

## **School Leadership and Management after Special Measures: Discipline without the Gaze?**

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This article is concerned with the medium term effects on management structures and styles following a period in the disciplinary regime of Special Measures, a regime of intensive inspection applied to a school which is deemed as 'failing'. In it I discuss the techniques used by the management of one school to continue the school's improvement after the inspection team had departed. In particular I consider the prolongation of a system of 'Panoptic performativity' (Perryman 2003) in disciplining the staff body in a number of ways. I argue that in order to ensure that the school continued to make progress, the school management behaved as if the inspectors were still there by establishing other disciplinary mechanisms, and there is clear evidence that this was successful in the first nine months following Special Measures. However, there was a definite weakening of the panoptic pressure, and it took the return of inspectors to restore the disciplinary regime. This is not intended as a criticism of the management of the school, but rather a comment on the difficulties the school had in maintaining a framework of externally imposed discipline once the external pressure was lifted.

In my original research (Perryman 2003), I examined the experience of school inspection in England and Wales from a Foucauldian perspective as part of a system of increasing discipline and accountability. The article was based on a case study of a school undergoing an intensive inspection regime which successfully 'improved' (in inspection terms) enough to come out of Special Measures. This was made possible through the normalisation of the school through a deliberately developed discourse change, and the experience of a regime of what I called 'Panoptic performativity'.

Regular inspections by OfSTED (Office for Standards in Education), and particularly Special Measures, form an important part in the disciplinary regime in education.<sup>1</sup> Having experienced

<sup>1</sup> The Education (Schools) Act 1992 introduced a system in which schools are inspected every four years, according to a framework developed by the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED). If a school is judged to be failing it is

a Special Measures regime, I was struck by the links with Foucault's work on discipline. Foucault (1977, p 170) argues that 'the success of disciplinary power derives no doubt from the use of simple instruments; hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and their combination in a procedure that is specific to it, the examination'. The examination, in the guise of inspections, is part of the increasing culture of accountability in education, which has created a system in which disciplinary mechanisms are used widely.

In my research, I examined the experience of Special Measures and the successful manner in which 'improvements' were made in terms of two key concepts: discourse change and panoptic performativity. This article looks at what happened to the school in terms of these concepts in a post-inspection context.

## **Methodology**

The primary data used in this article is based on a case study of an inner-city secondary school, 'Northgate'<sup>2</sup> which was under Special Measures for just under two years<sup>3</sup>. The key research method was analysis of semi structured interviews with teachers just over a year after the school came out of Special Measures, (research period 1) and the following year in the weeks leading to the school's next OfSTED inspection (research period 2)<sup>4</sup>. The teachers were told that the research was part of a case study into the effects of Special Measures regimes and OfSTED inspections. In research period 1, I interviewed the teachers who had been at Northgate since before the school was put into Special Measures. There were twelve teachers in all, out of around forty in the school as a whole, and they comprised 3 senior managers, 3 heads of faculty, 4 heads of departments and 2 year heads. They were asked about the leadership and management of the school in the year after Special Measures. By research period 2 I interviewed the nine teachers that remained from the previous research period, as three had left the school to take up other teaching posts. In order to expand the sample, I also interviewed a further eight teachers. Hence the 17 interviewees of research

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placed under Special Measures, a period of intensive inspection designed to improve the school or result in its closure.

<sup>2</sup> this is a pseudonym to protect the identity of the school and respondents

<sup>3</sup> Actual dates withheld to protect anonymity of the school

<sup>4</sup> Actual dates withheld, to protect anonymity of the school

period 2 consisted of 3 senior managers, 4 heads of faculty, 6 heads of department, and 4 heads of year. They were asked how preparing for an OfSTED inspection had impacted on the school.

Northgate is an 11-16 inner-city comprehensive school, and has a roll of approximately 700 pupils. The school is in an area of significant deprivation. According to the school's OFSTED Report;<sup>5</sup>

The communities served by the school have considerable levels of social and economic disadvantage. Fifty-three per cent of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, a figure which is over double the national average. Forty-four per cent of the pupils speak English as an additional language to their own, representing at least thirty-five different language backgrounds. A significant proportion of these pupils are recent arrivals to the United Kingdom, often as refugees. Thirty-two per cent of the pupils on roll are on the school's register of special educational need, and 21 pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Need, which is above average.

