EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO

THE COASTING SCHOOLS (ENGLAND) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2025

2025 No. 1120

1. Introduction

1.1 This Explanatory Memorandum has been prepared by The Department for Education ("DfE") and is laid before Parliament by Command of His Majesty.

2. Declaration

2.1 Georgia Gould, Minister for School Standards at the Department for Education confirms that this Explanatory Memorandum meets the required standard.

2.2 Paul Cohen, Deputy Director for the Regulation and Quality Division, at the Department for Education confirms that this Explanatory Memorandum meets the required standard.

3. Contact

3.1 Julian Butcher at the Department for Education Telephone: email: Julian.butcher@education.gov.uk or Emma Bennett at the Department for Education: email: Emma.bennett@education.gov.uk can be contacted with any queries regarding the instrument.

Part One: Explanation, and context, of the Instrument

4. Overview of the Instrument

What does the legislation do?

4.1 This instrument amends the Coasting Schools (England) Regulations 2022 ("Coasting Regulations 2022"). The coasting regulations define coasting for the purposes of section 60B of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 ("EIA 2006"). If a maintained school meets the definition of coasting, section 60B enables the Secretary of State and local authorities intervention powers in Part 4 of the EIA 2006 to be used. Academy arrangements[1] permit the Secretary of State to intervene in an academy if it meets the definition of coasting. The purpose of the Regulations is to amend the coasting definition following changes to the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspection framework.

Where does the legislation extend to, and apply?

4.2 The extent of this instrument is England and Wales.

4.3 The territorial application of this instrument is England.

5. Policy Context

What is being done and why?

5.1 The current definition of coasting schools, in the Coasting Regulations 2022, relies on grades for overall effectiveness ("Single Headline Grades" or "SHGs") awarded to a

[1] The funding agreements governing the Secretary of States relationship with an academy trust, with a statutory basis in section 1 of the Academies Act 2010.

school by Ofsted to categorise a school as coasting. The Coasting Regulations 2022 do not capture schools inspected since the discontinuance of SHGs (https://www.gov.uk/government/news/single-headline-ofsted-grades-scrapped-in-landmark-school-reform) in September 2024. The definition of coasting schools must therefore be updated. The Secretary of State is under a duty to define what coasting means in relation to a school in section 60B(3) of the EIA 2006.

5.2 Several key terms used in the Regulations are described below. The intended operation of the four coasting categories are explained afterwards.

Terms used by Ofsted

5.3 His Majesty's Chief Inspector (Ofsted) is under a duty to inspect state funded schools at prescribed intervals. That duty is contained in section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (a "section 5 inspection"). When conducting a section 5 inspection Ofsted must report on "the quality of education provided in the school" (section 5(5)). Ofsted has a general power to inspect schools in England, otherwise than when required to do so by section 5, in section 8 (a "section 8 inspection"). This includes monitoring inspections. Ofsted's inspection regime is set out in guidance published by Ofsted.

5.4 Until September 2024, when reporting on a section 5 inspection of a school Ofsted would provide a SHG to describe the overall quality of the provision of the school. Most recently, the grades awarded were "outstanding", "good", "requires improvement" or "inadequate". "satisfactory" is a grade used historically. This grade is described as a grade for the overall effectiveness of the school in The School Inspection Handbook[2] and Ofsted's section 5 inspection reports. Ofsted would also award grades in four sub-judgement categories. Most recently the sub-judgement categories included the quality of education and leadership and management. These categories are referred to as key judgements in The School Inspection Handbook (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif).[3] The grades awarded were also "outstanding", "good, "requires improvement" and "inadequate".

5.5 SHGs were abolished on 2nd September 2024 (https://www.gov.uk/government/news/single-headline-ofsted-grades-scrapped-in-landmark-school-reform). Between September 2024 and November 2025, Ofsted awarded grades in key judgement categories only.

