



BEYOND OFSTED

an inquiry into the future of school inspection

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Foreword from the chair

I was asked to chair this inquiry a year ago. The debate around school inspection has changed considerably since then. The shocking death of Ruth Perry, the head teacher of Caversham Primary School, played a large part in that change. I pay tribute to her and to her family.

Ofsted has changed considerably over the last twenty years or so. We have moved from week-long school inspections with large expert teams, to short snapshot judgements by fewer than a handful of inspectors. At the same time, parent choice and academisation have raised the stakes considerably.

We ask too much of Ofsted; it is under-resourced for the high-stakes job it is expected to do. As a result, the quality of inspection has diminished and become inconsistent. The profession works in fear of these erratic judgements. With their careers on the line, head teacher behaviour can be distorted away from what might be best for the children in their school; that alienation from their vocation is one of the reasons why people are leaving teaching and school leadership.

The evidence is clear. Ofsted has lost the trust of the teaching profession, and increasingly of parents.

There is an argument that this can all be fixed by both abandoning single-word judgements and adding more regular safeguarding checks. This would lower the stakes and may allow a rapid change to a more rational system. But it would mean schools being inspected more and not less.

We can do better than a quick fix. There is now an opportunity for transformational change.

I have been struck when looking internationally at school inspection and quality assurance that there are alternatives to England's name and shame system. Most use forms of self-evaluation, peer assessment, and some also use school report cards.

There is good evidence that a long-term relationship with an external assessor builds trust and drives improvement. It allows that person to get to know the school's unique context and advise accordingly. In this style of quality assurance, I've spoken to people who even look forward to the next inspection.

These approaches are at the heart of our recommendations in this report.

We should increase accountability to parents with the opportunity of real time transparent reporting of school outcomes, including regular surveying of parents and pupils. The leadership of the school should be supported by an external partner who has regular engagement with the school around the inputs of the curriculum and pedagogy.

The combination of measuring what is important to a school and validating it with an external expert would result in an action plan for each school. This in turn means the school governance and the school community understanding what is working well and what can be done better.

Finally, a word on school governance. We ask a lot of school governors. It is a vital job that they do in supporting and challenging the professionals managing the school. This huge group of unpaid volunteers need more support and I regret the abandonment of the National Leaders of Governance scheme.

Eighty per cent of secondary schools are now academies and pooled governance through multi-academy trusts is now becoming the norm. This layer of the system is currently solely accountable to the Secretary of State via the Education and Skills Funding Agency. MATs now need to be held properly to account in a more transparent way. I therefore agree that Ofsted should now have a role in inspecting school groups, and in doing so should principally focus on their governance of school improvement.

This report proposes a big change in school inspection. Not everyone will agree. I am grateful to Jane Perryman and Alice Bradbury for writing it, and to the National Education Union for commissioning it. I hope people will read the whole report and that it stimulates a positive debate on the much-needed change to school inspection in England.

Jim Knight

Rt Hon Lord Knight of Weymouth

Introduction

The NEU is proud to have commissioned and supported this independent report on the future of school inspection. For too long, teachers and leaders have worked under the shadow of looming snapshot inspections, all too often by inspectors not fully trained or experienced in the types of schools they are judging, and the results can be devastating. Pupils are harmed by a system under which schools are forced to make decisions about teaching and learning for the wrong, accountability-driven reasons. Our high-stakes system is neither supportive nor effective and displays a lack of trust in education professionals. It must change and it must change significantly – we are past the point of tinkering around the edges.

This inquiry has produced a well-evidenced and coherent set of proposals designed to construct an effective, fair and supportive model, with excellence for all as its aim. Children and young people need a good local school, and we must focus on the ingredients and the drivers that can help schools which face challenges. Schools all have areas of practice and culture that are going well and areas of school life where more focus is needed. I think this inquiry will speak to the real experiences of teachers, committed professionals, who feel a daily responsibility to their students and accountability to their local community and want the kind of dialogue about school improvement advocated by the inquiry.

This new model is ambitious and rightly so. There is global evidence that the principles showcased here can generate all the right impacts: happier students, a more stable workforce and more equitable distribution of good outcomes across the education system. Those who want a fairer system, who care about school leaders' burnout rates, and who understand the depth of the teacher retention challenge, will want to consider the inquiry's findings in depth.

We want all political parties to engage with this inquiry's recommendations, and the wealth of evidence underpinning it, which lays out the powerful case for redesign and renewal.

Daniel Kebede

General secretary
National Education Union

EXECUTIVE
summary

Executive summary

Ofsted is in urgent need of review. This is the conclusion of this final report of the Beyond Ofsted Inquiry. Beyond Ofsted was established to review the impact of inspection policies and practices in primary and secondary schools in England, and alternatives to the current system.

The work of the inquiry, which ran for most of 2023, involved:

- regular meetings of the advisory board to discuss key issues to do with inspection
- a review of research on inspection, both current practices and global alternatives
- a survey of educators to seek their views about inspection
- focus groups with teachers, parents, governors and school leaders to explore these views and sense-check possible alternatives.

The research found strong support for the reform of Ofsted as, despite calling itself a force for improvement, it had several negative effects including on teacher wellbeing, school improvement and performance. The inquiry also found a deep distrust of the system rooted in a lack of consistency in the expertise of inspectors and the conduct/management of the inspection process.

A review of global inspection systems and academic evidence indicated that alternative systems were possible.

As a result of its work, the Beyond Ofsted Inquiry has formulated a set of recommendations which are summarised below and presented in more detail in the conclusion.

Summary of recommendations

Ofsted is no longer trusted and significant change is needed. We recommend significant reform of inspection, building a self-improving system with Ofsted operating at a different level. This will ensure high standards in schools and recognise the importance of their role in safeguarding. In summary:

- Every school will conduct its own self-evaluation – the school performance review (SPR) – which it will report to stakeholders. The government will work closely with the whole sector to develop guidance on what the SPR should comprise, which might include mandatory and optional elements. Accountability will then be principally to parents and the wider community.
- Schools will work with an external school improvement partner (SIP), delivering on an action plan, informed by the school performance review. Schools in a trust might have a SIP appointed from within that trust. Others would use a SIP provided by their local authority (LA). Some funding may be needed to increase local authority capacity for this work.

- While they are working on the school performance review, schools will engage in an ongoing dialogue with their SIP who will typically be experienced in school leadership and improvement. They would include serving head teachers.
- SIPs will validate the school performance reviews.
- The purposes of the school performance reviews are to enhance schools' capacity for self-improvement and to provide information to stakeholders. It would not be the means by which a school would be held accountable by the Department for Education (DfE) or by Ofsted.
- Safeguarding audits will be conducted annually by a separate body, under the oversight of a national safeguarding body. LAs will be able to take over the annual safeguarding visits when deemed ready by the national safeguarding body. The public sector equality duty would apply, for both pupils and school staff.
- The role of inspectors will change so that they focus on the governance of, and capacity for, school improvement and responding to any challenges faced including the relationship between the school and the school improvement partner. They would not routinely inspect teaching practice and pupil outcomes in the current way. For schools in a multi-academy trust (MAT), the inspection would focus on the capacity and approach of the trust to evaluating its schools' school performance reviews.
- The inspectorate will be reformed so that inspectors develop and maintain appropriate training and expertise in the area of school improvement, to be able to build the capacity of the school leadership team. This must include understanding the context of the school, including relevant expertise for specialist settings such as special schools and alternative provision. It must also include a thorough understanding of good school governance.
- Crucially, the inspectorate will be fully independent of government so that it can hold the government, its policies, and the effects of these policies to account through system-wide thematic inspections, including sufficiency of teacher supply.
- Our final recommendation is for an immediate pause of routine inspections to allow time to reset and regain the trust of the profession. Duty of care to the profession in order to develop collaborative learning cultures, which generate excellent professional skills and competencies, should be at the heart of any reform.
- These recommendations are designed to restore trust and address the intensification of leader and teacher workload, while reforming a system which is ineffective in its role of school improvement.

More details are provided at the end of the report, in Recommendations pp 62-65

A B O U T

the inquiry

About the inquiry

Membership

Beyond Ofsted is led by Lord Knight and the research team is led by Professor Jane Perryman with Professor Alice Bradbury. The work of the inquiry was supported by the NEU team; Justine Stephens from Can Can Campaigns; and Dr Graham Calvert and Katie Kilian from University College London (UCL).

Beyond Ofsted is funded by the National Education Union (NEU). The independence of the commission derives from the UCL researchers and the advisory board. This report has been written by the research team Professor Jane Perryman, Professor Alice Bradbury, Dr Graham Calvert and Katie Kilian, and has been agreed by Lord Knight.