Northgate was subject to the system of school inspection as it has operated in England and Wales since the 1992 Education Act. Before this, from 1868 to 1992, the relatively independent Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) carried out school inspections. Their periodic inspections were designed to provide an external view of schools to assist Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in effecting improvement. The Education Act of 1992 led to the creation of Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED), which is a privatised inspection system. Inspection teams, who have to bid for contracts, are led by a Registered Inspector, and inspect schools according to a criteria-based system. Following the inspection, the Registered Inspector reports to OfSTED and to the school in a publicly available document. The school then produces a summary report for parents and governors and an action plan to address any concerns raised in the report.

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<sup>5</sup> Reference to OfSTED report suppressed to protect anonymity of the school

If a school is not seen to be providing an acceptable standard of education, it becomes subject to Special Measures and subsequently receives termly visits from Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) to monitor progress. If the school is judged to have made sufficient improvements the school is removed from Special Measures following a full inspection. In extreme cases, if OfSTED does not observe improvement, the school is closed down. By September 1999, 900 schools had been put into Special Measures, approximately 3% of secondary schools (OfSTED 1999).

It is not my intention to argue that schools judged as 'failing' should not be subject to some form of intervention, but to illustrate the deficiencies of a system which dictates that in order to be removed from Special Measures teachers must adhere strictly to a rigid and pre-determined recipe for success. This recipe is based on the school effectiveness theories, and uses performativity and normalisation as its mechanisms. It is assumed that all schools can follow the same recipe for success, and any deviation from this norm can be an indicator that a school is failing, which of course ignores the individual socio-economic contexts in which schools are located. Performativity becomes the mechanism in which schools demonstrate, through documentation and pedagogy that they have been normalised.

Northgate went into Special Measures following a visit by HMI. The inspectors identified the key issues for improvement, which can be summarised as curriculum, teaching quality, behaviour, leadership and management, governance, attendance and punctuality. The Inspection report stated, 'Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools is of the opinion that the school requires Special Measures since it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education'.

After an intense twenty two months of inspection, Northgate was released from Special Measures. The leadership and management of the school achieved this through rigorously following a prescribed recipe for success in OfSTED terms, to achieve discourse change and normalisation.

## Discourse Change

Discourse is a central concept in Foucault's work, and describes the way a normalising framework is developed in order to dictate how a subject is thought about and discussed. Foucault (1976) exemplifies this with the subject of mental illness which he says is not an objective fact, but has changed through history. Only after madness is defined, can mad people exist. Behaviour is judged as normal and abnormal, which leads to the establishment of measurements and regulations around the idea of a norm. Foucault calls this normalisation, and argues that institutions such as prisons and hospitals are engaged in educating, rather than coercing, people to obey certain regimes. The discourse then describes the normalising framework. Ball (1990, p 7) defines discourse as being 'about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when and with what authority'.

In education, the adoption by OfSTED of aspects of School Effectiveness research, notably the 'tick lists' of characteristics of effective schools (Sammons, Hillman et al. 1995), and the widespread dissemination of OfSTED criteria for successful schools, have become the defining discourses through which schools are normalised. There has been a shift in accountability since the 1988 Education Reform Act, from teacher professionalism, with accountability to themselves, their colleagues and their students, to accountability to external agencies such as funding bodies, OfSTED, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), and the Teacher Training Agency (TTA). It is in this context of increased accountability that such disciplinary mechanisms as normalisation, performativity and deliberate discourse change can thrive. Gold and Evans (1998) write of discourse construction in education that 'dominant discourses are often so powerful that the dissenter finds it hard to voice dissent articulately or objectively' (p 9).

There are a number of theoretical perspectives on inspection. Inspections are not straightforward events, but practices which are set within their own tradition and discourse. Wilcox and Gray (1996) see inspection as evaluation, as auditing, as a disciplinary power, and argue that seeing inspection through these theoretical interpretations means that

objectivity can not be achieved. They write that 'inspection even in its current OfSTED form does not fit neatly into the usual models of evaluation. It has some of the characteristics of positivist styles of evaluation - use of quantitative methods, the quantification of data, explicit criteria and the like. On the other hand it also draws on some of the practices and assumptions which reflect the interpretive and naturalistic traditions of evaluation whilst not necessarily acknowledging that this is the case' (Wilcox and Gray 1996, p 115). Inspection can be seen as part of the growing audit culture, the use of quantitative data which illustrates efficiency, performance and quality. Thus a key section in OfSTED reports is about efficiency and value for money. Power (1994) writes of an 'audit explosion' which has been caused by decentralisation of services such as local education authorities and increased control from government. Auditing is often thought of as a neutral collection of facts, but Power notes; 'audits do not passively monitor performance but shape the standards of this performance in crucial ways' (p8).