5.6 From November 2025, Ofsted conducts inspections under a system referred to here as the school report card system ("SRC"). Under this system, when conducting a section 5 inspection Ofsted will report on and award a grade in up to nine evaluation areas, including leadership and governance. The grades awarded include "exceptional", "strong standard", "expected standard", "needs attention" and "urgent improvement". The evaluation area of safeguarding is evaluated on a "met" or "not met" scale. These categories are referred to as evaluation areas in the guidance material published by Ofsted.[4]

Linked Schools

5.7 The Coasting Regulations 2022 contained provision to capture schools that change structure between the first qualifying inspection and their second, such that they are

[2] Version published on 16 September 2024.
[3] Version published 16 September 2024.
[4] Inspection information for state-funded schools: for use from November 2025. Version published 9 September 2025.

technically a different school at their second qualifying inspection. This is particularly relevant to academies which may have received their first qualifying inspection as a maintained school before converting to an academy. The amended coasting categories in these Regulations do the same, adapted for the new categories.

5.8 The concept of a linked school is defined as:

- A predecessor school. This is a school that was discontinued and replaced by the school now under consideration.
- If there are two or more predecessor schools, each predecessor school. This is to cover merger scenarios where two or more schools merge into one. In this scenario each predecessor school would be required to have received a relevant assessment (explained below) in a full inspection from Ofsted. If only one school received a qualifying grade in their most recent section 5 inspection, the new school would not be coasting.
- If a school's predecessor school has not had a section 5 inspection, the most recent school in the chain to have a section 5 inspection. This is to capture scenarios where the predecessor school changed structure quickly into the school, before it received an Ofsted inspection.

The Coasting Categories

5.9 A school will be coasting if it meets the entry conditions in substituted regulation 4(2), (3), (4) or (5) and following any inspections which cause the school to meet the entry conditions, has not met the exit condition. A school must only meet the exit condition once to leave coasting status. If the school subsequently receives a section 5 inspection report which causes it to meet the entry conditions again, it must meet the exit condition again to leave coating status.

The exit condition

5.10 To exit a coasting category, the school must obtain at least "expected standard" gradings across all evaluation areas. This is because, whilst leadership is critical, improvement must be holistic. A school may have improved leadership but still deliver poor outcomes in other areas. Requiring at least "expected standard" in all areas ensures that pupils receive a consistently high-quality education. This approach also prevents premature exit from coasting status based on partial improvements, ensuring that progress is embedded and sustainable. The exit condition is common to all the coasting categories and the policy rationale is the same.

5.11 Provision is also made through additional exit conditions so that historic cases of coasting schools are not captured.

Paragraph Two

5.12 Substituted regulation 4(2) is the primary coasting category. It primarily captures schools that receive grades of "needs attention" in the evaluation area of leadership and governance in two consecutive section 5 inspections. Equivalent grades under previous inspection regimes are captured in the first chronological inspection. Schools that were assessed to be in a category of concern in their second most recent section 5 inspection are also captured. This is relevant in this category if a school causing concern is subject to structural intervention and becomes a new school. If the new school received a grade of "needs attention" for leadership and governance we want to capture the school as coasting to ensure it is supported.

5.13 This is similar to the previous approach under the Coasting Regulations 2022, which proved effective in identifying schools with persistent underperformance. The rationale is that a single inspection outcome may reflect temporary challenges, whereas two consecutive judgments indicate a sustained issue requiring intervention. This continuity ensures fairness and consistency in identifying schools that are not making sufficient progress.

5.14 The evaluation area of leadership and governance is the focus because it is foundational to school improvement. Ofsted and DfE guidance consistently highlight that strong leadership is the key driver of sustained improvement across all areas of school performance. By focusing on this evaluation area, the category assesses the root cause of systemic issues rather than symptoms. Schools with weak leadership are less likely to implement effective teaching, behaviour, or curriculum strategies.

