised when checking cycle coverage.

The analysis showed a higher proportion of grade 1 judgements in Catholic life and mission than in RE, with collective worship between the two. Participants also discussed differences between dioceses and changes over time. These patterns prompted questions about consistency, but the figures alone did not establish whether differences reflected school quality, interpretation of descriptors or incomplete records. PR undertook to extend historical analysis as more detailed inspection data became available.

The very limited use of grade 4 prompted discussion about the usefulness and spacing of the four grades. Participants questioned whether the present descriptors provided sufficiently helpful distinctions, particularly around grades 2 and 3. No decision was taken to change the number of grades.

Changes to Ofsted reporting made comparisons with CSI outcomes less straightforward. NC described a locally developed numerical proxy for the new report cards, which PR asked to see. This remained an exploratory method for comparison, rather than an agreed national measure or an official equivalence between the two systems.

Framework revision and the directories

PR explained that the bishops describe the quality of Catholic education through the directories, and that CSI's task is to evaluate schools against that vision. Revision should therefore test whether the descriptors properly reflect the RED, PLD and forthcoming Catholic Life and Mission Directory. Prayer and liturgy required particular attention because some current indicators did not adequately express the PLD's understanding of quality.

The emerging work on academy trust inspection strengthened the case for revising school and academy trust inspection together. PR confirmed that a new school framework would not be launched in one year's time. The meeting did not settle a replacement timetable.

One proposal was to replace the nine separate judgements with one for each of the three principal areas and one for leadership and governance. Another was to distinguish strategic oversight from implementation in schools, recognising that responsibilities sit differently in a maintained school, a single academy trust and an academy within a Catholic multi-academy trust. These were possible structures to test, not agreed changes. The presentation proposed one holistic Prayer and Liturgy judgement, informed by six dimensions, with distinct descriptors for governance and school implementation. The six dimensions would organise evidence without receiving separate grades.

Strategic oversight should support and evaluate schools without prescribing so much detail that school leaders lose the ability to lead their own communities. Shared expectations of quality need not require every school to use the same resources or express its mission in an identical way.

The six proposed dimensions

The presentation organised the proposed holistic judgement around six connected dimensions: Eucharistic and ecclesial character; the prayer of the Church; the gathered assembly and its engagement and participation; liturgical formation and ministry; a coherent and inclusive liturgical life; and leadership and implementation, with governance separated where appropriate.

These were lenses through which inspectors could consider evidence, rather than six new subgrades or a replacement checklist. The presentation's indicative links to CW1, CW2 and CW3 showed how existing concerns could remain recognisable within a different structure. The mapping was not intended as a direct equivalence between old and new criteria.

The proposed overarching question was how well the school lives and grows as a Eucharistic community through prayer and liturgy. Observations, pupil and staff voice, planning and evaluation would contribute to an explanation of one grade. The presentation explicitly left open how aggregation, moderation, reporting and training would need to change to support this approach.

Prayer and liturgy and the formation of the community

Formation emerged as a central concern. Participants argued that inspection should ask how staff and pupils are helped to understand and participate in the prayer life of the Church. Formation is ongoing for everyone; baptism should not be treated as evidence that a member of staff already has the understanding or confidence needed.

RD highlighted the challenge of common descriptors across schools with very different communities. Discussion also recognised the pressures on small schools where several responsibilities fall to the headteacher. PR argued that common principles remained necessary, while accepting that they would be expressed differently in different contexts. Case studies illustrating that range were suggested as support for both inspectors and schools.

Participants distinguished leading prayer from facilitating pupils' participation. Expectations needed to respect staff members' beliefs and the PLD's account of appropriate roles. The aim was to build capacity beyond a very small number of confident people without assuming that every member of staff must undertake the same ministry.

NC questioned expectations that pupils should explain in detail how prayer had moved them to action, particularly when applied across ages five to eighteen. The discussion recognised that prayer forms character over time and that its effects cannot necessarily be isolated or demonstrated during a two-day inspection. PR accepted the need to reconsider indicators which encourage inspectors to seek artificial evidence of an immediate spiritual outcome.

Quality of prayer and participation

PR outlined a possible approach centred on the Eucharistic character of Catholic prayer. This meant a prayer life shaped by the Church's worship and connected to the parish and wider Church; it was not a proposal to judge quality by the frequency of Mass. Formation for participation, the centrality of Scripture and the quality of communal and personal prayer were offered as more helpful considerations than numerical measures of activity.

Celebrations of the word were discussed as an important expression of this prayer life. PR emphasised that Scripture should shape the celebration, rather than become a

minor element within elaborate introductory activities. Drawing ordinarily on the Church's lectionary and liturgical year was proposed as a marker to explore in drafting, with scope for appropriate choices and exceptions. This discussion did not introduce a new inspection requirement.