The discourse of OfSTED involves standards, quality, efficiency, value for money and performance, and I argue that a change in discourse must occur in a 'failing' school for normalisation to take place. At the outset Northgate, the case-study school, found itself at the centre of a discourse of failure. Consequently, adopting the discourse of OfSTED was a key strategy in terms of getting out of Special Measures. Under an inspection regime, a school's documentation becomes part of the surveillance. In schools this can be seen in constant clarifications of policies and procedures, in departmental handbooks, school and departmental action plans. Ball (1997) notes that 'documents produced in these technologies become increasingly reified, self referential and dislocated from the practices they are 'meant' to stand for or account for' (p 319). This was the case at Northgate; for example, the self-evaluation documentation produced by the school over the inspection period increasingly mirrored the language of OfSTED, rather than the practices of the school.

Even given that the general consensus at Northgate was that inspections were 'demoralising and exhausting', as the school 'improved', teachers were able to welcome some of the effects of being in Special Measures, often in the framework of an 'improvement' discourse. They

mentioned the importance of the focus of the inspections, the push for improvement and monitoring improvement, and the development of good practice. At the same time, as teachers became practiced in the use of the improvement discourse, so they were able to demonstrate improvement to the inspectors. Thus the discourse change could be said to have 'worked' for them.

### **Panoptic performativity**

According to Foucault, the disciplinary power at the heart of discourse operates in institutional apparatus and technologies. One disciplinary institution noted by Foucault (1977) is Bentham's Panopticon, which was a design for a model prison. In the Panopticon, individual cells were arranged around a central tower. By the use of backlighting, a supervisor could observe every cell without the 'inmate' knowing if they were being watched or not. The architectural design of the Panopticon, according to Foucault (1977, p 201), served to 'induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power'. Westoby (1988) wrote that a central feature of Foucault's method is

to uncover the regulative principles whereby behaviour is defined and normalised through micro technologies of physical control. In the realm of school organisation, this method leads... to the techniques of surveillance and punishment that enable institutional power to be made both diffuse and invisible (p 33).

Thus institutional authority is invisible, but the objects of power, which in a school are the teachers and pupils, are visible and supervised. This is achieved by the internalisation of required behaviour. Bentham in his 1787 work 'Panopticon', quoted in Miller (1988, p 43) wrote that 'the object of the inspection principle is to make them not only suspect, but be assured that whatever they do is known even though that should not be the case'. Wilcox and Gray (1996) also link inspection with disciplinary mechanisms 'as it requires a school to undergo an exacting discipline which extends over a period considerably longer than that of the inspection week and may also lead to a school being disciplined' (120). They locate the

panopticon with the handbook which continues to influence schools in between inspections and is used as a management development tool.

There are clear similarities with a Special Measures regime. When Northgate was under Special Measures, the school was inspected eight times in 18 months, and, in one particular intense phase, five times in nine months. When inspections were occurring at such a rate, there was a sense that they were continuous. Because there was so little 'recovery time' between inspections, the staff learnt to act as if inspection was continuous. The six weeks between inspections was spent gathering evidence for the next time, writing policies, observing and grading lessons and frantic meetings to ensure the whole school was working together. The experience for teachers was of constant inspections. When interviewed, teachers used metaphors such as *'treadmill'*, *'jumping over hurdles'*, *'jumping through hoops'* *'a crazy cycle of working like mad followed by a period of near collapse'* and said that *'the frequency of inspections [was] demoralising and exhausting'*. To use the panoptic metaphor, even if the school was not being officially inspected, 'the dark central tower' of OfSTED was always invisibly watching. Eventually, teachers under Special Measures need to behave as if they are being inspected all the time so it becomes second nature and thus the disciplinary mechanism is internalized.

