

# Report on the Consultation on the inspection of small schools

May 2024

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## Introduction

In March 2024, following feedback from schools, dioceses and inspectors, the Catholic Schools Inspectorate consulted on a proposed change to the inspection of small schools from September 2024 onwards. A small school is defined in the current Catholic Schools Inspectorate handbook as a primary school with fewer than 106 pupils on roll or a secondary school with fewer than 101 pupils on roll.

The details of the proposed changes and the reasons for them are outlined below. The consultation closed on Wednesday 27 March 2024. 87 responses were received. The inspectorate is grateful to all those who took the time to complete a response, each of which was considered in arriving at final decisions following the consultation.

## The proposal

In line with the current Catholic Schools Inspectorate handbook, small schools (primary schools with fewer than 106 pupils and secondary schools with fewer than 101 pupils) have Catholic Schools inspection carried out by a team of two inspectors but for only one day. This contrasts with all other sizes of school which will always have at least two inspectors, and always for two days. It had been suggested that the duration of inspections should be two days for all schools, including small schools. If we were to make this change, it would come into force from September 2024 onwards.

The arguments for and against this change were provided as part of the consultation. These are outlined below.

### Arguments in favour of the proposed change

1. It would provide school leaders with greater opportunity to provide additional evidence to inspectors in response to emerging judgements at the end of day one.
2. It would allow for more time for professional conversations between the inspection team and school leaders.
3. It would increase the reliability of the inspection judgement as it allows more time for evidence gathering and scrutiny.
4. Inspectors report that even though there are fewer pupils in a school, the number of inspection activities that need to be carried out are not significantly reduced as a consequence, and the timetable for small schools is currently very tight, increasing stress for both inspectors and school leaders.

### Arguments against the proposed change

1. The inspection team are present in school for a shorter duration, potentially making the process less stressful for schools.
2. It is more expensive for dioceses.

### Consultation questions

Only three questions were asked in the consultation. The first two required responses.

1. In what capacity are you making this response? (selected from the following multiple-choice options):
  - As a diocesan officer
  - On behalf of a small school
  - As a CSI inspector
  - Other

2. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to extend the inspection of small schools to two days? (selected from the five-point Likert scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree')

The third question was optional and left space for respondents to make a free text response without any limitations. The question was:

3. Please feel free to provide any additional comments to accompany your response.

## Consultation responses

### 1. In what capacity are you making this response?

We received a total of 87 responses, 50 from inspectors, 9 from diocesan officers, and 28 from those responding on behalf of a small school. The breakdown of the respondent types is indicated in the chart below.

