

Nearly 5,000 Church of England schools serve every type of community in every county. They are attended by close to one in four of the country's



...y serve children from all and no religious backgrounds. However, they

Dr Margaret James, National SIAMS Director.

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Dr Margaret James - National SIAMS Director

How can an inspection framework provide parents and carers with information about how effectively a school is meeting this aim? This question is fundamental to the new Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) framework.

Replacing grades with judgments has understandably grabbed the attention of headline writers, but all of the changes we've brought in have arisen from our vision of what school inspection should look like so that it too serves the common good.

SIAMS inspections are carried out under section 48 of the 2005 Education Act. They involve the inspection of RE, collective worship, and spiritual, moral, social, and cultural education in Church of England and Methodist schools and academies in England.

For almost three decades, they have resulted in each school being awarded one of four grades: currently 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Requires Improvement', and 'Ineffective'. From September, this will no longer be the case. Instead, an inspector will make a judgement on whether the school is living up to its Anglican/Methodist foundation through an up-to-date Christian vision that enables all pupils and adults to flourish. SIAMS will not reduce its findings to a grade word or number.

Instead, it will provide a narrative account of the school's strengths and areas for development. This rich data will enable all who have an interest in the school to find out what it is really like to be part of that community and to make decisions accordingly.

Inspectors will do this by gathering evidence to answer inspection questions that focus entirely on the impact of a school's vision-driven, context-specific actions. Inspection criteria have been dispensed with, respectfully allowing school leaders the freedom to apply their expertise in serving the needs of their communities. The school will be asked to provide evidence of the impact of their work; and the inspector will use the evidence to make a judgement on whether the school is living up to its foundation as a Church school.

For example, inspection question 4 asks how the school's Christian vision creates a culture in which pupils and adults are treated well. The new SIAMS Framework does not list generic criteria but invites leaders to demonstrate how the vision is being worked out in practice and in context.

Inspectors will ascertain whether everyone is treated with dignity and respect, whether individuals' wellbeing is enhanced by belonging to the school and whether the mental health of pupils and adults is taken into consideration when making decisions. If the school is part of a multi-academy trust, inspectors will assess how the trust ensures people are being treated well. It will be up to school leaders to explain how they work, make decisions and monitor impact; and it will be up to them to provide robust evidence to substantiate their claims. The inspection judgement will simply sum this up.

The result will be one of two evidence-based judgements: The school will either be deemed to be living up to its foundation as a Church school, or inspector will set out the reasons why it may not be fully doing so. These reasons could include, for example, RE not being effective, collective

worship not enabling pupils and adults to flourish spiritually or people not being treated well, and will require urgent attention.

We are describing our new framework as 'radically different; radically the same'.

It is the same inasmuch as it does not reimagine what it means to be a Church school, imposing no new demands on schools.

However, the collaborative, context-specific manner of inspection heralds a radically new approach, recognising the professionalism and expertise of school leaders and focusing exclusively on the impact of actions rather than on the actions themselves.

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