Paragraph Three

5.15 Substituted regulation 4(3) captures schools which were previously assessed to be in a statutory category of concern (schools assessed as requiring special measures or requiring significant improvement – defined in section 44 of the Education Act 2005), are no longer in a statutory category of concern but not yet graded at least "expected standard" across all evaluation areas, or equivalent grades under previous inspection regimes.

5.16 This change is intended to prevent schools from slipping through the cracks. It ensures that schools which have exited statutory categories of concern but remain fragile in performance are identified and supported, maintaining momentum for improvement and safeguarding educational standards. The category relies on the duty, contained in section 13(4) and (5) of the Education Act 2005, which requires Ofsted to state in a section 5 inspection report that a school no longer requires special measures or significant improvement when they reach that conclusion. Provision is made to eliminate circumstances where Ofsted are required under that section to state that a school no longer requires special measures, but are under a duty to state the school requires significant improvement. Schools that did not receive any "needs attention" grades (or equivalent) in the report that took them out of the category of concern will not be captured.

Paragraph Four

5.17 In the absence of SHGs, schools inspected after 2 September 2024 but before the introduction of the SRC in November 2025, were subject to an interim Ofsted inspection regime. These schools were awarded grades in key judgements, including quality of education and leadership and management. Substituted regulation 4(4) captures schools inspected under this interim regime. It uses "requires improvement" gradings in the key judgments of quality of education or leadership and governance as substitutes for an SHG of "requires improvement". It follows the same policy in the Coasting Regulations 2022 of requiring an SHG of below "good" at the school's previous section 5 inspection. These schools are required, as with the other categories of coasting schools, to obtain grades of at least "expected standard" across all evaluation areas before exiting the category.

5.18 This category is included to ensure schools inspected under the interim Ofsted regime - between the removal of Single Headline Grades and the introduction of the School Report Card, are not excluded from intervention. These schools may have been assessed as underperforming but were not captured by the 2022 Coasting Regulations, and therefore require inclusion to enable appropriate support and improvement action.

Paragraph Five

5.19 This category captures schools that met the coasting definition under the Coasting Regulations 2022 (two consecutive inspections of "requires improvement" or lower). These schools still need support to improve. It uses the language of grades for overall effectiveness, which is the language used by Ofsted to describe the SHG for a school. It is different from the language used to describe this grade in the Coasting Regulations 2022. It is different in order to clearly distinguish it from grades in key judgement areas used elsewhere in the regulations. These schools are required, as with the other categories of coasting schools, to obtain grades of at least "expected standard" across all evaluation areas under the SRC before exiting the category.

What was the previous policy, how is this different?

5.20 From September 2022 to September 2024, the Secretary of State relied on SHGs awarded by Ofsted to define coasting schools for the purposes of section 60B of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. A school would be coasting if Ofsted awarded it a SHG of "requires improvement" and it had been judged "satisfactory", "requires improvement" or "inadequate" at their previous inspection. The revised definitions move away from relying on headline grades. This change is explained in more detail in other sections of this memorandum, including the rationale for focusing on particular evaluation areas and the importance of sustained, embedded improvement.

5.21 A key difference is the exit condition. Under the new approach, a school must now be judged at least "expected standard" in all evaluation areas to exit coasting status. This ensures that improvement is not partial or isolated, but comprehensive. It reflects the Department's view that a school should only exit coasting status when it is delivering a consistently good standard of education across all aspects of provision.

6. Legislative and Legal Context

How has the law changed?

6.1 The legislation on coasting schools is contained within the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (as amended by the Education and Adoption Act 2016) and the Academies Act 2010 (as amended by the Education and Adoption Act 2016). The legislation requires the Secretary of State to define the meaning of coasting and permits them to disapply the coasting regime for certain school types and intervene in schools that meet the definition.

6.2 Section 60B(3) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 places a duty on the Secretary of State to make regulations which define what coasting means in relation to a school. The current regulations which define coasting are the Coasting Regulations 2022. These Regulations amend the coasting definition in regulation 4 of the Coasting Regulations 2022.

