What the New Ofsted Framework Means for Attendance Leaders

Briefing Note — Prepared for School and Trust Attendance Leaders
Updated October 2025

Introduction

This briefing note explains the key changes within the new Ofsted inspection framework and what these mean for those leading attendance at school and trust level. It is intended to help attendance leaders prepare strategically and communicate confidently with senior leaders, governors, and inspectors.

Key Changes in the New Framework

1. Attendance is being elevated

Attendance will form part of a combined 'Attendance and Behaviour' judgment. It is no longer seen as a side issue but a central part of school effectiveness.

2. More granular reporting

Schools will receive a report card with grades across domains including attendance and behaviour. Inspectors will expect not just data but a clear narrative of actions and impact.

3. Statutory weight for DfE guidance

The DfE's 'Working together to improve school attendance' guidance (August 2024) is now statutory. Schools must demonstrate compliance, including accurate coding, robust follow-up, and evidence of removing barriers to attendance.

4. Flexible but deeper inspection focus

Inspections can select context-driven focus areas; attendance will often feature. Schools previously judged 'good' may face graded inspections more frequently.

5. Higher expectations for analysis and intervention

Inspectors will expect not just statistics but deep analysis of trends, proactive early interventions, and clear evidence of impact.

Implications for Attendance Leaders

Implication / Challenge	What It Means	Strategic Response
From 'data keeper' to	Inspectors will want more	Develop a clear narrative of

'evidence storyteller'	than raw attendance percentages.	actions taken, impact measured, and lessons learned.
Greater accountability across the school	Attendance will be seen as a leadership and cultural issue, not admin-only.	Embed shared responsibility across SLT, heads of year, tutors, safeguarding leads.
Pressure on vulnerable cohorts & equity	Disadvantaged, SEND and medically complex pupils will be closely scrutinised.	Disaggregate data, target interventions, and document personalised strategies.
Justifying part-time or flexi arrangements	Reduced timetables must be well-evidenced, time-limited and reviewed.	Keep clear documentation of rationale, review points, and alternatives tried.
Consistency and compliance	Coding errors or weak register practices will not be defensible.	Audit processes, train staff, and quality assure registers regularly.
Early prevention over late chasing	Schools judged on how early and well they intervene, not just on phone calls.	Set up early warning triggers, family engagement plans and multi-agency support.
Workload & capacity	Expectations are rising; one person cannot carry the load alone.	Build a distributed attendance model and protect leader wellbeing.

Guiding Principles for Attendance Leaders

- Keep the child and family at the centre: build trust, not just compliance.
- Prepare your narrative now: capture actions, outcomes, and reflection.
- Ensure governors and staff can articulate the attendance strategy.
- Distribute the workload: attendance is everyone's business.
- Link attendance to curriculum access and long-term life chances.
- Look after staff wellbeing: attendance work is relentless but should not be isolating.

Reflection & Discussion Prompts

- How well does your current attendance strategy reflect a true whole-school graduated response?
- Where is attendance responsibility held? Who owns the data, actions and impact?
- How confident would staff and governors feel if inspectors asked them about attendance?
- Are our processes compliant with the new statutory DfE guidance (August 2024)?
- Do we have strong early intervention and family engagement systems?
- How are we supporting attendance leaders to avoid burnout?

Conclusion

The new Ofsted framework raises the bar for attendance leadership. It demands strong analysis, shared responsibility, and proactive culture-building. By preparing now, attendance leaders can move beyond compliance to genuine improvement — helping every child belong and thrive.