Ball (2001) links the surveillance of inspection with performativity. Performativity is about performing the normal within a particular discourse. In the context of school inspection this means that lessons are taught in a particular way and school policies and documentation reflect the expected discourse. Performativity is a term first used by Lyotard in 1984, when he suggested that post-modern society is obsessed with efficiency and effectiveness. This has led to all kinds of businesses, (and more recently schools themselves), being judged in terms of outcome and performance. Thus league tables, SATs results and inspection reports are increasingly the measurements by which schools and teachers are judged. Jeffrey (2002, p1) notes that

A performativity discourse currently pervades teachers' work. It is a discourse that relies on teachers and schools instituting self-disciplinary measures to satisfy newly transparent public accountability and it operates alongside a market discourse

Performativity in education can lead to a sense of deprofessionalisation as teachers can feel that they are performing in order to demonstrate their competence. According to Jeffrey and Woods (1996, p 326) 'OfSTED inspections...penetrate to the heart of teachers' operations and mount a continual surveillance. The teacher's self is brought under intensive and critical gaze'. During Special measures, the regime at Northgate, I argue, was one of panoptic performativity.

### **Leadership in the Panopticon**

If OfSTED and the Special Measures regime led to a panoptic system of surveillance at Northgate, it also allowed the Headteacher increased authority to dictate how inspections were dealt with. Whilst there was always a sense at Northgate of 'them against us' (meaning the inspectors against the school), some believed that being under Special Measures had enabled the management team to become less democratic. Teachers reported that; *'the school has become dictatorial with a top-down management - a 'them and us' management style which disempowers staff and engenders a lack of ownership as people become disaffected'* and *'It gives management an excuse to insist on certain things from staff'*. Scanlon (1999) agrees that such changes are likely, arguing that ' whilst new Headteachers were often critical of the Special Measures process, their replies suggested that it had strengthened their own position in the school and allowed them to take actions which might not have been possible under other circumstances' (p 54).

Ball (1997) noted of one school under inspection that

'the locus of power or blame for additional work, overbearing paperwork, meticulous surveillance was often located with OfSTED and not directly with the senior

management team who frequently positioned themselves as ciphers for outside pressure' (p 332).

Just as the inspectors at Northgate could make constant judgements, the regime meant that the Headteacher could as well. Like the director of the Panopticon 'in this central tower, the director may spy on all the employees that he has under his orders' (Foucault 1977 p 204).

Northgate was removed from Special Measures after eighteen months, and I was interested to know what effect the departure of the inspectors would have on the leadership of the school. When Special Measures was not there to provide the panoptic system, to engender a sense of 'them against us' as the whole school worked together, how would the management change?

### **Maintaining the Panopticon**

Nine months after the end of the Special Measures regime there was a palpable sense that the regime of panoptic performativity had been maintained. The danger when a school comes out of Special Measures is that there will be a decline in standards. As Ian noted;

*When you come off Special Measures everybody's going to go 'Blurgh, lets just chill out for two-and-half years or something'. Somebody said to me that schools can't maintain improvement for more than three years, I think that there was an inevitable 'let's relax a bit' (Ian, senior manager)*

Janice noted the potential lack of a goal, saying

*There's nothing that really motivates the staff to do well, which I suppose in some ways coming out of Special Measures you've got a goal to work towards even though its not a good goal, but there's nothing that has replaced that, there's no desire by some people for the school to become better. (Janice, middle manager)*

Simon comments on the lethargy that followed the departure of the Inspectors

*It would have been very tempting to say 'right we've had a hard two years on Special Measures, now we're going to take it easy, take a breather'. A lot of people wanted us to do this, a lot of people wanted us to say 'look, that's enough, we'll have 12 months where we just become stable'. Had we taken that 12 months to become stable I think we would have sunk. (Simon, senior manager)*

However, at Northgate, the management of the school maintained the regime of panoptic performativity through continuing to embrace change and innovation. This meant that external pressures were maintained, the sense of outside agencies maintaining the gaze. In volunteering for centrally administered pilot programmes, the school was opening itself up to the continuation of judgements being made on the school from outside. Simon discusses the importance that the management team placed on moving the school forward.