At the heart of Beyond Ofsted are the advisory board members who brought their extensive knowledge of inspection, school leadership, stakeholder views and equalities to address the aims and objectives of the commission. The members are listed below. Brief biographies of the board appear on the Beyond Ofsted website beyondofsted.org.uk

Scope of the inquiry

In 2022, the NEU called for the Department for Education (DfE) to review school inspection and alternatives to the current system. These calls were based on increasing evidence from their members and the wider literature that school inspection was doing more harm than good.

Teachers associate Ofsted with increased workload, pressure and stress. They often have no confidence in the judgements made, with inspectors frequently not being experts in the education areas or phases they are inspecting. Research has also highlighted that schools in areas of high deprivation are much more likely to be rated poorly and that a poor inspection outcome can lead to cumulative and prolonged negative impacts in those schools and to the children and young people schools serve.

The NEU commissioned this inquiry to harness the growing momentum towards change among teachers and leaders, education unions, academics and education policy experts who wish to establish a system of school inspection that is supportive, effective and fair. Exploring how school inspection in England is currently working and identifying solutions to the problems identified, presents an opportunity to push forward an alternative approach that leads to more equitable and fair outcomes for all.

Roles

Organisations

Lord Jim Knight of Weymouth (chair)

Labour peer
Director
Chair
Chair

Member of the House of Lords
Suklaa Ltd
E-ACT MAT board of trustees
Council of British International Schools

Frances Akinde

LA SEND inspector and adviser
BAMEed SEND hub of BAMEed Network

Dr Kulvarn Atwal

Executive head/learning leader

Highlands Primary School/Uphall Primary School, Redbridge, London

Melissa Benn

Writer and campaigner

Founder of Local Schools Network
Visiting professor York St John University

Professor Alice Bradbury

Professor of sociology of education
Co-director

UCL Institute of Education
Helen Hamlyn Centre of Pedagogy

Patrick Cozier

Head teacher
Chair
Co-vice chair

Highgate Wood School, Haringey, London
Haringey Secondary Heads' Forum
Show Racism the Red Card

Caroline Derbyshire

CEO
Chair

Saffron Academy Trust, Essex
Head teachers' roundtable

Jess Edwards

Chair of policy, research and campaigns
executive committee
Primary teacher

NEU
Lambeth, London

Jason Elsom

CEO

Parentkind

Roles

Organisations

Dr Zubaida Haque

Independent consultant
Former CEO
Former interim director

Equality Trust
Runnymede Trust

Jo Hutchinson

Director for SEND and additional needs

Education Policy Institute

Andrew Morrish

Director
Co-founder

Makana Leadership Limited
Headrest

Dr Bernadita Munoz Chereau

Lecturer

Centre for Leadership,
UCL Institute of Education

Dame Alison Peacock

CEO

Chartered College of Teaching

Professor Jane Perryman

Professor of sociology of education

UCL Institute of Education

Penny Rabiger

Independent consultant
Doctoral researcher
Co-founder

Leeds Beckett University
BAMEed Network

Emma Rose

Executive member
Secondary teacher

NEU
Warwick

Observers

Roles

Organisations

Justine Stephens

Campaigns director

Can Can Campaigns

Dr Graham Calvert

Researcher

UCL

The scope of the inquiry centred around answering the key question of what a better inspection system in England could look like. Underlying this, we wanted to find out what are the principles that make a good inspection system, and how these translate into inspection processes and practice.

To answer that central question, the inquiry needed to understand key changes to school inspection in England over time; strengths and weaknesses of the current approach; how inspection operates at school level; and the impact on the culture and ways of working of a school. To inform an alternative, the inquiry sought to identify the factors within the inspection system that contribute to its strengths and weaknesses, and the changes needed to address the negative or 'unintended consequences' identified.

In terms of scope, the inquiry primarily looked at inspection in primary and secondary schools in England, and the extent to which these differed. It also explored the specific impacts of inspection on schools serving the most disadvantaged pupils. The international literature was explored, to gather evidence on how inspection systems operate in other countries. The review of international systems examined how inspection systems in high performing education nations operate differently from England, the role of accountability and school improvement in these models, and how any positive outcomes from different models could be used to inform an alternative approach to inspection in England.

The inquiry engaged closely with the education profession, asking questions about the principles they think are needed to underpin a better inspection system, and potential solutions they see as being effective in tackling the problems they

identify. It also explored how parents/carers and governors interact with the current inspection system; how they feel about, and understand, school inspection; and what they want to see changed.

The scope of the inquiry meant that the focus was on inspection of mainstream schools in England, though Ofsted have a wider remit including inspections of early years, special schools and initial teacher training (ITT) programmes. This discussion here may be relevant to these other sectors, but the inquiry is limited for reasons of time and capacity to mainstream primary and secondary schools.

Methodology

The research conducted for the inquiry took a mixed methods approach, involving a large-scale survey of teachers and school leaders, supplemented by focus groups with teachers, parents/carers, governors and head teachers. The aim was to gather a wide range of views on both the current system and potential alternatives. We also undertook a major review of international school inspection systems to inform the process of proposing an alternative.

Survey of primary and secondary teachers and leaders

The survey design drew on the key differences in inspection identified in the international comparison work undertaken by the research team, other surveys about inspection (including Ofsted's own survey) and the frames of reference for the inquiry. Using the online platform, Qualtrics, the survey was distributed via a link on the Beyond Ofsted website, by emails from NEU, on social media and to the research team and advisory board's contacts. The survey

was open between 23 March and 26 May 2023, in the immediate period after media coverage of Ruth Perry's death (the release was delayed in response to this tragedy). There were seven sections with a total of seventy questions (listed in Appendix 1). In all statement sections there was a balance between positive and negative assertions to address any potential respondent bias.

The survey attracted 8,443 enquirers. A total of 6,708 of these consented to take part, of whom 79 per cent identified as being a member of the NEU, suggesting that the survey had reached other parts of the sector. The sample had a balance of types of school (48 per cent in a LA maintained school, 36 per cent in an academy as part of a MAT), current (82 per cent) and retired teachers (18 per cent), school leaders (15 per cent) and classroom teachers (80 per cent) (see Appendix 2). There was a slight bias towards primary teachers (65 per cent) over secondary (35 per cent). Descriptive and inferential analyses were carried out using the Qualtrics inbuilt tool set, utilising the relate function to explore differences between groups. This function performed Chi and ANOVA analyses producing a p-value and an effect size. The inclusion of open questions resulted in more than 500,000 words of written responses. These were analysed thematically, based on the key aims of the inquiry and the emerging concerns of the chair and advisory board. Given the considerable number of written responses, these were subdivided using Qualtrics according to phase, level of employment, the most recent Ofsted grade and the teacher's overall experience of inspection.

Focus groups

The first set of five focus groups were held with teachers, at the NEU

conference in April 2023. The NEU sent out a request for members attending the conference to sign up for a session on focus groups, and the research team selected a representative sample to be part of the research, based on the type of school and phase. We held five focus groups simultaneously (two primary and three secondary), with three of the research team and two NEU staff asking the questions from a standard schedule. This schedule covered positives about Ofsted, improvements and potential alternatives, and problems with the current system, in that order. Recordings were transcribed professionally. Analysis was again thematic, with particular attention given to the participants' views of alternative inspection systems, as the inquiry moved to this phase of work.

A second set of seven focus groups were held in July 2023 with parents/carers (2), governors (2), and school leaders (3). The participants for the parent group volunteered in response to an email from Parentkind and the governors in response to an email from the National Governance Association. The head teachers were contacted after they volunteered their details on the survey for a follow-up focus group. The head teachers were initially selected to form groups of local authority primary heads, MAT-based primary heads and secondary equivalents. Practicalities resulted in only the two types of primary heads attending separate groups, and a third being held with a mixture of primary and secondary heads from both LA schools and MATs. Despite high numbers of volunteers and options to select convenient times, attendance at the focus groups was low, possibly due to time commitments at the end of term (see Appendix 3 for details). The parents/carers and governors were asked about their views on Ofsted and potential alternatives, with the idea of

separate safeguarding audits being discussed, as the advisory board was by this point decided on this idea. The head teachers were asked the same, but also presented with a model of an alternative system and asked for their views on the potential advantages and disadvantages of this model. Again, focus group recordings were transcribed and analysed thematically, alongside the previous data collected and in response to the emerging model of an alternative system of inspection presented later in this report.