Why was this approach taken to change the law?

6.3 This is the only possible approach to make the necessary changes. The coasting definition must be set out in secondary legislation.

7. Consultation

Summary of consultation outcome and methodology

7.1 On 3 February 2025 DfE published the 'School accountability reform – school profiles, improvement and intervention' (https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/school-accountability-reform)

consultation. The consultation methodology involved gathering feedback from parents, carers, pupils, school leaders, teachers, support staff, trustees, governors, and third-sector organizations. The consultation was conducted through online responses, emails, and postal submissions.

7.2 In February 2025, DfE launched the consultation "School accountability reform – school profiles, improvement and intervention" ("Accountability Consultation"), which proposed a new approach to identifying and supporting schools that are persistently underperforming (coasting schools). DfE proposed to update this definition to include schools that receive an 'attention needed'[5] rating in the evaluation area of leadership and governance and were graded as below 'good' - or equivalent – at their previous inspection. This reflects the Department's view that effective leadership and governance are critical to delivering high standards. We added that as the school report card was implemented, this would mean that a school would be deemed as coasting if it had been graded as 'attention needed' in leadership and governance in two consecutive inspections. We explained that we proposed to amend the Coasting Regulations 2022 to apply to schools meeting the definition of stuck both before and after the introduction of the school report card. These proposals were based on the Department's understanding of Ofsted's new inspection regime at the time.

7.3 In the Accountability Consultation we also proposed that schools assessed as requiring significant improvement, who improve from requiring significant improvement but do not improve to gradings of "secure"[6] across all evaluation areas would be subject to structural intervention.

7.4 Almost half (46%) of respondents agreed with our proposal to update the definition of coasting schools following the introduction of school report cards as 'needs attention' in leadership and governance, following a previous below Good (or equivalent) Ofsted judgement – with 26% disagreeing. A similar proportion of respondents (47%) were also in favour of our proposed approach to school improvement for these schools and amending regulations to give effect to this, with only 23% disagreeing. With the proposal that, until September 2026, schools found to require significant improvement should normally be subject to structural intervention, more respondents agreed (41%) than disagreed (33%), and 22% didn't have a view. Two thirds of respondents (66%) agreed that targeted RISE intervention should be the default for schools assessed as requiring significant improvement following September 2026, before moving to structural intervention if necessary.

7.5 These regulations implement the proposals in the Accountability Consultation.

7.6 The official government response was published on 9 September 2025.

8. Applicable Guidance

8.1 The Support and Intervention in Schools (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68baed81cc8356c3c882ab6c/support-and-intervention-in-schools.pdf) guidance sets out the Department's policy on intervening in schools that are persistently underperforming, including those identified as "coasting." It outlines how schools that meet the definition of coasting—based on

[5] The terminology proposed by Ofsted at the time for "needs attention".
[6] The terminology proposed by Ofsted at the time for "expected standard".

repeated underperformance and lack of structural change—will receive mandatory targeted support from Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence teams. The guidance also confirms that, where improvement is not secured within a defined period, structural intervention will be the default approach to ensure all pupils receive a high-quality education

Part Two: Impact and the Better Regulation Framework

9. Impact Assessment

9.1 A full Impact Assessment has not been prepared for this instrument because there is no impact on business as these proposals only regulate the public sector.

10. Monitoring and review

What is the approach to monitoring and reviewing this legislation?

10.1 The approach to monitoring of this legislation, as with all intervention powers, is to keep the new measure under regular review to ensure it effectively captures and supports the schools that need it most.

Part Three: Statements and Matters of Particular Interest to Parliament

11. Matters of special interest to Parliament

11.1 None.

12. European Convention on Human Rights

12.1 As the instrument is subject to negative resolution procedure and does not amend primary legislation, no statement is required.

13. The Relevant European Union Acts

This is instrument is not made under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, the European Union (Future Relationship) Act 2020 or the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023.