*One of the reasons I think as well why we haven't gone down the pan, and I have worked in schools who've gone down after OfSTED rapidly, is the fact that we made a decision that we were going to move the school forward, and we've taken on board initiatives like putting in a bid for specialist status, like becoming a pilot school for [a government initiative], we've kept the momentum going. We went for it; we didn't take our foot off the gas. It was a decision that we made that we weren't going to tread water, we were going to go for it, we were not going to have a static 12 months after it and that's why we've come on. I have worked in schools which I would describe as being moribund, what they lacked was momentum. They were comfortably in a position where they were going to manage to avoid getting into challenging circumstances and they lacked the impetus to make the next step. I don't think we're happy being a 'bog-standard Comp', we never will be, and we're pushing and pushing and pushing and pushing and I think that's the one reason why we've not gone under. Now we're playing our own game, we're taking the school in the direction that we*

*want to go and the staff are actually coming with us as well, I think the school is... in a way the shackles have come off.* (Simon, senior manager)

Speaking of the head, Eileen (senior manager) said *'He's very keen to change it around, so therefore he hasn't got much patience with the argument that we should just coast for a bit'*

Stoll (2003) found that it was important for successful school to have a sense of ownership of change (note Simon's comments about 'playing our own game'). She writes 'even within an externally determined framework, more successful schools are in the driving seat, setting their own direction, adapting mandates to fit their vision, 'colonising' external education reforms' (p 95).

Another element of panoptic performativity continued by the management team was to continue observations of teachers on a regular basis

*The monitoring is continuous and it is very rigorous, as rigorous if not more rigorous than it was during the time we were in Special Measures. Top-down, everybody.*  
(Alistair, middle manager)

*We get regularly seen by senior management now, on a termly basis. Basically we are observed and they keep doing the percentages through that. We don't get huge amounts of INSET<sup>6</sup> about it, you're just told you're going to be observed and these are the things and this is what you've got to do.* (Lyn, middle manager)

*I think we're getting more skilled at making correct evaluations of teaching and learning, we've done a lot of observations. We have also have now got a cycle and we observe and we've noticed as an SMT that the teaching has actually gone up, it's a lot better.* (Simon, senior manager)

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<sup>6</sup> In Service Education and Training, a funded programme of training for teachers which schools can use to train their staff in new skills, developments and changes, either 'in-house' or using external agencies

There was also a sense that the management team was highly visible around the school. The head was praised for his 'hands on approach'.

*I really, really like the hands-on approach, he's out, reliably every lunchtime, every duty, sleeves rolled up and his priority is that and it is so rare when people get logged in to those jobs, there's always something else, and he never puts anything else first, and for that he's there for the staff, it's a hands on approach and he's leading from up front, so even when he makes mistakes, you can't take that aspect away from him, it's the best one. (Eileen, senior manager)*

*He never misses a duty, he absolutely, totally prioritises it, its admirable (Helen, middle manager)*

This links with the findings of a research project by the UK National College for School Leadership. (Harris and Chapman 2002). This study analysed good leadership practice in schools defined by OfSTED as 'Facing Challenging Circumstances', the benchmarks for which are fewer than 25% of pupils achieving five or more A\*-C grades at GCSE<sup>7</sup>, and schools in which more than 35% of pupils receive free school meals (an indicator of socio-economic deprivation), irrespective of the exam performance of its pupils. The research found that 'the heads in the study did 'walk the talk'. Through the consistency and integrity of their actions they modelled behaviour that they considered desirable to achieve the school goals' (Harris and Chapman 2002, p 11)

Similarly, one senior manager commented on the leadership team as being 'highly visible'

*I think as an SMT we're out and about a lot and we lead well on it and I think that the teachers, I wouldn't know but I think most of the teachers probably feel comfortable here and confident they will get support and back-up, we are very visual senior management team, we are out and about, we are seen to be out and about. You*

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<sup>7</sup> General Certificate of Secondary education, the public exam taken at the end of compulsory education, usually at the age of 16. Grades range from A\*-G, with grades A\* to C seen to be a good pass.

*know, you can get your paperwork done and hide behind a door or you can go out and round about the school and do your paperwork afterwards. The priority has always been here that we're out and about and I'd hate to see us lose that.* (Simon, senior manager)

This is an interesting example of a management strategy which fulfils two functions. By maintaining a high visible presence the management can closely monitor the work of the staff – who after all is going to miss their break time duty supervision when they know the head will be there? – but also is a highly popular strategy and makes the staff feel supported.

So how successful were the attempts of the headteacher to maintain the performative regime? The teachers were asked if they thought the school had continued to improve since special measures. Many of the staff indicated that the school had continued to move forward in the key issues of raising achievement, quality of teaching and behaviour of students.