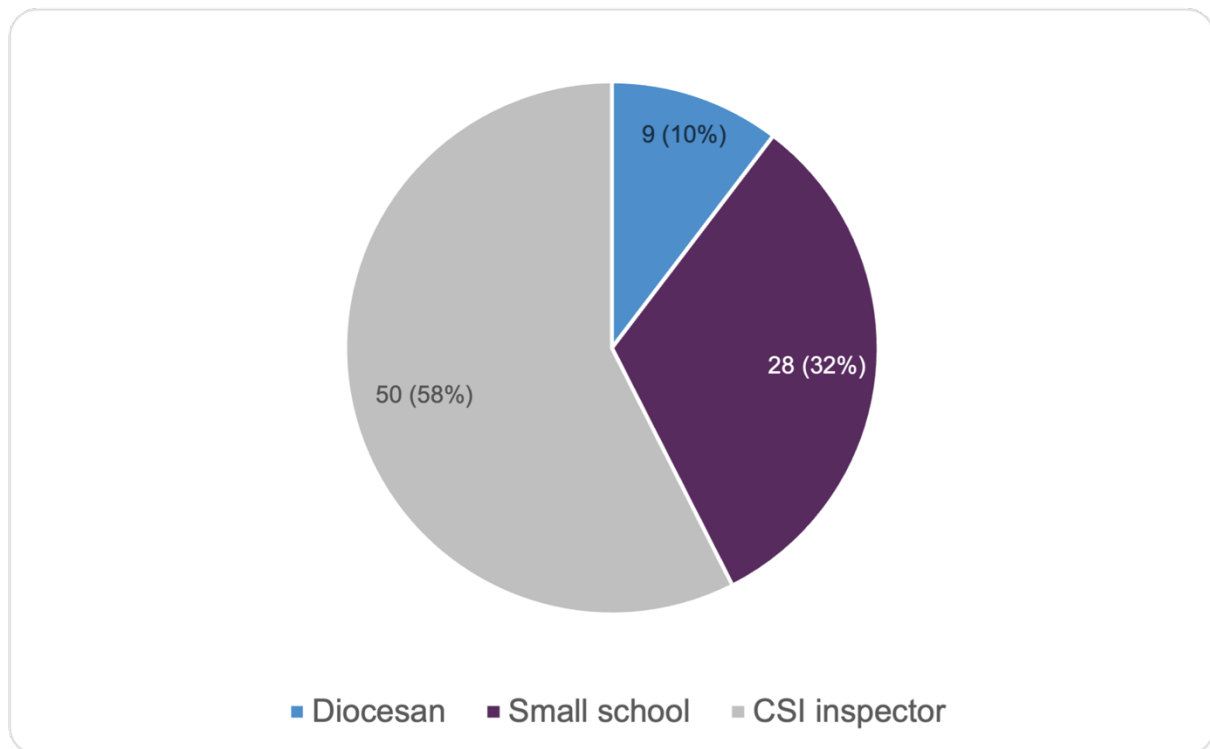


Figure 1: Responses by each respondent type

On reflection, in relation to those who were responding on behalf of a small school, it would have been useful to know how many had received an inspection under the National Framework and how many were awaiting one. Sometimes it was possible to discern this from the responses given, but in most cases not. In the absence of that piece of information, the responses from small schools were taken at face value, with no distinction made between those who reported having been inspected by the Catholic Schools Inspectorate and those that did not. The responses to this survey have been assessed alongside other feedback received from the strategic oversight committee, diocesan officers and individual inspectors.

### 2. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to extend the inspection of small schools to two days?

Overall, the response to the proposal was positive, with 60% of respondents overall supporting the proposal (those selecting 'strongly agree' and 'agree'). However, when the results are analysed by respondent type a more nuanced picture emerges.

Inspectors were strongly supportive of the change, with over 80% in favour of the proposed change. This contrasts with those responding on behalf of small schools, of which the vast majority were opposed to the proposal (75% selected 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree'). Diocesan officers were somewhere between the two, being more in favour of the change than opposed, but with a significant minority opposing the proposed change (72% in favour, 32% opposed).

The comparative percentage of responses overall and for each respondent type is given in the chart below.