Each quotation in the report is from a different participant but we have only labelled them according to sector, role and most recent inspection grade for ease of reading. When choosing quotations from the survey it was considered necessary to ensure that these were representative of those across the spectrum of positive and negative experiences as well as high and low grades. There were no carers in our focus groups, so though we refer to parents/carers throughout the report, the quotes are labelled as from parents only. Overall, the strength of the methodology of the inquiry is its triangulation of participants and data collection methods. The survey participation has given a rich data set. Participation in leader, parent and governor focus groups was low, but leaders were well represented in the survey, and we have sought the views of governors and parents/carers via their own stakeholder organisations surveys and publications.

Review of international inspection systems

The threefold aim of the international review was to describe how inspection might be done differently, trace any documented correlation between inspection strategies and educational

outcomes, and use the evidence from the review to develop a set of possible changes to put forward to teachers in the survey.

The initial starting point for selecting countries was to review the PISA 2018 data (Schleicher 2019) to identify those above and below the United Kingdom on the total average score and the individual rankings for mathematics, science and reading. We acknowledge that the OECD's (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) has its critics as a system for judging quality, but it is generally accepted as a benchmark for identifying high quality education systems.

The inspection systems of the top nine nations were examined as well as Sweden, the Netherlands and Spain who were identified as countries with lower PISA scores than the UK. In addition, a review of practices in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland was introduced to consider variations within the UK. Drawing on Ehren et al's study (2013), we focused on three points of comparison: when inspections are done, what standards are assessed and what are the consequences for the school. On reviewing the literature, these were supplemented by differences over who conducts the inspection and what evidence is gathered during an inspection.

Ethical considerations

The research was approved by the UCL Institute of Education research ethics committee. All names have been changed and identifying features removed from all quotes. Survey responses were anonymous, with email addresses for interviews kept separately from the rest of the data on a secure system. All participants gave informed consent.

THE CASE FOR CHANGE:

**why do we
need reform?**

The case for change: why do we need reform?

The case for inspection

In its principles of inspection and regulation, Ofsted (2022b) states:

Inspection provides independent, external evaluation and identifies what needs to improve in order for provision to be good or better. It is based on gathering a range of evidence that is evaluated against an inspection framework and takes full account of our policies and relevant legislation in areas such as safeguarding, equality and diversity.

It argues that *“inspection provides important information to parents/carers, learners and employers about the quality of education, training and care”* leading to these groups being able to make informed choices based on the published inspection reports.

According to Ofsted, its judgements are *“underpinned by consistent, researched criteria”* and provide *“assurance to the public and to government that minimum standards of education, skills and childcare are being met; that – where relevant – public money is being spent effectively”*.

Husbands (2014) writes that *“... inspection is extremely important. It shapes the way governments, practitioners and the public think about the school system”*. He acknowledges that there are tensions between inspectors, practitioners and policy makers but argues that its evidence base is:

... the most comprehensive and thorough evidence base on what happens in classrooms anywhere in the world. It is what makes Ofsted important and relevant, however uncomfortable its findings may sometimes be to read. The independence and integrity of the evidence base are of critical importance. It has been, and remains, a precious commodity in English education.

(Husbands, 2014)

Amanda Spielman (HM Chief Inspector of Ofsted from 2017 to 2023) in her speech introducing the 2019 education inspection framework (2018a) described Ofsted as *“a force for improvement”* which she said was achieved *“through intelligent, responsible and focused inspection and regulation”*. She also stressed the safeguarding aspect of Ofsted’s powers and the view that Ofsted ensures that inspections make sure that *“all learners will receive a*

high-quality, ambitious education”, assessing compliance with relevant legal duties. According to Spielman, the latest iteration (2019) of the inspection framework was a response to concerns and criticisms raised. She acknowledged that the 2015 inspection model had contributed to excessive workload in some schools, much of which falls on classroom teachers. She said that when it comes to assessing a school, Ofsted should complement, rather than intensify, performance data. It should reward school leaders who are ambitious for their pupils, rather than those who jump through hoops. Therefore, the new framework would place greater emphasis on the substance of education, and actively discourage unnecessary data collection. The new Chief Inspector from 2023, Sir Martyn Oliver, has criticised the 2019 framework for not taking results into account enough, and has committed to a ‘big listen’ on the sector’s concerns. He also commented when appointed that he would be *“prioritising inclusion and aiming for the highest standards in all areas”* (TES, 20 July 2023).

Publishing data on post-inspection surveys (Ofsted, 2021), Ofsted said: *“88 per cent of leaders were satisfied with the overall process of their inspection, and 91 per cent thought that their inspection will help them improve. These figures are similar to the results of surveys completed before the pandemic.”*

Perceptions of Ofsted

However, there are many criticisms of Ofsted, centring on the fact that schools are expected to perform to the same standards irrespective of intake or other external factors (Hutchinson, 2016); the nature of evaluation as a political tool

(MacBeath, 1999); the neutrality and expertise of inspection teams (Bousted, 2022; Maw, 1994; Richards, 2020); the negative impact on teachers and student results (Perryman, 2007, 2022); and the evidence that poor inspection outcomes disproportionately impact schools serving the most disadvantaged communities (Hutchinson, 2016; Munoz Chereau et al 2022; Thomson, 2022). As MacBeath writes (1999:5):

[Evaluation’s] purpose is rarely without prejudice. It does not often set forth simply to ‘find out’ in a disinterested and speculative way. Evaluation usually comes with a mandate, a price, and an audience in mind.

Ofsted is often seen as the manifestation of a political tool, designed to evaluate schools not to improve standards in education, but to fulfil a political purpose. This section provides an overview of the criticisms.

It is important to note that Ofsted has undergone several significant framework changes since its inception, and that some argue that despite various reforms many of the issues identified in the 1990s still remain today (hence the inclusion of some older literature in this review). It can also be suggested that the current incarnation has exacerbated many of the negative effects, and that the constant change, or ‘moving of goalposts’ adds to this. To contextualise this, a brief history follows.

Ofsted: health and wellbeing

Research suggests that Ofsted impacts negatively on the health and wellbeing of staff and thus impacts teacher retention (Bousted, 2022; Perryman, 2022). Ofsted’s own survey on the wellbeing of teachers (Ofsted, 2019), reported that the demands of inspection heavily influenced teachers’ working practices.

It found that teachers worked a 50- to 57-hour week, over half of which was spent outside the classroom on Ofsted preparation meetings and data-focused tasks.

Reporting on a survey of NEU members conducted by researchers at Cardiff University UCU on teachers' job quality after the pandemic, Felstead et al (2023) write:

... work intensity is higher when an inspection is thought likely, and also that teachers report somewhat lower task discretion. The combination of working harder and with less control is known to be a potential source of job strain: 64 per cent of teachers under the risk of inspection reported always coming home from work exhausted, as compared with 53 per cent of other teachers.

Not only can Ofsted lead to extra workload, it can also trigger extreme emotional stress. As Grek et al (2015:132) comment: *"Ofsted... has a much more aggressive, 'watchdog' attitude towards schools and its mode of doing inspection*

is characterised by increased levels of anxiety, stress, uncertainty and at times even paranoia."

This is supported throughout the media; for example, Barton (2015) wrote an article in the TES reporting on letters from head teachers who were *"emotionally hollowed out by a bad inspection"* with an *"inescapable sense of guilt, their shame, their feelings of having let down their students, staff, parents, governors, community and – gut-wrenchingly – their own families"*. Leaders of smaller schools, who may be more isolated, are particularly vulnerable and more frequently seek support (Headrest, 2023).

The links between inspection and mental health are most poignantly illustrated by the suicide of head teacher Ruth Perry (Jeffreys et al, 2023) while waiting for the publication of an Ofsted report downgrading Caversham Primary School in Berkshire from Outstanding to Inadequate in January 2023. Much of our data collection was carried out in the

Ofsted: a brief history

In 1992... Ofsted inspections started with inspections every four years, a two-month notice period and the introduction of published reports and grades. Ofsted operated under the slogan, Improvement Through Inspection.

In 2005... there was a new emphasis on school self-evaluation and *"a new relationship with schools"*. Inspections were now every three years with the

notice period reduced to two days.

In 2012... the category Satisfactory was replaced by Requires Improvement. Schools were graded according to four judgements. Ofsted's slogan was now Raising Standards, Improving Lives.

In 2015... Ofsted introduced a common inspection framework across all sectors, again with four judgement areas. Schools were given little or no notice.

In 2019... (the current framework), categories were revised again with a focus on quality of education, particularly the curriculum. Under

aftermath of this, and concerns about this issue are foremost in the data and throughout the report.