Simon, senior manager, remarked '*I think teaching and learning in general has improved in the school*'. Alistair and Zoë commented favourably on the behaviour.

*Behaviour has improved. I think it goes up and down and I don't think it's got too much to do with coming out of Special Measures, although certainly during Special Measures there were very few downs, it certainly slipped straight afterwards but then improved and slipped again. We are constantly trying to find mechanisms to improve pupils' behaviour* (Alistair, middle manager)

*I think the discipline is so much better than in most schools I have ever been in* (Zoë, middle manager)

Others pointed out the improvements made to the school in terms of both calibre of staff, resources and pupils.

*Coming out of Special Measures allows you to attract better quality staff and I think areas of the school that have slipped will be much better next year because you can say we're out of Special Measures, we are moving forward, lots of exciting things, new buildings, more money. We will get the staff, so things will get better. (Alistair, middle manager)*

*High-achieving children in the area are seriously considering coming to our school (Eileen, senior manager)*

Overall there was a sense that the school had continued its forward momentum.

*It hasn't come easy but there are a lot of things that are in place there weren't in place 12 months ago which are tangible evidence that we've not stood still and we're not going to. (Simon, senior manager)*

Thus, nine months after the School had come out of Special Measures, the management had been able to maintain a regime of Panoptic performativity, by continuing OfSTED style observations (surveillance), and driving forward acceptance of innovation and change, which would maintain the improvement discourse and invite external judgements.

However, even in research period 1, there were rumblings of discontent about lack of consultation. The decision to continue to innovate was quite contentious for the staff, as some staff thought that they were not being consulted about the proposed changes. Some felt that the head was taking the school forward too quickly into new initiatives without enough consultation, and that those who dissented were afraid of being frozen out.

*What the joke is, I feel like we need some stability, and he's bringing in... So there's a bit of, yeah, that wasn't with consultation! One meeting he told us about it and basically he said if you don't feel like you can do it then you should be working in a school down the road then. (Lyn, middle manager)*

This view concurs with research done by James (1999) who concluded that

where there was a willingness on the part of teachers and managers to change and engage in the primary task of teaching and managing there was fulsome praise and support from the head; where there was opposition it was resolutely confronted (p 150)

Other complaints were about the headteacher's management style – the minority perception was that he was autocratic, that the senior management team were 'yes people' and the middle management were not consulted. Perhaps this is an inevitable by product of a regime of surveillance and discipline. Bennett (1995) cites two approaches to management theory. The first is scientific management or Taylorism, which dictates that human beings have to be driven and efficiency comes with supervision and control. This is also known as the rational-technicist model (Levacic, Glover et al. 1999) The second is a non-rational approach which motivates individuals to enable them to work affectively. OfSTED pushes schools towards the rational technicist model, and the continuing sense of lack of control felt by some of the teachers indicates that the atmosphere of performativity had continued.

Janice, a middle manager, comments on lack of consultation:

*There's a very autocratic management system which is very top-down and 'this is what we're going to do and this is how we're going to do it' and there was no negotiation or consultation. I'm not convinced the senior management team understand the grassroots of problems that there are because you have a lot of teachers who are at the bottom rung who get very frustrated by what's happening at senior level and they don't know what's happening at senior level. Things are still 'this is something that's going to happen' it's a fait accompli as opposed to a discussion with staff so that staff aren't feeling as if they are being part of the process but being told that this is what they're going to do and that doesn't make for a healthy school*

*staff. I suppose they're sort of dressing it up like they present things they say 'we're going to talk about this now as a middle management team and we'll see what your opinion is on it because obviously we need you to agree with it' and then you might say to them 'has this been agreed?' and they say 'yes', so then where is the point in discussing it when we've already agreed and signed up to something that is all signed and sealed and delivered without actually discussing with the staff team, so there's frustration (Janice, middle manager)*

Similarly, two middle managers point out the lack of a sense of democracy

*We still lack opportunities for all staff to have input into the key school issues, I still think that the fact that we hardly ever have a whole staff meeting...meetings are often useless, but I think there is a need to have one every half-term with some open agenda time that people can raise issues that are important to them. (Rob, middle manager)*

*I think the middle managers feel really, really frustrated because they don't have any power (Zoë, middle manager)*

This is backed up by other research, notably by McEwan and Thompson (1997) who found that half of the secondary headteachers they interviewed said that they made decisions without consultation. They concluded that 'principals in post-primary schools receive surprisingly low levels of respect from pupils and teachers alike – the decisions they make are often perceived as inconsistent and ill-informed' (p 61). The sense of frustration is echoed in the research of Cole and Walker (1989, p 164), who found 'an important source of stress for teachers is the feeling that they are not in control of the situation in which they have operate'.