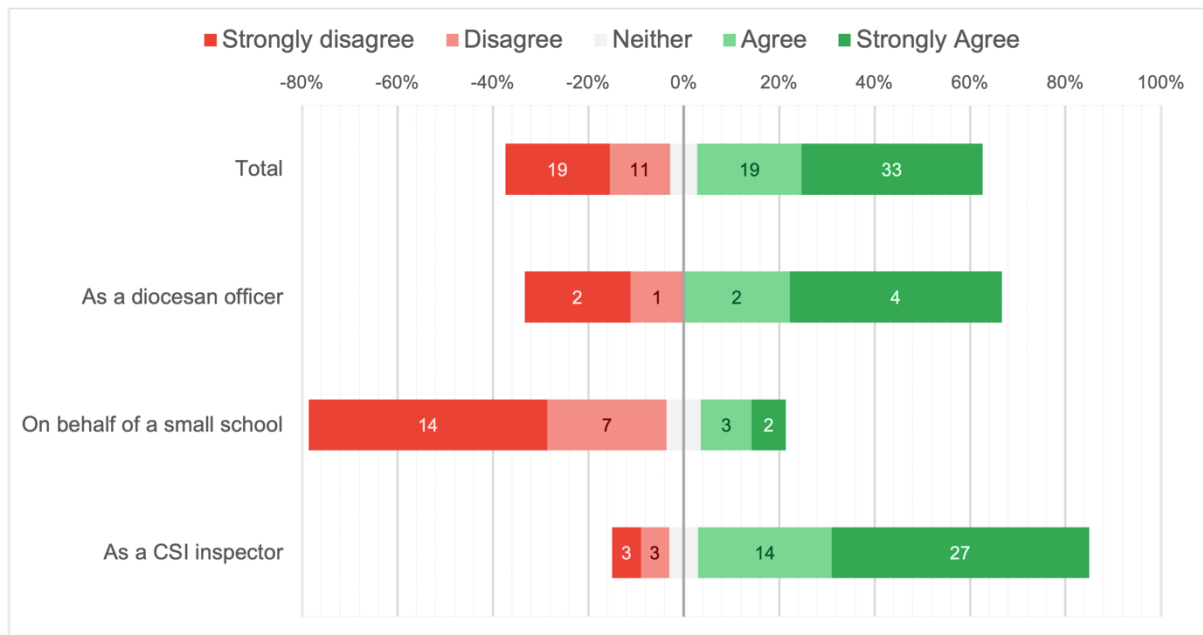


Figure 2: Response to proposal overall and by each respondent type

3. Please feel free to provide any additional comments to accompany your response.

In addition to the tally of responses given above, respondents were given the option of writing a comment to explain their choice. Not every respondent submitted an accompanying comment, but of those that did, 32 (58%) were in favour of the proposed change, and 20 (36%) were opposed. Three (6%) of those who made a comment saw strengths in the arguments on each side.

Those in favour of the proposed change spoke most often of the way in which the additional day would lead to the inspections being less rushed. The following example is representative of these kinds of comment:

I feel after doing a one-day inspection it would have been valuable to have another day as it felt rushed, and you wanted to do a good job for the school and I feel two days would support this.

It should be noted that all those who argued for the proposal on these grounds were inspectors, not small schools, for whom this sense of hurriedness was not one they recognised.

Others who supported the proposed change pointed to the opportunity the two-day process provided for small schools to present additional evidence on day two. Most of these again were inspectors, but not all. One respondent on behalf of a small school pointed out how valuable the additional day would be and appealed to the injustice of denying small schools this opportunity:

It feels unfair to deny small school leaders and teachers the opportunity to regroup and reflect after day one and return the following day with further evidence/argument. This chance is precious and will have surely altered the overall judgement of previous inspections in larger schools. Parity in providing this opportunity would only seem right and just.

Connected to this argument was the argument that establishing this parity would lead to more secure inspection judgements.

Those opposed to the change most often pointed to the disproportionate burden that would be placed on a small number of staff. Unlike in larger schools, in a small school a smaller number of people take on more responsibility and usually the same person will be responsible for many of the areas inspected by the Catholic Schools Inspectorate. Given current concerns about staff wellbeing, this was considered unjustified:

From a school perspective, I think two days is very intense for the schools, where often a single member of staff will take responsibility for Catholic life and mission, RE and prayer. This often means that inspectors would have multiple points of contact with a single member of staff over two days, which would give poor regard for their wellbeing.

As a consequence, many respondents who replied on behalf of small schools, pointed to the organisationally complex nature of arranging an inspection timetable with so few people to cover those who will be taken out of class to take part in inspection activities:

Managing staff release in such a setting is inherently intricate, and the expectation of accommodating two inspectors over two days for meetings, observations and discussions would be extremely difficult – quite impossible really.

In addition, those who were opposed to the change were not persuaded that the extra time was needed and cited recent experience of inspection as evidence:

As a small school with a NOR [number on roll] of 93 we had a two-day inspection with two inspectors last week. So the guidance was not followed. On the first day the inspectors gathered all the information they required and the second day although we were expecting lines of enquiry they had sufficient evidence. I do not see why there would be the need for a second day unless there is cause for concern.



In line with the final comment in the responses cited above, another respondent who was opposed to the change suggested that the default should be a one-day inspection, with an extension to two days only when the inspectors' judgements and those of the school were not in agreement. This would mirror Ofsted's approach, who routinely carry out one-day inspections of small schools (under s.8 of the Education Act), converting them to two-day inspections (under s.5 of the Education Act) if there is cause for concern.

Some of those opposed to the change pointed out the disparity between the proposed change and Ofsted's approach and questioned why the Catholic Schools Inspectorate was not recognising small schools as a special context, just as Ofsted do.

Others took the opportunity to suggest alternative proposals, amongst which were:

- Routine one-day inspection, unless causes for concern, or disparity between the inspectors' and the school's judgements, emerge on day one (as outlined above).
- A two-day inspection, but with only one inspector.
- A one-day inspection, but spread over two days, beginning and ending at lunchtime on each day.

Finally, another respondent not only disagreed with the proposed changes, but also with the Inspectorate's definition of a small school, which again differs from Ofsted's. Ofsted treat any school with 150 or fewer pupils on roll as a small school. The current definition of a small with which the Catholic Schools Inspectorate is working is a primary school with fewer than 106 pupils on roll or a secondary school with fewer than 101 pupils on roll.