As Waters and McKee (2023) remark in an opinion piece in the *British Medical Journal*: *“In the UK we do not even know with certainty how many teachers have killed themselves in circumstances linked to Ofsted inspections, but we are aware of at least eight others.”* They say that although the loss in confidence in Ofsted is a matter for the education sector, they as medical professionals speak on behalf of the health community in saying: *“Society asks a great deal of those who teach our children. It seems reasonable that we should listen when they tell us, in different ways, that enough is enough.”*

Ofsted and performance

Ofsted, and its regulation of accountability and performativity measures, can enforce a culture where schools operate according to ‘what Ofsted wants’. Rather than being

controlled directly, senior leaders and teachers change their behaviour and practices in order to fit the system and adapt to changing policy contexts such as changing inspection frameworks. In this context, inspection does not have to physically take place for a school to be governed by its perceived judgements. This means that inspection is not just about surveillance, but the threat of surveillance.

With no-notice inspections, the veneers of success to demonstrate to the inspectors are likely to be present all the time, and teachers will be rehearsed, trained and inculcated in Ofsted-friendly ‘effectiveness’ in a permanent way. However, the inspection focus often changes – an illustration of the frequent moving of Ofsted’s goalposts, is provided by Hannay (2023) who analysed Ofsted reports over the last decade and found *“topics raised in Ofsted reports have waxed and waned over the years”*. He found curriculum, leadership, safeguarding and staff were currently popular, while those in

section 8, ‘short inspection’ schools were given two days’ notice, but inspectors would be on site for only one day. There was to be a 90-minute phone call between the lead inspector and the school the day before the inspection began. However, *“Ofsted may conduct inspections without notice. When this happens, the lead inspector will normally telephone the school about 15 minutes before arriving on site”* (Ofsted, 2018a:22). The judgement grades remained the same, but the goalposts had changed. The categories are now quality of education (with the

sub-heading intent, implementation and impact), behaviour and attitudes, personal development, and leadership and management. The focus is now on curriculum and quality rather than exam results and performance measures. The shift from outputs to curriculum is a significant one – no longer is quality assessed by outcomes (data) but also now by inputs – how curriculum is defined (intent, implementation and impact). This represents a significant paradigm shift, which may explain why Ofsted is now describing itself as *“a force for improvement”*.

decline include attainment, English as an additional language (EAL), progress and Pupil Premium. Significantly, each one of these changes in emphasis causes “a tsunami of work as leaders and teachers move heaven and earth to provide the new evidence that they think, they have heard, they imagine Ofsted will demand to see” (Bousted, 2022:37). Cynicism about the process is evident, as well as frustration that sometimes the genuine needs of the school are sidelined. In primary and early years education in particular, the focus on data for Ofsted (in the mid-2010s especially) drove a process of prioritising the production and manipulation of attainment data, known in the literature as datafication. Everyone had to have their ‘Ofsted story’ prepared, to explain their data (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017); thus the focus of Ofsted drove schools’ practices in anticipation of an inspection.

Ofsted: the inspectors

The role of Ofsted has always been controversial, with critics questioning the criteria on which its judgements are made and the effect of inspections on schools.

Many of the criteria adopted by inspectors require interpretation of data and are reliant on observation. There is a difficulty of short and infrequent qualitative observations having to be interpreted and recorded as quantitative ratings. Richards (2020:512) questions the validity of the inspectors’ judgements:

Such judgements can seem to be firmly rooted in objective reality, but crucially they can only be mediated through inspectors’ past experience, and they involve mental processes that are often complex and prolonged, resulting in inferences, forecasts and conclusions. Different inspectors may legitimately observe, report and assess facts

differently. Reality judgements cannot be characterized as totally objective or be regarded as incontestable.

Hannay (2023) writes about the grading system:

To use a restaurant analogy, the distinction between ‘Good’ and ‘Requires Improvement’ or ‘Inadequate’ feels something like a health inspection: is the establishment fulfilling its legal duties? That between ‘Good’ and ‘Outstanding’ is more like the Michelin Guide: is the service exceptional in some way? The latter feels more subjective and also more dependent on the circumstances and priorities of individual pupils.

Furthermore, some Ofsted inspectors are thought to lack the knowledge required to make fair judgements of lessons, with a 2014 report by the think tank Policy Exchange (Waldegrave and Simons, 2014) likening some of Ofsted’s judgements to that of “*flipping a coin*” and “*...observing lessons during an inspection, an activity which takes up a considerable amount of time and money, is neither valid nor reliable. Research suggests that there is a fifty-fifty chance that the lesson observation does not tally with the actual progress made by pupils in a class*” (p 10). Their survey of around 300 teachers and head teachers found a number of concerns:

- the variability of quality between different inspection teams
- inspection teams making decisions based on the data before they had come into the school
- short lesson observations not allowing for accurate judgements
- problems with the reliability and interpretation of data
- some leadership teams very guided by ‘what Ofsted wants’

- pressure felt to adapt teaching style when Ofsted inspectors are present
- some teachers felt pressure to inflate levels to show better progress. (Waldegrave and Simons, 2014: 64)

The report also suggested a focus on the quality of school inspectors saying that many inspectors lack the necessary skills or experience to make fair and consistent judgements – and this has now been exacerbated by the need for ‘deep dive’ subject inspections. Policy Exchange suggested that all Ofsted inspectors should have relevant and recent teaching experience in the schools they are assessing, and that their accreditation should depend on passing tests demonstrating ability to analyse data and use it to make reliable judgements. During the inquiry we heard evidence that alternative provider (AP), special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and early years were all areas where inspectors regularly had insufficient expertise to make valid judgements.

One area that expertise has been questioned is in safeguarding. The Safeguarding Alliance submitted a report to the inquiry in which it said that Ofsted has a complete lack of understanding about what constitutes safeguarding, and that significant failures in the inspection of safeguarding enable unsafe settings to continue to operate, putting children at risk. It also commented on the paucity of independent quality assurance of Ofsted’s practice, and that training in the area of safeguarding was inadequate. The alliance also questioned whether LAs, particularly failing ones, would be suitable for this task, especially as they are also criticised for a lack of understanding and training.

Following Ruth Perry’s death, Ofsted (2023) offered to make the distinction

between effective and ineffective safeguarding more clear and where there is a ‘limiting judgement’ (where a school’s only Inadequate judgement was due to safeguarding), promised they would return within three months. There was also clarification on the sharing of reports by heads and it announced a revised complaints process.

Scott (2023) argues that these reforms do not go far enough to address the problem of limiting judgements, nor remove the “*public humiliation, personal anxiety and stress levels*” of staff. He asks: “*Given the importance of safeguarding shouldn’t a school be subject to mandatory annual assessments by an independent body (not Ofsted) with relevant expertise?*”

Inconsistency

The inquiry consistently heard of inconsistencies in inspection judgements.

Ongoing research by Bokhove, Jerrim et al (2023) on variations between inspectors’ judgements found that male lead inspectors were more likely to be lenient than their female counterparts, in particular, 36.4 per cent of primary inspections led by a woman led to a Requires Improvement or Inadequate rating, compared to 33.1 per cent of primary inspections led by a man. They also state: “*Much larger differences are observed between inspectors working under different contractual arrangements (HMIs versus OIs), with the former consistently reaching harsher judgements than the latter, even after controlling for a wide array of school and inspection characteristics.*”

Further doubts relate to the process of allocating grades: in 2015, an inspector (Barton, 2015) revealed that inspection judgements can be arbitrarily over-ruled by senior figures, commenting on a case

where a school had been downgraded:

We couldn't understand this rationale at all. It turned out that Ofsted had made a brief visit to the school some time before the inspection and had come up with some sort of unreported provisional judgement. So, all that evidence we had gathered meant nothing and essentially this team of experienced inspectors was not trusted to make a judgement.

Barton concluded: *"...the accounts above reveal an inspection system that appears in too many cases to be doing great damage. My sense is that it's time to stop quietly accepting that the way Ofsted is, is the way Ofsted should be."*

Ofsted and school improvement

In 2014 the Teacher Support Network (Education Support from 2017) carried out a poll which showed that over 90 per cent of teachers believed that Ofsted inspections had a neutral or negative impact on students' results. Also *"few teachers in the case study schools could think of ways in which feedback might have had an influence on their practice"* (Ferguson, Earley, Fidler and Ouston, 2000:49).

Ofsted was criticised as *"not fit for purpose"* in 2007 by the House of Commons Education Select Committee (HOC, 2007) with one issue being that *"Ofsted has no capacity to give advice when a cluster of local schools suffer from systemic underperformance"*.

Disadvantaged schools

Recent research by Thomson (2022) shows that inspection outcomes are more likely to negatively affect disadvantaged schools and their communities. The report examined inspection histories post-2005, and found that:

Of all the schools open in January 2022, 38% of schools were found to have always been judged good or better since 2005/06. This includes 6% of schools which had always been outstanding over this period. A slightly higher percentage of secondary schools (8%) were always outstanding although a slightly lower percentage (34%) had always been good (including always outstanding).