I wondered how the management of the school would continue to maintain the disciplinary regime as memories of Special Measures receded, and returned to the school nine months

later, the timing prompted by news that the school was to undergo another OfSTED inspection.

### **Decreased Surveillance**

When I returned to the school, it was evident that the sense of surveillance had slipped, and for some middle managers there was a sense that with the imminent return of OfSTED, the Panoptic system was welcomed as it provided a mechanism through which senior management could find themselves 'under the gaze', and as a way to make everybody work equally hard. The arrival of OfSTED in most schools heralds a period of over-work in preparation. MacBeath (2004) writes;

OfSTED. For teachers, there are few words that carry the same emotional impact and weight of expectation. For a generation of school staff it has signalled time to set aside learning and engage in tactical manoeuvres designed to impress, if not outwit, their uninvited visitors. Preparing for inspection becomes, for three months or more, an overriding obsession.

It was in the context of the work required for OfSTED that teachers expressed their opinions that perhaps things had started to slip. Janice remarked that teachers were being asked to do a lot of things for OfSTED that should already be in place.

*It's also highlighted I think all the holes in things, you have a line manager meeting with someone, and you haven't had one since last June, and then they say 'did you write an action plan, we want it written on school guidelines and can you backdate it?' You say 'actually I did write one if you remember' but there's a lot of people who've never had things in place. (Janice, middle manager)*

Similarly, Olivia was annoyed at being asked to do things at short notice

*I'm cross that everybody's been in that position yet again, it's so badly organised, because you know I don't mind working quite hard but I don't particularly like doing it over my weekends.* (Olivia, middle manager)

Sophia commented

*Last time when HMI<sup>8</sup> left we stopped all the systems. Three-quarters of the systems went and now we have to create them again.* (Sophia, middle manager)

Donna, who noted that senior management had, until OfSTED had been announced, rather lost the 'high visibility' remarked upon the year before.

*What's noticeable with the OfSTED is we are starting to see more people circulate around because that's dropped a bit and kind of tailed off and the students need to know that there's always somebody watching you, checking your behaviour, saying 'hey', so that has been up since we know that OfSTED has been here. There's a fear that when OfSTED goes it will go down again. Senior management need to be around a lot more, I mean I don't know what they do, I'm not there in someone's office I've got no idea, but they do need to be seen more physically around definitely.* (Donna, middle manager)

Donna seemed to indicate that the panoptic regime falls short if it is not centrally monitored. It is interesting to note that she uses the phrase 'always somebody watching you' and applies this to the pupils in the school, whilst implying that management need to be watched as well. Janice agreed, saying

*There's anger about people who see the management out and about now and they say that after OfSTED they will all disappear again into their rooms. It's also highlighting to people how we have just been struggling along and it has been getting tougher and how it could be if people were doing things and they know it won't last,*

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<sup>8</sup> Her Majesty's Inspectorate. School inspectors are usually referred to by the acronym HMI.

*so there's a lot of anger about that. The extra work is because people haven't been doing their jobs as well as they should have been necessarily. (Janice, middle manager)*

## **OfSTED Returns**

There was a sense from the staff that OfSTED was beneficial in that it was turning the gaze onto senior management. Even one member of senior management commented 'You need someone from outside saying 'You must do this'.' A head of department who said 'OfSTED makes you pull your socks up even if you are doing the right thing - it still makes you think' echoed this. Another argued

*I think we were all guilty of taking our foot of the pedal once special measures was over. Everybody did, I think we all did, you do, and then OfSTED comes upon you and you suddenly have to get yourself back up again. (Lynn, middle manager)*

Sophia was enjoying the effect that the effect of OfSTED was having on her relationship with the management of the school, and also on school systems

*I like OfSTED this time round because SMT have to be nice to you, they start asking about your needs because they need your loyalty, suddenly money is available for extra admin support and resources and people are really nice to you. Big important whole school issues are being addressed, like lateness to lessons. Suddenly we have a new system and it works. (Sophia, middle manager)*

Perhaps the Panoptic regime is only fully effective if it is externally monitored and encompasses everybody, or if there is a sense of ownership by everyone in authority. In a Panoptic prison there are two layers of authority, the director of prison and the warders. The warders watch the prisoners, and the director watches the warders to make sure they do their job properly, as well as watching the prisoners. In schools the situation is more complex, as

Panoptic surveillance can be perceived as senior management disciplining teachers, rather than pupils. Unless teachers feel that every member of the school community is being effectively monitored, they will look to external influences such as OfSTED to ensure that senior management are disciplined as well.