## Consultation Outcomes

### Possible outcomes considered

Several possible outcomes were considered in response to the consultation. They are:

1. Do not make any changes to the current procedure. All small schools (as currently defined by the Catholic Schools Inspectorate) to be inspected for **one day by two inspectors**.
2. Make the proposed change. All small schools (as currently defined by the Catholic Schools Inspectorate) to be inspected for **two days by two inspectors**.
3. Make one of the following alternative changes proposed by respondents:
  - a. Small schools to be inspected for **two days by one inspector**.
  - b. Small schools to be inspected for **one day by two inspectors** but beginning and ending at lunchtime on each day.
  - c. Small schools to routinely be inspected for **one day by two inspectors**, but this can be extended to two days if there are causes for concern or disparity between the inspectors' and the school's judgements.

In addition, prompted by the responses given, the inspectorate has considered these two additional changes:

4. Redefining a small school to any school with 150 or fewer pupils (in line with Ofsted's definition)
5. Adding a section to the context-specific annexe of the inspection handbook to better prepare inspectors to interpret the framework in the small school context.

### Decision reached

After considering all possible responses to the consultation the inspectorate has committed to the following outcomes:

- No changes will be made to the current procedure for the time being. Therefore, all small schools (as currently defined by the Catholic Schools Inspectorate) will continue to be inspected for **one day by two inspectors**.
- This will be reviewed once a full five-year cycle of inspection has been completed and a complete evidence base gathered on the impact of one-day inspection for small schools, but there is no indication at this time that one-day inspection for small schools adversely effects the reliability of inspection judgements.
- Leave the definition of a small school as we currently have it (fewer than 106 pupils in a Primary school and fewer than 101 in a secondary schools).
- Introduce a context-specific annexe to better prepare inspectors to interpret the framework in a small school setting.

- Modify the team composition for small schools to include at least one inspectors who has an understanding and experience of teaching mixed-age classes.

### Rationale for decisions reached

The arguments for the proposed change were mostly made by inspectors, on the grounds that it made the experience of inspection less rushed and stressful for inspection teams. However, this argument was offset by the case made by the leaders of small schools that such a change would increase the stress and burden placed on small schools.

The arguments that pointed to the increased complexity of organising inspection for small schools across two days and the undue burden placed on a small number of staff were compelling. Inspection is not an end in itself, but is part of the Church's commitment to improving Catholic education for all pupils in Catholic schools. Given that inspection ultimately exists to serve the schools, the pupils in them, and their parents (not the inspectors), these arguments proved weightier than those in favour of a proposal that benefitted inspectors, but to the possible detriment of schools.

In addition, some argued that the proposed change gave small schools additional opportunities to present evidence on the second day. However, those responding on behalf of small schools did not report this as something that was usually needed. On balance, therefore, the arguments in favour of reducing inspector pressures were not sufficient to offset the arguments of those responding on behalf of small schools about the proposed change.

It was agreed that this decision would be kept under review because not every small school that responded had yet experienced inspection and it is possible that their views may change once they have experienced a one-day inspection. It is also important to check, over time, whether the lack of a second day is having an adverse impact on the reliability of inspection judgements.

The definition was not altered, largely because it was not something that was a direct feature of this consultation. It would move many more school into the small-school category (an increase from 88 schools to 205) and, given the worries inspectors had expressed about the pressures of a one-day inspection, it seemed unfair at this point to make such a large change to procedure when its consequences are not fully understood. Again, this will be kept under review.

Adding a context-specific annexe and a team member who understands the small school setting will lead to more accurate inspection as it will help inspection teams to have a better understanding of the small-school context. We will look to work with leaders of small schools to assist in the drafting of this section of the handbook.

## Appendix: List of all additional comments

The text below is a list of all additional comments, with any personal identifiers redacted. Spelling and grammatical errors have not been corrected.

Although it will cost more (which is the only reason why I don't strongly agree) and I haven't actually inspected a small school, I feel that the process would be rushed, leading to the potential that the most accurate outcome may not be reached. The second day is sometimes useful for gathering additional evidence, either from the school leaders, or from observations or discussions with pupils. Without this, schools could only be judged on the initial findings, rather than through inspectors being able to delve deeper and gain a more accurate picture.