However, there were regional variations:

44% of primary schools in London and 43% in the North West have always been judged better than good. This compares to 28% of primary schools in the West Midlands and 32% in the East Midlands. London also leads the way for secondary schools. 50% have always been judged good or better. This compares to 23% in the North East and Yorkshire and Humber and 28% in the West Midlands.

And, most concerningly:

68% of schools in the least deprived fifth of secondary schools have always been rated good or better. This compares to 15% of schools in the most deprived fifth... and there were almost as many secondary schools in the most deprived fifth that have never been judged good or better (13%).

In their study of 'stuck' schools (those with repeated Requires Improvement or Inadequate judgements), Munoz Chereau et al (2022) found that geographical location, student population and deprivation play a part when explaining 'stuckness'. However, persistently receiving less than Good Ofsted inspection grades statistically significantly contributed to this 'failure'. They reported two vicious cycles – low Ofsted grades preceded increasingly deprived pupil intakes and higher teacher turnover. They also found that some stuck schools had progressed academically (in value-added terms)

but remained being judged as stuck, whereas some comparison schools that were judged Good had declined their academic performance; the strongest predictor of 'stuckness' was not academic performance but the Ofsted grades of nearby schools.

The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) in 2020 argued:

The current approach to inspection can inadvertently work against improvement in schools serving highly deprived communities in multiple ways. It can disincentivise teachers and leaders from choosing to work in those schools for fear of being judged more harshly by the inspectorate for doing so and by encouraging short-term actions that show short-lived impact, rather than incentivising deeper reforms to provide for longer-term sustained improvement.

Following an analysis of policy, historical reports from archival work and a corpus of contemporary reports, Cushing and Snell (2022) wrote: "... *the non-standardised language practices of students and teachers are heard as impoverished, deficient, and unsuitable for school.*" They add: "*These auditory judgements are made through predominantly white, privileged ears – according to the latest available data, 92% of Ofsted inspectors are white and earn an annual salary of around £70,000.*"

The fact that "*the more deprived the pupil intake the more negative the Ofsted judgement*" is a "*troubling finding*" (Bousted, 2022:37). Recent research on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis noted that Ofsted does not recognise the extensive work of schools in supporting families in poverty, for example through organising food banks (Bradbury and Vince, 2023); the lack of awareness of these unequal burdens risk further disadvantaging some schools in areas of deprivation.

Stakeholders' views of inspection

Parents/carers

A 2018 study by the group Parentkind (2018) showed that parents/carers made relatively high use of Ofsted reports. Fifty-five per cent of parents/carers said they looked at Ofsted reports when choosing a school and 65 per cent said they found it easy to understand Ofsted's written reports. However, in 2019 the same organisation reported that "*there is currently a level of dissatisfaction among the parent community about how Ofsted meets its needs and expectations*".

In 2023 Parentkind (2023) conducted another survey of its membership. It found that only 16 per cent of parents/carers supported the idea of publishing a single headline grade for schools. Additionally, 71 per cent of respondents did not feel Ofsted reports told parents/carers the most important things they need to know about schools' performance. Parents/carers rated Ofsted reports as being low in importance when deciding where to enrol their child. Parents/carers "*repeatedly raised issues around the adversarial nature of inspections and were supportive of suggestions to make inspections less stressful and avoid the issues associated with a negative headline grade and focus instead on helping schools to improve*". More than 70 per cent of parents/carers supported separating safeguarding from Ofsted inspections. In the open comments section, the three themes that appeared most frequently were:

1. making Ofsted inspections more collaborative and supportive;
2. inspection system needs overhauling/ not fit for purpose; and

3. Ofsted inspections are too pressurised and stressful for teachers.

These two surveys demonstrate decreasing support from parents over time.

Another poll of 650 parents/carers conducted by Exeter University in 2021 found that only 37 per cent looked at Ofsted reports when choosing their school, leading them to recommend *“more parent-friendly, one-page summaries of the key points from inspection reports”, “with all parents/carers receiving the information via letters and texts”* (Hazell, 2021).

A report by policy consultancy Public First (Dorrell, 2022) subtitled Listening to parents/carers of the Red Wall, concluded: *“... one could argue for more frequent, lighter touch health checks and safeguarding inspections for all, to increase reassurance to parents/carers whilst reducing the burdens on schools associated with it.”*

Students

It is surprising that students' views on Ofsted are not often sought. The organisation States of Mind embarked on a project Breaking the Silence (2022) to rebalance this. In 2019 it held focus groups with young people in London. One of the student researchers reported:

The more we investigated, the more we realised that the pressure of league tables and Ofsted creates anxiety and stress for pupils and teachers and makes the whole environment tense. No one likes being judged. We also found that pupils and teachers felt they behaved differently when Ofsted was in the school, so their findings may not even be accurate.

(Millar 2022)

The first phase resulted in a letter being sent to Amanda Spielman suggesting

that Ofsted exacerbates *“teaching to the test and leads to a culture of memorisation”*. A year later for phase 2, a different cohort conducted further focus groups and a survey, and *“a disturbing picture emerged of an education system that values results above human flourishing, stifles creativity, identity, personal development and often negatively impacts the mental health of young people”*. In phase 3, another cohort drafted an alternative school evaluation system which they called a Review for Progress and Development (RPD). This was a collaborative model relying on self-evaluation and its aims were described thus:

Broaden the focus of what is evaluated in schools, with more focus on mental health, life skills and personal development.

Allow students, teachers and communities opportunities to work together to review and develop the education that is being provided.

Many parts of education are already stressful for both students and teachers and we do not believe that an inspection process should add to this.

Governors

According to the National Governance Association's 2022 report (NGA, 2022) which specifically focussed on the impact of the 2019 framework, only 36 per cent of governing boards reported that the Ofsted inspection helped governance. Governors reported inconsistency in the questions and depth of questions regarding the curriculum by Ofsted inspectors. Although 62 per cent of governors valued the feedback meeting, 19 per cent of governors claimed their published Ofsted report was not reflective of the discussion in the feedback meeting, and it was felt that the role and impact of governance

continues to be diminished within inspection reports. The conclusion to the report noted:

NGA continues to express concern that the inspection process under the framework does not actively utilise the function of governance to evaluate the school through to the operational level. The 2022 findings further build on the 2020 findings that indicate that governance as part of the wider leadership and management judgement is not valued or prominent enough within the new framework, albeit as an unintentional consequence of the direction Ofsted is taking.

(NGA 2022:13)

Summary

- Ofsted claims to provide independent external evaluation and to be a world leader, and that its frameworks are based on its own high quality research.
- Ofsted calls itself a force for improvement.
- Ofsted has negative effects on the wellbeing of teachers and school leaders, adding to workload and stress.
- Ofsted causes some schools to perform according to 'what Ofsted wants' – which is not necessarily the best for the school or its students.
- The inspectors are criticised for inconsistency and lack of independence and expertise, particularly around safeguarding.
- Ofsted can be detrimental to school improvement, and particularly negatively affects schools in socio-economically deprived areas.
- Some parents/carers use Ofsted reports to help choose their schools, but many do not feel Ofsted reports

tell them the most important things they need to know about schools' performance. They see Ofsted as too stressful for teachers and recommend an overhaul.

- Students feel that their voice is missing in the current inspection system and that inspections add unhelpful pressure to the system.
- The majority of governors do not feel that Ofsted helps with governance.

Evidence from the research data – the case for change

Themes from the written responses

An analysis of the qualitative textual responses to the questions generated several key themes.

An interrogative rather than a supportive approach

There was a common perception that Ofsted is an interrogative, destructive process rather than a supportive, constructive one. This was the dominant negative view from those rated at either end of the grading spectrum.

Although the school was graded Outstanding, individuals were never given any positive feedback about their specific roles. We did not feel supported. We were not told during our interview what we were doing well.