MC cautioned against implying that every act of prayer should follow the same four-part pattern. Schools needed space for meditation, lectio divina and other forms of prayer. PR agreed that celebrations of the word should not be expected every day and that the quality and purpose of prayer mattered more than the number of forms a school could demonstrate. The relationship between communal prayer and opportunities for personal prayer also needed clearer recognition.

Participants questioned practices in which every pupil completed a written evaluation after each celebration. Such routines could become formulaic and imply that worship was principally something to rate according to personal preference. This was identified as an issue for reviewing the descriptors and their interpretation, rather than a change to current requirements announced at the meeting.

PR emphasised the distinction between participation by the whole gathered assembly and the particular ministries undertaken by some pupils. More children performing visible tasks did not necessarily mean better participation. Formation should help pupils understand Scripture, liturgical responses, singing, symbols, posture and movement, while respecting their freedom and religious background. Collaboration with parishes on a shared sung repertoire was offered as one practical example.

The Liturgy of the Hours was suggested as a resource which schools could draw on more confidently, supported by training. NC also argued that the centrality of Scripture should be explicit across the framework, including RE, while recognising the different ways Scripture is encountered in learning and in prayer.

PR sketched possible broad distinctions in quality, from prayer being peripheral or poorly understood to a coherent, well-supported prayer life rooted in the Eucharistic community of the Church. These were illustrations for further drafting. The presentation supplied six proposed dimensions and an illustrative four-grade progression: substantially absent or unfaithful; developing but inconsistent; secure and faithful; deeply embedded and formative. Frequency, novelty, numbers undertaking ministries and dedicated space would not, by themselves, determine quality. Neither these dimensions nor the illustrative grade descriptors were adopted as policy.

Chaplaincy and clarity of expectations

BM reported that chaplains could feel insufficiently involved in inspection and that their contribution was not always reflected adequately in reports. The review offered an opportunity to recognise chaplaincy more clearly across Catholic life and mission and

prayer and liturgy. Participants stressed that chaplaincy is a function of the school's life, including in primary schools without an appointed chaplain, and should not be equated simply with employing a person with that title.

Discussion distinguished the legal character of norms and formally promulgated directives from the directories' wider descriptions of quality. PR cautioned against treating every aspect of the directories as a binary compliance test or overloading diocesan directives. The framework should evaluate how well schools exemplify the bishops' vision.

Participants asked for language which school leaders and teachers could understand without specialist explanation. At the same time, simplification should preserve the meaning and ambition of the directories. PR recognised the need for formation and practical support. Differences between advice given to schools by clergy and diocesan teams also needed sensitive handling; schools should not be judged harshly for circumstances outside their control.

Inspecting at the level of responsibility

The presentation developed the distinction between governance and implementation beyond the broad proposal discussed above. Governance descriptors would consider fidelity, policy, capacity, resources, assurance and accountability. School implementation descriptors would consider the Annual Plan of Provision, staff formation, liturgical expertise, evaluation and improvement. These were proposed descriptor stems for testing.

For a standalone school with substantive governance of its own, both would be evaluated at school inspection. For an academy within a Catholic multi-academy trust, the proposal placed board governance within academy trust inspection and school implementation within academy inspection. Local governors or committees would be considered according to the actual scheme of delegation. Local findings could inform evaluation of the academy trust's assurance without generating a duplicate governance grade.

The presentation identified unresolved questions about how findings would reach an academy trust before its first inspection, how inspectors would distinguish local weaknesses from failures at academy trust level, and how inspection timing and evidence would connect. These details form part of the proposal presented to the meeting; the recorded discussion did not resolve each of them or establish a new inspection process.

The closing slides invited testing of the dimensions, grade distinctions and allocation of responsibility against contrasting school contexts. This accords with the discussion's emphasis on case studies and further drafting, rather than immediate implementation.

Quality assurance and moderation arrangements

The meeting supported a staged approach to joint QA visits by PR and diocesan coordinators, initially within the coordinator's own diocese. PR would write inviting inspection dates and coordinators' availability, then select visits that could be accommodated. Around five or six visits were envisaged, subject to capacity, during the period leading up to the May meeting.

The intention was to gather a fuller record of each selected inspection, including evidence forms and draft and final reports, so that the combined QA and moderation meeting could consider fewer inspections in greater depth, from inspection activity through to the published report. Coordinators would continue to write the QA record. Additional local QA remained welcome; PR was not asking dioceses to arrange the previous volume of visits as a separate national expectation for this exercise.

RD challenged PR to consider the practical pressures of inspecting when setting expectations for evidence records. PR acknowledged the importance of realism. The suggestion that PR should personally undertake an inspection was discussed, but concerns about subsequent complaints and appeal arrangements meant that no commitment was made.

PR also demonstrated access to the previous moderation report and diocesan feedback. The feedback packages included reports relating both to inspectors sponsored by a diocese and to inspections commissioned within it. Coordinators would be able to share relevant feedback with their sponsored inspectors. PR undertook to clarify access, resolve the password difficulty and make reports easier to locate on the website.

