



Chair of Trust – Mr Nigel Harrison Chief Executive Officer – Mr Tim Sutcliffe

Chief Financial Officer – Mrs Talvinder Tundall Deputy CEO – Mr Matthew Brookes

16th January 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

The new approach from Ofsted

We hope all is well and the term has started well for your child. As you may be aware, Ofsted have completely renewed the Ofsted inspection framework and the way inspections are reported to parents. The following is key information directly from the Ofsted website;

How we've improved reporting our inspection findings

Ofsted has improved how we report the findings of education inspections.

We've designed our new-look report cards with parents and carers in mind, to give you a clearer picture of what's working well and where the next steps for improvement are.

New Ofsted grading system

The main change is that we no longer give one overall judgement, such as 'good', 'outstanding' or 'requires improvement'.

Instead, the report cards show colour-coded grades for different areas – the aspects of education that matter most to you, like 'attendance and behaviour', 'achievement', 'personal development and well-being', and 'inclusion' (meaning how well the school or other provider meets the needs of all children).

We grade these areas on a new scale:

- 'exceptional'
- 'strong standard'
- 'expected standard'
- 'needs attention'
- 'urgent improvement'

We also tell you whether safeguarding responsibilities are 'met' or 'not met'.

It's important to understand that the new grades can't be compared to the old ones: this is a different approach to inspection and a new way of reporting to you.

What the new Ofsted grades tell you

Registered Office – Glen Hills Primary School, Featherby Drive, Glen Parva, Leicester. LE2 9NY.

Tel: 0116 2782535

Email – admin@symphonylearningtrust.co.uk

Symphony Learning Trust registered company number - 07941899

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*The ‘expected standard’ is just that – it means the school or other provider is doing everything that it should be doing, so you’ll see the green colour coding on the report card. **It’s a high standard, to make sure your children are receiving everything they need and deserve.***

‘Needs attention’ is an indication that there is work to be done to reach the ‘expected standard’. It’s not a ‘fail’ but it highlights where issues can be addressed.

You may see a mix of grades across a report card: it’s perfectly possible to achieve highly in some areas, and require a little more focus in others.

We have been consistently told that ‘Expected Standard’ is a ‘high bar’ and we believe that parents should be rightly informed that this is the case. A ‘Needs Attention’ grading would previously have simply been an area for improvement as opposed to an individual grade – a good analogy would be that any grading there would be it is the same as an MOT ‘advisory’ on a car; it’s *not* a ‘fail’. Indeed, any area that ‘Needs Attention’ may be re-visited by Ofsted in a matter of months and be moved up to ‘Expected Standard’ or above when fully in place rather than waiting for four years for the school to be due for their next inspection.

As stated above though, it is not possible to compare grade outcomes from any Ofsted report pre-2026 to any Ofsted report moving forward.

What we do know though is that Symphony schools continue to deliver very high standards to our pupils, perform well above national averages, provide exciting and safe learning environments and ensure they are ready for their secondary education. Every school continues to improve and under the previous Ofsted framework, all our schools were ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’.

Your support as parents is invaluable and my thanks in advance for your continued positivity.

Yours sincerely,

Tim Sutcliffe

CEO

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