(Primary middle leader, Outstanding)

Although I accept the outcome of the inspection and the improvement points, I feel like the inspection team showed no empathy towards professionals, they provided no concrete developmental

Teachers (survey and focus groups)

Experiences of school inspection

Reflecting on their most recent inspection in the survey, the strongest messages were that:

- 93 per cent experienced high levels of personal stress during an inspection
- 93 per cent agreed that inspection increased workload
- 84 per cent disagreed with the suggestion that inspections empowered them

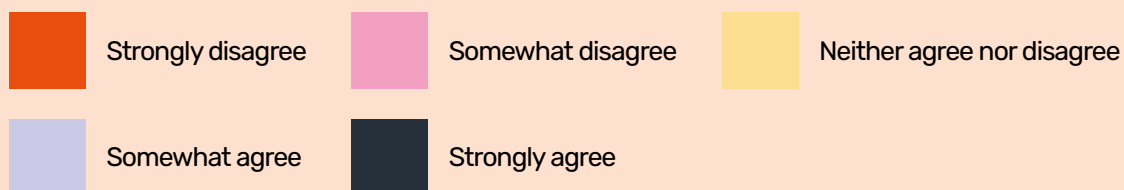
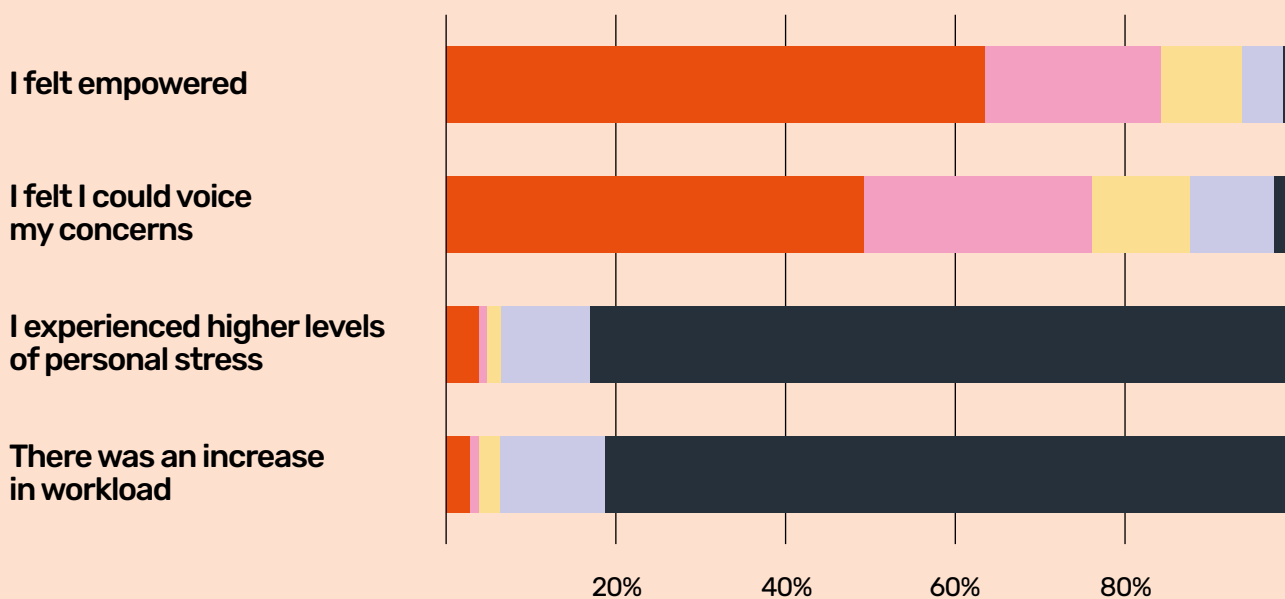
- 76 per cent disagreed with the view that they could voice their concerns during the inspection.

In response to the question: **Overall, would you say your experience of inspection was...**

- 74 per cent of respondents said that their experience was very or somewhat negative
- 16 per cent said neither positive nor negative, and
- 10 per cent said very or somewhat positive.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

During the inspection...



It is interesting to note that these are not the comments of the disgruntled – 81 per cent of our survey participants were from Good or Outstanding schools. It is unsurprising that more of those in the lower Ofsted categories (94 per cent) rated their experience as negative, but so did 67 per cent of those with positive results. Only ten per cent of those with a Good or Outstanding rating saw it as a positive experience.

When asked whether the school does anything to prepare specifically for future inspections in between inspections, **only three per cent** of respondents said the school does nothing special to prepare for Ofsted.

Statements about Ofsted inspections

The survey asked respondents to agree or disagree with several statements about Ofsted inspections, finding that participants strongly or somewhat disagreed with the following:

- Ofsted is a force for improvement (89 per cent)
- inspections are a valid method of monitoring schools and holding them to account (88 per cent)
- inspections create extra but manageable work (87 per cent)
- inspections are a reliable arbiter of standards (82 per cent)
- inspectors have relevant experience (75 per cent)
- inspections are independent of government (71 per cent)
- inspections give school a chance to demonstrate strengths (70 per cent).

Respondents strongly or somewhat agreed with the following statements about inspections:

- have harmful effects (94 per cent)
- undermine leaders' focus on doing what is best for the students (85 per cent)
- stifle creativity (83 per cent)
- have a negative impact on retention (76 per cent).

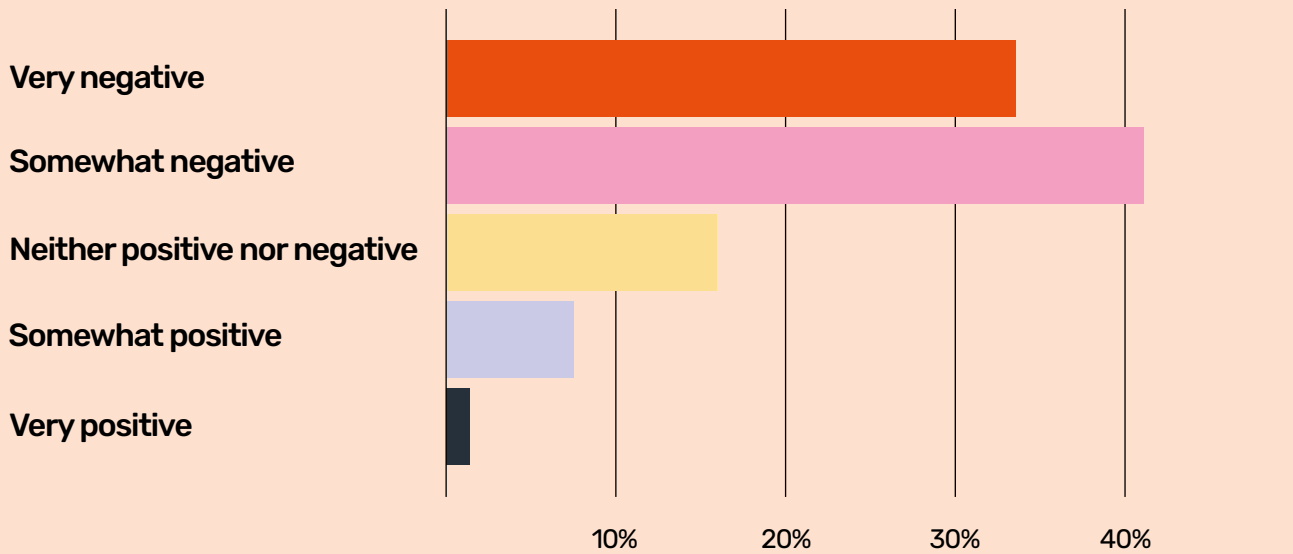
From the data, it was possible to show that those in schools with Good or Outstanding judgements were less vehement in their opinion, shifting from strongly agree/disagree position toward the agree/disagree position. The key conclusion was that, regardless of the judgement, Ofsted inspections are not held in high regard by this sample.

How did respondents feel about the judgement?

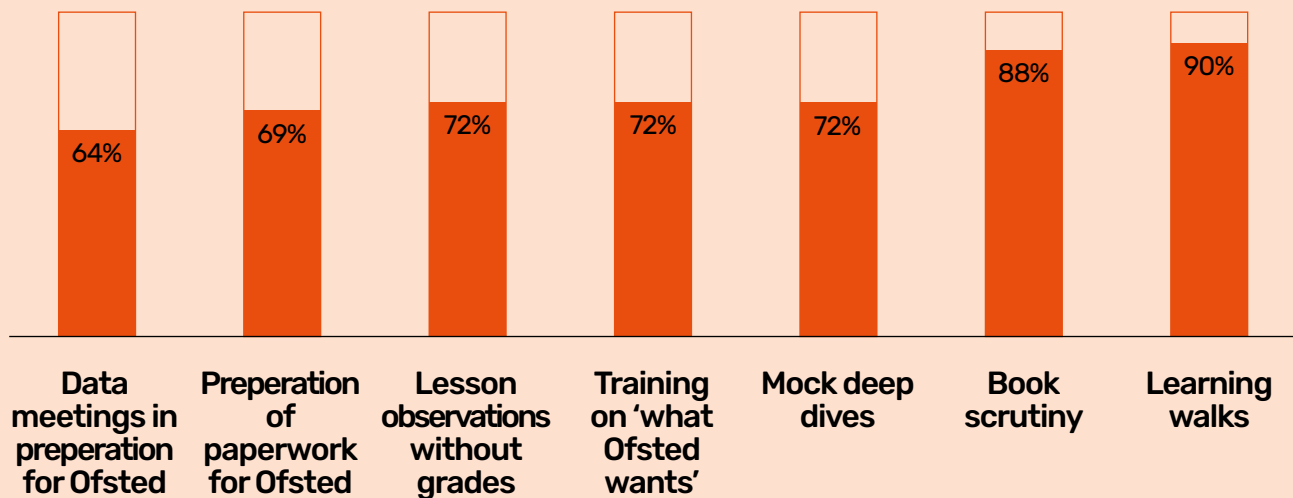
From the teachers' perspective, 38 per cent of our sample thought their most recent school inspection was a fair assessment. In contrast, 36 per cent thought it was harsh, ten per cent too lenient and 16 per cent were not sure. This would suggest that 62 per cent of teachers did not think the outcome of an inspection reflected what their school was like. When considering if this judgement was related to the rating of the school by Ofsted, we found that those in schools rated Good/Outstanding were more likely to view the judgement as fair, but even 58 per cent of those with this rating did not think it fair. Seventeen per cent of those rated as Outstanding thought the rating was too lenient, supporting the view that the teachers in this sample do not have confidence in Ofsted even when the outcomes are good for the school.