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Apologies for the late response, I forgot to complete this before the Easter holiday started. From a school perspective, I think two days is very intense for the schools, where often a single member of staff will take responsibility for Catholic life and mission, RE and prayer. This often means that inspectors would have multiple points of contact with a single member of staff over two days, which would give poor regard for their wellbeing. However, from an inspector's perspective, I understand that overnight 'thinking time' is of great importance to be able to digest evidence and reflect on the day's work. Would a viable solution be for the inspection of a small school to be one day, but split over two (i.e. run from midday to midday)?

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As a small school headteacher the one day appeared to be sufficient in that the staff felt less stressed. However, as a CSI I know that actually it can be very challenging to gather the information to give a school the fairest judgement especially when generally our schools have so much that they want to share and show. You want to be able to listen carefully and the day can be very tiring. Two days gave us a little more time to reflect and not feel as rushed.

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As a small school we are only inspected by OFSTED for one day and they are able to look at multiple subjects. It would apply unnecessary stress and worry to staff if we were inspected over a two day period.

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As a small school with a NOR of 93 we had a two day inspection with two inspectors last week. So the guidance was not followed. On the first day the inspectors gathered all the information they required and the second day although we were expecting lines of enquiry they had sufficient evidence. I do not see why there would be the need for a second day unless there is cause for concern.

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As an inspector you can use the second half of the second day to start drafting the report with your colleague, this is a real opportunity for collaboration and reduction of work to undertake post-inspection. A one day inspection would not allow for this. You also take time to reflect between day 1 and 2.

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As Executive headteacher of an infant school with 63 pupils, I think a 2-day inspection would be unfairly harsh. Apart from seeing worship, and the quality of teaching and learning - of which we would anticipate no-more than 20-minute lesson observations for 3 classes, I think a 2-day inspection would mean that there would be a heightened expectation for these teachers to be observed twice - both in Religious Education, and Collective Worship. I could understand it if the inspection were to be split over two consecutive half-day morning periods, but not for two full days. At present, each teacher is almost worth 33% of the judgement, as opposed to in a single form entry primary school, where each teacher is almost worth 1/7 to 1/8, depending on the size of school. A full two-day inspection would be unduly fair and disproportionate to the number of pupils and staff in school, and would therefore be likely to decrease the grade given, as there is greater likelihood of something 'going wrong' due to the pressure of two inspectors for two days for 3 classes.

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Being a two form entry school inspectors were able to see everyone teach RE watch evryone do collective worship and everything else connected with the CSI inspection process by lunchtime on day2. Therefore I would say that 1 day would be enough for a small school. In the current climate we need to be mindful of the excessive stress that nay inspection process puts on Headteachers and staff

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Experience of inspecting a small school for one day when there was not enough time available.

Firstly, I would like to challenge the threshold for small schools being 106 pupils. My school is a half-form entry school, with currently 107 pupils on roll. Under the current Catholic Schools Inspectorate Handbook, we wouldn't even be considered as a small school! Even if my school was at maximum capacity of 119 pupils (7 year groups of 17 PAN), we would still be a school made up of only 4 classes, with the equivalent of 4 full-time teachers. Surely this should also be classed as a small school? In their recent training (January and February 2024) the OFSTED threshold for small school is stated as being 150 pupils or fewer.

<https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/ofsted-inspectors-new-training-inspect-small-schools>

I am strongly against the proposal to extend the inspection of small schools to two days as it is unfair and deeply distressing to put such a small staff (equivalent of 4 full-time teachers in my case) under that amount of stress. I would argue that this would be against our Catholic Values of how we treat the individual. In the Small School Guidance for OFSTED Inspectors, even they give recognition on the demands on staff in small schools during inspections and are encouraged to support their wellbeing. Surely our Diocese should, at the very least, adopt the same approach?"

Gives more time for the school to address any areas missing evidence and also to feel the judgement is more accurate and more considered.

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Having completed a one day inspection on a small school, it was a very hectic and challenging process to complete the inspection to the highest standard in such a short time. I think that it was also quite stressful for the school staff as they had little time to present all of the evidence that they wished to put forward. As Lead Inspector, I felt responsible to ensuring that the inspection was conducted to the highest possible standard and gave the school the fairest opportunity to present their good work. I found the process very challenging in one day.