Inspector training

The meeting supported retaining a spring training window and providing a spring package for all inspectors alongside team-to-lead training. PR proposed the same team-to-lead programme in northern and southern venues, with dioceses nominating suitable team inspectors. PR would seek support from FB and JC in developing it.

Making team-to-lead training compulsory for future leads was discussed but not decided. Participants identified workload, release time, shadowing and the relationship with general spring training as matters to resolve. NC proposed a future training structure with initial inspector training followed by a compulsory additional component for those becoming leads. This was a proposal for the next framework and training programme.

NC's suggestion of a national webinar for updates was received positively. It could leave diocesan sessions with more time for practical activity. PR identified a need for concrete help in producing resources. The format and content remained to be developed.

Inspection planning and complaints recording

PR demonstrated the due-date tables and explained the distinction between CSI cycle dates, statutory deadlines and grant eligibility. Coordinators were asked to check records, identify missing inspections and report errors. Grant availability figures were cumulative, so amounts available from earlier years were already included in later totals.

The predicted Ofsted term was a planning aid based on published timing rules and the last recorded inspection, rather than a guaranteed date. PR advised caution if sharing it with schools. Some predictions could identify only an academic year. The tables required a suitably updated desktop version of Excel to operate as demonstrated; coordinators experiencing difficulties were asked to contact PR.

PR introduced the Microsoft Forms complaints record. Coordinators were asked to log a complaint when received, then revisit the same submission as details and outcomes became available. The existing records of previous complaints could remain as they were. PR acknowledged the difficulty of finding and updating submitted forms and invited coordinators to report problems. Integration into the inspection portal was the intended longer-term improvement.

The discussion distinguished retaining a complaint's outcome from retaining the underlying inspection evidence. PR indicated that outcome records should be retained. No new comprehensive retention schedule was agreed.

In response to PM's final question, PR confirmed that a school should be held to an earlier area for improvement only where the matter remained relevant to the current framework. The exchange concerned the clarified expectations around pupil leadership of prayer and worship; it did not require schools to meet a superseded expectation.

Agreed follow-up

- PR to share the provisional national analysis; coordinators to check diocesan totals and due-date tables and identify missing reports or incorrect records.
- PR to take the framework discussion into ISAAC's drafting work, including formation, realistic indicators of quality, chaplaincy, Scripture and the relationship between school leadership and strategic oversight.
- PR to write to coordinators about joint QA visits; coordinators to provide schedules and availability following that invitation. The visits would support the combined QA and moderation exercise in May.

- PR to clarify access to moderation reports and diocesan feedback, resolve the password issue and improve website access.
- PR to arrange a spring inspector training package and develop northern and southern team-to-lead provision with support from the training team. Compulsory lead training and a separate webinar for updates remained proposals for further development.
- Coordinators to log new complaints promptly, update the existing submission as the case progresses and contact PR if the process causes difficulty.

Conclusion

The evidence considered during the day gives substantial grounds for confidence in the quality of Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspections. Across QA records and the experiences reported by schools and inspectors, a consistent strength was the ability of inspectors to combine professional challenge with care for the people and communities being inspected. At its best, inspection was rigorous, well prepared and responsive to evidence, while remaining recognisably rooted in the Church's educational mission. Schools valued being understood, listened to and challenged constructively; inspectors valued colleagues who helped them exercise sound professional judgement.

This confidence must nevertheless be expressed with appropriate qualification. The submitted QA evidence covered only 5% of inspections, and participation in post-inspection evaluations varied considerably between dioceses. Some QA records did not explain sufficiently how their conclusions had been reached. These limitations do not establish that inspection was weak, but they restrict our ability to demonstrate that its quality is consistently secure across the country. The encouraging judgement that practice had improved or remained stable applies to the evidence reviewed, rather than constituting a comprehensive national assessment.

The concerns identified were significant because they affected the fairness, clarity and usefulness of the inspection experience. Emerging judgements were not always shared in time for leaders to respond; evidence recording and its scrutiny were uneven; and a minority of evaluations raised concerns about conduct, reporting or team leadership. These accounts require careful local follow-up. They should neither be generalised into a judgement about all inspectors nor discounted because a school was dissatisfied with its inspection outcome. The recurrence of preparation and time pressures also requires attention to the demands placed on schools and inspectors.

The next stage is to make strong practice more consistent and more demonstrable. Joint QA visits and the combined QA and moderation exercise will allow closer examination of selected inspections, connecting the conduct of inspection with the evidence gathered and the report ultimately published. Their value will depend on the depth and breadth of the evidence they provide. Regular review of evaluations, accessible moderation feedback and focused training will support that work.

The strategic discussion reinforced a clear principle for improvement: inspection should evaluate the quality of Catholic education described in the directories, with expectations that are faithful to that vision and realistic in their application. Better assurance and a revised framework should build on the strengths already evident, enabling every school to experience inspection as a fair, rigorous and constructive encounter that recognises its mission and helps it to improve.