This view is amplified by the finding that 92 per cent of our respondents disagree with the view that Ofsted is a reliable and trusted arbiter of standards

Overall, would you say your experience of inspection was...?



Things that over 50% of respondents say their school does to prepare for Ofsted



across all different types of schools/ colleges and that 89 per cent disagree that Ofsted inspections are a valid method of monitoring performance and holding schools to account. Again, it was possible to show that those in schools with a Good or Outstanding judgement were

less vehement in their opinion; however these were all small or weak effects, the tendency being toward the critical perspective. It appears even those who are 'winning' in the system (84 per cent of respondents recently being graded as Good or Outstanding) are critical of Ofsted.

feedback and didn't take into account the background of children at the school including their starting points. They weren't flexible or relatable, struggling to put staff at ease during a stressful day at school.

(Primary senior leader, Requires Improvement)

The problem of a lack of trust in the inspectors and their frequently interrogative approach to the process turned the inspection into a performance or a game, rather than a supportive collaboration to improve practice.

A lack of expertise and consistency among inspectors

Even when inspections were viewed positively, there was a recognition that this might have been a matter of luck, furthering the view that inspection is a process lacking reliability.

Our expectation was positive – however, I feel that we were 'lucky' as a school, the inspectors were working heads who clearly had an idea of real school life, and they were a diverse group!

(Primary teacher with additional responsibilities, Outstanding)

The written comments highlight the lack of consistency in the process, frequently coupled with the belief that the inspectors lack the necessary experience to make the judgements they make. This undermines any trust teachers might have in the capacity of inspectors to be effective.

I have experienced a number of inspections in three different schools, and I still think it is very subjective and dependent on the inspectors you get. There are still rogue inspections, and they get drawn down rabbit holes depending on their own interests and expertise.

(Primary head, Outstanding)

The validity of the inspection process is undermined if teachers believe that the outcome is dependent on the inspector rather than the process. It is these perspectives that underpin the view of 91 per cent of respondents that Ofsted is not a reliable and trusted arbiter of standards, and that 88 per cent do not think it is a valid method of monitoring performance or holding schools to account.

Inspectors seek evidence to support their preconceptions

Inspectors were seen as seeking to find evidence that supports their position, frequently a negative judgement, and ignore that which contradicts it.

The inspectors clearly arrived having already decided. Nothing we did would change their opinion. It didn't matter how good what we did was.

(Secondary teacher, Requires Improvement)

The inspectors attended having already drawn conclusions of what they wanted to find and then asked loaded questions of staff and students to get quotes for their report. The entire affair was disingenuous, with no chance for a good outcome. Inspectors actively avoided good practice to ensure they could find small snippets of evidence to confirm a report they had already written.

(Secondary middle leader, Requires Improvement)

It felt like the inspector had decided the outcome of the inspection before he arrived at the school. He did not meet with me at appropriate times and did not listen when he did. The meeting I had with the inspector felt pointless and I felt unheard.

(Primary head, Good)

For the sake of balance, it should be noted that there were a minority of comments about instances where inspectors were open to discussion, looking to develop, rather than prove, a position.

We felt it was a fair judgement and were listened to by inspectors. It didn't feel like inspectors had come in with a preconceived judgement, which had happened at our last inspection.

(Primary teacher with additional responsibilities, Good)

However, even in these positive examples, a contrast is made with previous experiences or perceptions of inspection. Examples of this collaborative approach are peppered through those accounts leading to a positive experience for seven per cent of the sample.

The problem of school performance

The real or perceived pressure that Ofsted inspections put on schools is translated, in these data, into the school trying hard to put on the performance of an outstanding school. There is an absolute terror evident in the data of the inspectors discovering the actual school, and everything being done to hide any flaws under pain of being identified as a failing school. Sixty per cent of classroom teachers and middle leaders, and 50 per cent of senior leaders disagreed with the statement that inspectors saw the real school.

The view that what inspectors see is not the everyday life of the school is upheld in the commentaries:

Nothing felt normal. Everyone was under huge stress. People were concerned about their jobs if they did badly. People worked long, long hours. It was not reflective on the positive or negative of our actual school. Nobody felt good about the good outcome, it just felt a relief it was over. (Primary teacher, Good)

There is a significant emotional impact resulting from the additional work that must be undertaken to satisfy the inspectorate. This additional work contributes to the view that what is seen is not the truth of the school, meaning that the actual grade has no value. The degree of the inspection being a pretence is further reflected in the comments of others rated as Good or Outstanding.

It was a false representation of what the school is like. Only SLT-chosen students and staff were spoken to.

(Secondary teacher, Outstanding)

The school has major behaviour issues, and these were not seen as the inspectors were guided to 'safe' areas.

(Secondary middle leader, Good)

An Ofsted inspection does not reflect a true picture of the day-to-day running of a school. A school wears their Sunday best for Ofsted.

(Primary teacher, Good)

The inspection itself felt incredibly scripted. Staff had been Ofsted prepped over an extended period and we knew exactly what to say to tick the right boxes.

(Secondary teacher, Good)

The high-stakes outcome of being judged as Requiring Improvement or Inadequate contaminates the value that might be assigned to being judged as Good or Outstanding, grades which are associated with putting on a convincing performance. The inspection process can therefore be described as toxic, as in Hetrick's (2023) definition of a toxic organisation as one that causes harm over a considerable period of time. This is not only because teachers cannot trust the judgements made by the inspectorate but because the additional work and worry produced by the need to perform is damaging to their physical and psychological health.

The perceived toxicity of Ofsted

The word toxic (and callous, sick, tainted and barbaric) appears within the written comments (and in focus group data); this we take to mean something which is overwhelmingly negative and, specifically, something which is doing more harm than good. This led some in the focus groups to call for a fresh start:

Within the inspection framework we need to stop using the word Ofsted. Ofsted is toxic, it cannot be reformed there is absolutely no way.

Ofsted is now such a tainted brand. I think it must be abolished rather than reformed.

The relationship between Ofsted and schools has become so toxic that a completely new body needs to be formed, independent of the DfE and with a new agenda with input from the profession and teaching unions.

The perception of the toxicity of Ofsted is apparent in that 93 per cent of respondents experienced higher levels of stress, while 83 per cent felt disempowered and 75 per cent did not feel they could voice their concerns. Meanwhile, respondents did not see Ofsted

judgements as fair reflections of school quality, or as a force for improvement.

Ofsted toxicity is further demonstrable from the word clouds associated with responses to two questions – when asked to describe what they feel when they know Ofsted is coming, and what their overall experience of Ofsted has been.

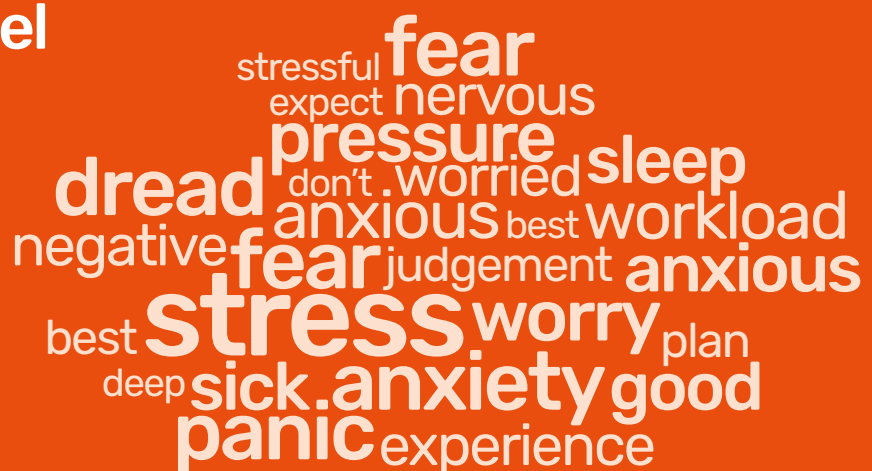
These suggest that Ofsted, and its imminent arrival, produces significant emotional reactions. (It must be noted that even though the word ‘good’ appears in both clouds, its occurrence in the commentaries is in the context of the fear of not being ‘good enough’ or referencing the grade of Good rather than feeling good about the inspection). It must also be noted that within this sample, 83 per cent of the respondents were in schools judged as Good or Outstanding. Toxicity is not, therefore, associated with a negative judgement, but is embedded within the process.