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Having completed an inspection of a small school in one day, I felt this was very stressful for all concerned and did not give time for talk, reflection or opportunities for the school to provide any additional evidence

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Having conducted several one-day inspections in a small school, and one 2 day inspection in a small school, I think that a 1.5 day model would work. This enables the additional time for the inspection activity, opportunity for the school to provide evidence and time for reflection by the inspection team. One day inspection works well ONLY when there is broad agreement between the school and the CSI team. Where there is disagreement, there simply is insufficient time to go deep enough to allow the process to be fair to the school and the CSI process.

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Having recently been through a two-day Inspection, the pressure was dis-proportionate for a small school. Having recently inspected a small school I would very much welcome this turning into a 2-day inspection. The day was very tight on time in comparison to a two-day inspection. The evening between the two days I always think is vital as you can step away and take stock of what you have seen meaning that when you go in on the second day you often know where your enquiry might lead you. The extra day would also mean that you could cover a larger evidence base and not be so rushed getting notes together for the final feedback session.

I was also Headteacher of a small school for 4 years and would have welcomed a 2-day inspection so that I would be able to showcase everything I would want the inspectors to see. I agree that even though there are fewer children this does not reduce the amount of inspection activities that need to be carried out and what the school would want you to see.

I agree that this gives time for a full gathering of evidence

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I agree the extra day provided the school with the opportunity to provide additional evidence.

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I agree with all of the arguments in favour, especially points number 3 and 4.

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I am in favour of the proposal on the whole and feel that a two day process could make an inspection less stressful for all parties; particularly in terms of gathering and providing evidence. If an inspection team

adopts the right approach when they arrive in a school there should be no undue stress placed on its staff regardless of the number of days in school.

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I do not have personal experience of inspecting a small school so it is difficult to comment. However, it would seem fairer to give the school the second day to have the opportunity to appropriately respond to anything that is brought up in day 1. Would an alternative for the smaller schools be one inspector for the two days?

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I feel after doing a one day inspection it would have been valuable to have another day as it felt rushed, and you wanted to do a good job for the school and I feel two days would support this.

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I feel that even an additional half a day would allow small schools the opportunity to provide additional evidence to inspectors in response to emerging judgements at the end of day one.

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I have been through an CSI last year in a school with two classes. The teachers were already watched for over an hour. The few children were interviewed and watched in lessons and two acts of worship. It was too much even for a whole day with NOR. The other school I work in is due its CSI next academic year and it has four classes. I think a day would just be right for a school this size. It is all down to capacity.

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I have never inspected a small school but appreciate the comments that despite number of pupils being small, the inspection activities will remain the same. Perhaps two inspectors on day one and one on day two could be a compromise .

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I think it's a good plan although I do worry about the number of lesson observations for teachers in a small school as usually there are mixed age classes.

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I think this is a waste of resources. I think a one day inspection for two inspectors is more than sufficient. You could do two days but have one inspector. I think two days for two inspectors could result in the school being over inspected. I think the current arrange is proportionate.

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I think to do justice to every school there should be the opportunity for inspection to be 2 days to find all the evidence required to meet the framework. Inspecting in one day which will be very hurried and perhaps not do the school justice.

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I totally agree that despite having a smaller number of pupils inspectors still have to have the same number of meetings e. g meeting with RE lead , governors etc. It would also be fairer to schools enabling them to find extra evidence overnight if needed. As writing the feedback takes an afternoon in reality at present they only have half a day to do the inspection of a small school. Definitely needs 2 days.

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If moving to 2 days, then possibly one inspector would be more suitable. I agree that it allows more time for evidence gathering however I feel that the smaller number of staff and likely smaller - or sometimes non-existent - SLT would be under greater pressure than those in larger schools over 2 days with 2 inspectors.

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In a school that is less than 1 form entry it would be more stressful for staff if it was 2 inspectors for 2 days.

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It feels unfair to deny small school leaders and teachers the opportunity to regroup and reflect after day one, and return the following day with further evidence/argument. This chance is precious and will have surely altered the overall judgement of previous inspections in larger schools. Parity in providing this opportunity would only seem right and just.

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It takes up a lot of time for me as I am over two schools. I feel it causes extra stress on the staff team.

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It would bring everything in line and would ensure that enough evidence is collected. It gives the school the opportunity to respond to lines of inquiry.