There was also a sense that some teachers welcomed the return of OfSTED as an opportunity to get feedback on the job they were doing. Sophia said that she felt that only when the external gaze was present did she get any positive feedback

*As an NQT<sup>9</sup> we had OfSTED in our first year and there was great panic in the school, but I thought that it was very positive, it seemed to be the one time that I got direct praise and acknowledgement for my teaching. The inspector told me I'd done a fantastic lesson, and nobody had done that before, I haven't had that before. It looked like to me that the people that struggled got lots of support and observations and if you're good you're just left to it. I think also with OfSTED everybody's work is put under the spotlight, and people who have not pulled their weight have to. (Sophia, middle manager)*

Similarly, Zoë hoped that the return of OfSTED would 'catch out the people who did not do their job all year round.

*I'm hoping that some people will get had up for their crap jobs, part of me thinks that some people should be sacked and that's the real reactionary side of me. I even shock my partner when I say 'look sometimes, some people deserve to be hauled to be told they're shit, to be told they need to sort it out within a certain amount of months and if they don't they should go', because the rest of us spend our life covering for them. Half of my job is spent moaning at people who don't do their job, if I didn't have to moan at them I'd have a really nice time. Some people deserve to be helped and some people just don't. (Zoë, middle manager)*

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<sup>9</sup> Newly Qualified Teacher. This is the first year after a teacher training course.

To link to the panoptic prison again, perhaps the model prisoner would not mind the continual possibility of surveillance, and would perhaps resent the fact that their constant good behaviour was not recognised. There is a sense here that some teachers welcomed back the return of the external monitoring.

## **Conclusion**

Unlike some schools in the year after Special Measures, in the opinion of the management and staff, Northgate had continued to improve. The headteacher and senior management of the school had continued the rigorous regime experienced under inspection and replaced external disciplinary sources with internal mechanisms, a highly visible management team, a continuing programme of lesson observations and a drive for innovation and change.

Ian, a senior manager, perhaps summed up this change with:

*There has been a shift, it's now 'this is the way I want it done' rather than 'this is the way HMI want it done'. Whether you agree with it or not, he is the manager, he is the boss; you have to do what he says. And if you don't like it there are plenty of other schools around which is the same as any other job.*

This links with the work of Blase and Anderson (1995) who suggest that 'adversarial leaders' attempt to empower the school community. 'However, when they cannot convince teachers or parents of their convictions, they often suggest that their opponents transfer elsewhere' (p 43).

However, it seems that the Panoptic system must be seen to extend to all to prevent the development of a 'them and us' division, and nine months later staff expressed concerns about a lack of direction and an invisible senior management team. It seemed that it was not until the 'dark central tower' of OfSTED was due to return that the drive for improvement was

resumed. Continuing the regime of panoptic performativity at Northgate led some teachers at the school to rely on the gaze to moderate the work of senior management and other colleagues. This is perhaps an inevitable consequence of a regime of surveillance which relies on external monitoring to be fully effective. The Panoptic system introduced by Special Measures ultimately proved difficult to maintain. This perhaps calls into question the whole issue of seeking school improvement by way of a system which can not be continued in the long term.

At Northgate, the management structures imposed by Special Measures were welcomed by some staff as providing a sense of structure and purpose in ways which may have been missing when the school was not under inspection pressure. Perhaps if inspection were less externally imposed, if it were a mixture of internal moderation and external support, described by Wilcox and Gray (1996, p 112) as 'inspection with a friendly face', schools would have a more permanent sense of normalisation and discourse change, and maintain systems and practices of which they had ownership. If discipline depends on 'the gaze', through the evaluation, auditing and disciplinary power of OfSTED, then it is difficult to maintain that discipline once the gaze has departed.