

A guide for ASCL members to responding to Ofsted's Big Listen: safeguarding in schools

About this guide

At ASCL's Annual Conference 2024, His Majesty's Chief Inspector Sir Martyn Oliver launched [Ofsted's Big Listen](#). Sir Martyn described this as a comprehensive listening exercise to hear from a full range of professionals and stakeholders. Ofsted has said that it welcomes feedback and criticism, and that it is interested in ideas for small changes as well as major reforms.

You can **take part in the Big Listen** [here](#), and the consultation **closes on 31 May 2024**. We strongly encourage all members to take part.

ASCL will, of course, be submitting our own response to the Big Listen. This document is not that response.

Instead, this guide is intended to raise some key points or considerations that members may wish to make in your own responses to the questions in the 'Safeguarding in schools' section of the survey. These prompts are based on ASCL's [Future of Inspection](#) policy paper, which was warmly received by the sector when we published it in 2023. They are also informed by our ongoing discussions with [ASCL Council](#) and our broader membership.

There is a separate [guide to the sections on schools, colleges and SEND and alternative provision](#).

We hope this document will be useful to senior leaders in the final month of the Big Listen. Please feel free to share this beyond ASCL membership with your wider team.

Question 1 | Do you think safeguarding should be a separate judgement from the leadership and management judgement?

This question only offers a response of 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know', without the ability to comment further.

Members may want to consider this question in the context of later questions: if safeguarding was inspected more frequently than other areas of the EIF, what would this mean for the leadership and management judgement? Could L&M change annually because of safeguarding, without a graded or ungraded inspection?

The question continues: "A safeguarding judgement would likely still inform the overall judgement, as protecting children from serious harm is so important", which implies that an ineffective safeguarding judgement would lead to an inadequate overall effectiveness. Members may therefore want to consider how impactful a separation of safeguarding and L&M would be, especially when overall effectiveness judgements remain in place

Question 2 | Given the importance of safeguarding, should we inspect it more regularly than other areas?

As above, there is only the option for three responses, without the ability to comment.

It is formal ASCL policy that safeguarding should be audited annually, and whilst still looked at every four years during Ofsted inspection, should be separate from the handbook.

Members will note that Ofsted uses the pronoun 'we' in asking this question. In proposing a new annual safeguarding audit, ASCL is not necessarily sure that Ofsted is best placed to conduct these. Given the lack of a comment section for this question, this nuance may be lost in a trilemma response.

Question 3 | Reinspecting safeguarding in some cases

Ofsted is proposing to reinspect schools where there are serious safeguarding concerns (but inspectors are satisfied that leaders can resolve them) within three months, withholding the report in the meantime.

This question is open comment.

This is clearly in response to the coroner's report into Ruth Perry's death. Members may want to consider the impact of delaying publication of a report on the school community: would this be helpful or a hinderance to a school's reputation?

ASCL Council believes that three months is an appropriate amount of time but does not currently have a view on whether reports should be published during that period or not.

Question 4 | Do you have any comments on Ofsted's new pause policy and how we can make it work better for schools and children?

The final question is also comment only. It invites reflection on whether the new [pause policy](#) is fit for purpose.

Members will note that Ofsted couches this question as a policy for 'schools and children', rather than headteachers' and senior leaders' wellbeing, as ASCL understood the policy to focus on.

We think the pause policy is welcome, but members may want to reflect on how supportive it is for them as individuals. In most cases, the pause will only be for one working day.

Final question: Is there anything else you'd like to tell us [about safeguarding in schools]?

The title of this consultation is the Big Listen – if there is anything at all that you want Ofsted to know, this is your opportunity.

Whether you were inspected between 2021 and 2023, since the changes made in January 2024, or are awaiting inspection, we believe that Ofsted genuinely wants to hear your views.

Additional comments could include anecdotal evidence of inspection (or waiting for an inspection), ideas for small or significant reforms, or reflections on the impact of inspection on the wellbeing, recruitment and retention of staff.

We hope this guide is helpful, and that our prompts have triggered some discussions or thoughts. If you have strong views about the key points ASCL should be making in our own response to the Big Listen, please email tellus@ascl.org.uk We're not able to respond to most of the emails we receive into this inbox, but they are extremely helpful in enabling us to better understand members' concerns and thoughts.



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