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Mindful that CSI is inspecting 1 subject and not a whole curriculum

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More evidence for work scrutiny, meetings with children, staff, governors etc to get a full picture of the school being inspected. It also allows time for frequent KIT meetings with head.

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My opinion is broadly in agreement with the reasons for extending expressed above. We have had two one-day inspections, and they feel very rushed and intense, with little room for reflection, and more likely to lead to less accurate judgements.

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No real preference as there are pros and cons

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One day does not give you enough time to collect thoughts on the day. One and half days would even help you to have the evening

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Please feel free to provide any additional comments to accompany your response.

Please find below my response in my role as

We are a ½ from entry school with 105 children on roll from reception to year 6.

The proposed initiative poses an immense pressure on a small school. Managing staff release in such a setting is inherently intricate, and the expectation of accommodating two inspectors over two days for meetings, observations and discussions would be extremely difficult – quite impossible really. An approach I feel could work would involve deploying a lead inspector to evaluate the school across the same timeframe. This approach would minimise disruption by requiring the release of only one staff member at a time. Implementing the proposed plan would significantly intensify the pressure already experienced by staff within our smaller school.

From an inspectors point of view, I have not inspected a smaller school. However when inspecting a one form entry school with the same quota of inspectors, the timings have been sufficient to enable to inspection to run effectively and smoothly. I hope this feedback is useful.

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Staff can leave early on the second day if need but having that night to digest reflect and look at other things the next day is a must

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The proposed approach would unduly burden a small school, placing unprecedented pressure on its staff. Releasing personnel in such a context is exceptionally intricate. Allocating two inspectors for two days to meet staff, conduct observations, and host meetings is simply impractical. A more sensible solution would involve deploying one experienced inspector over the course of two days. This streamlined approach would alleviate the need for the school to free up more than one staff member while also enabling school leaders to effectively shadow and support the inspector. Implementing the proposed plan would only exacerbate the already existing stress on staff in our small schools, making it a highly detrimental move.

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The team within a small school is often very small (eg. 4 class teachers which includes the Head). Many staff members 'wear a range hats' and as a result the inspectors will naturally spend a significant amount of time and be able to ascertain an insight into a range of areas by conducting possible one or two meetings. During one day in school, it would also be possible to visit every class and interact with the pupils.

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There are fewer classes so one day should be enough - perhaps it is the expectations of the inspection that need to change rather than the duration.

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There could be flexibility about two inspectors remaining for the full second day.

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There is a lot of information to gather

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There is more than enough time to complete a small school inspection in 1 day when small schools, more often than not, have a 4 class structure.

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There is often lots to celebrate and one day does not do the school justice. It is stressful for small schools to present their evidence in a shorter timeframe.

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This gives small schools the opportunity to share all evidence, especially if this has not been seen on day 1

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Two days allow for a more coherent, realistic investigation of a school

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Undertaking an inspection in one day is very rushed. It can make speaking with parents difficult as you want to meet with staff at the beginning of the school day on day 1 but the end of the day is too late because there would be no opportunity to follow up on anything raised. Also if additional evidence is required it can be difficult on a one day inspection whereas there is more time to gather all the required information over two days. I have undertaken a one day inspection in a small school and it was very difficult to prepare for feedback - myself and the team inspection were undertaking observations and holding discussions with key stakeholders into the afternoon and only got the opportunity to meet to consider the

evidence and judgments late in the afternoon. On a two day inspection, the afternoon on the second day could be given for inspectors to meet and discuss and spend quality time preparing for the feedback.

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We agree with the arguments in favour of this proposal

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We feel that as a small school with only 3 classes in total it would be very unfair to have 2 inspectors in for 2 days, I feel it puts unnecessary extra stress onto staff well-being. We see that one of the arguments for extending is that activities are not significantly reduced for a small school, this is counter intuitive as obviously there are far fewer activities; lessons; children; teachers and support staff for the inspectors to inspect (could be up to 50% less for a school like ours). Due to small numbers of children and classes there will be more interaction with the inspection team than if you had a school twice the size. Would it be possible to see an example timetable for a school of our size (3 classes) and one for a normal sized Primary school? Thank you for taking account of our views, we feel very strongly.

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When you only have 3 or 4 classes and no SLT, two days will feel very intense. I am also the HT as well as the RE lead as well as y5/6 RE teacher. That is a lot of focus on one person over two days.

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