The interaction between the key aspects of the inspection process and stress is exposed in this account:

As a 37-week pregnant woman conducting a deep dive interview this was

What do you feel when you know Ofsted is coming?

Responses:



very stressful for me. I felt all the work I had done was disregarded and felt under immense pressure. The inspector did not want a clear picture of how the subject was being taught but had a clear agenda. I didn't feel listened to, and it has knocked my confidence greatly. I had extreme anxiety and worry about if this impacted my baby as I later had complications meaning I had to be induced but I will never know.

(Primary teacher, Good)

Thus, while recognising that this is a self-selected sample, the commentary is overwhelmingly negative. It may not be the case for all teachers but for many, Ofsted has become toxic in terms of the trust teachers put into its judgements, the way that its inspections are carried out, and the stress it produces in them. Hence it is both ineffective and has negative effects.

Conclusion

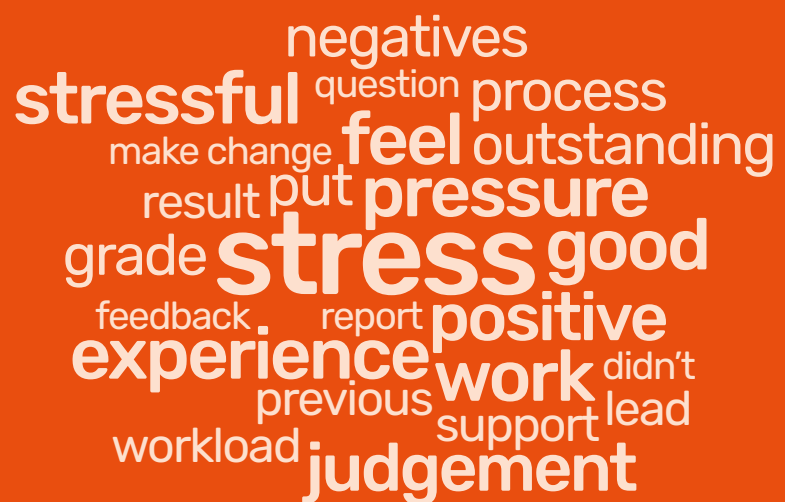
Unsurprisingly 73 per cent of our sample felt that inspection was a very/somewhat negative experience as opposed to the seven per cent who felt it was a positive/somewhat positive event. Additionally,

97 per cent of our participants thought inspections needed a complete or substantial overhaul, with only 0.4 per cent thinking they were working well.

Inspection is put forward as an independent, objective instrument for assessing if schools fail to reach, reach or exceed a set of standards. The subsequent report is meant to achieve two things: show schools what they must do to raise standards and provide parents/carers with a standardised means of comparing schools. The validity and reliability of this process depend on two assumptions. First, different groups of inspectors are qualified to carry out inspections in the same way. Second, schools behave as they normally would during an inspection. Though our sample is ultimately self-selected, it is possible to conclude that neither of these assumptions are being met. This failure can be seen as causing the distrust of Ofsted, the resentment at the amount of additional work that inspections produce and the contempt for single-grade judgements. Ofsted has become toxic to teachers because of the lack of trust teachers now have in the process and the subsequent negative emotional response

What is your overall experience of Ofsted?

Responses:



produced from being subjected to this distrusted process.

Evidence from senior leaders

The data from the senior leader focus groups provided more detailed information on the specific concerns of head teachers. Leaders were generally antagonistic to the current system finding “no value in it”, apart from perhaps to help parents/carers make choices. However, as one remarked:

I don't actually think the current form of Ofsted is accurate for parents. I don't think unless you're used to reading Ofsted reports, I don't think enough parents read beyond a judgement headline.

(Post-primary focus group)

Leaders explained that the one-word grade “literally does attract or kill your school” (LA primary head FG), another adding “that grade on its own is attracting people, bums on seats, money, so it becomes a cycle that you almost can't get out of” (LA primary head FG).

The single grade system was also explicitly linked to stress:

To sweep in and out of a school and put a big stamp on it, and then walk away from that having not really had any relationship with that school or any kind of build up over time-ness of it all, for me it is the biggest level of stress and what people feel is completely wrong about it.

(Post-primary FG)

Many of the senior leaders spoke about the fear engendered by Ofsted, of being seen on a bad day: “That is the real thing because it is the idea that if this day goes wrong, everything now goes wrong” (post-primary leader FG). Another primary head talked about how fear of the call from Ofsted was always at the forefront of his mind:

When I was at my daughter's graduation... and when I was by my [ill] father-in-law's bedside in March, both those times where my head should be completely there, I am thinking, what if they call today?

(Primary LA head FG)

There were also suggestions that inspections actually made the schools worse; a secondary head who had an inspection during GCSEs explained:

It made our school worse. There is no way looking around it, having a three-day inspection during the exam window made our school worse. Surely an inspection shouldn't actively make a school worse whilst it's occurring.

(Post-primary teacher FG)

One of the concerns was that the system was unequal and inconsistent. One secondary head noted that if he became an Ofsted inspector while remaining as a head teacher he “would have all that Ofsted training and be able to bring that back into my own school to implement it tomorrow. But I'm not. Whereas the head teacher down the road is”. He said the system of sharing information was very inconsistent and often depended on inside contacts.

There is also the issue of an inspection framework which adopts a one-size-fits-all approach, despite the variations in size and context of schools:

I have got 50 kids; how can it be on the same criteria as my colleague who is up the road who's got 550? ...You can't compare the schools, because that one grade is like comparing the performance of a Porsche, with the performance of a Mercedes with a Kia, with a Ford, you can't compare them, they're all vehicles, but they're not the same, you can't compare them in that way.

(Primary LA head FG)

Certainly, in the past, Outstanding grades have been heavily skewed towards more affluent areas, and you know, that in itself says that the measures are all wrong, and the work that's going on in some RI schools and so forth is absolutely phenomenal and up against all sorts of things.

(Primary LA head FG)

Finally, the school leaders noted the pointlessness of the process – it did not improve practice, Ofsted missed critical things and it didn't tell them anything they did not already know:

I've had lots of Ofsteds in lots of authorities and at all levels, and it's not shaped my practice as a teacher, or as a leader, or as a subject leader or as a head, or executive head, so actually if it doesn't do that, what's it for?

(Primary LA head FG)

She was useful in the sense of affirming some of the things that we knew, she didn't pick up a single thing that we didn't already know.

(Primary LA head FG)

Overall, the data from senior leaders reinforces the case for change, bringing out key issues in terms of grades, fear, inconsistency and unfairness, and the lack of school improvement.

Evidence from parents

In focus groups, parents broadly agreed that inspections need significant reform. Notably, several parents attending had experience as governors, so they were not representative of parents overall, but were more informed about the Ofsted process.

Parents expressed the view that they did not trust the Ofsted rating and inspection protocol, and many conducted their

own visits to gauge the school climate before enrolling their child. They raised issues with the lack of consistency in inspections and out-of-date reports that did not reflect the current school environment. All of the parents shared how they advised others to visit the schools rather than rely on Ofsted reports. Additionally, parents claimed that choice was illusory and argued that what goes into school enrolment is far more nuanced than an Ofsted grade.

As a parent no, I don't think it's fit for purpose. It feels like it's a one-size-fits-all measure.

(Parent focus group)

It's a lot more nuanced than Good, Outstanding or Requires Improvement. The whole mechanism and trust needs to be reviewed.

(Parent FG)

This is significant, as the need for parents to have clear information is a key justification for Ofsted; these comments reinforce the findings of the previous parent surveys discussed above.

As well as not finding it useful, parents responded negatively to the extreme stress and fear experienced by school staff during inspections. They explained how inspections and ratings shifted the dynamics of the school and negatively impacted the educational and emotional experience of their child.

A high-stakes report that is coming out that can make or break head teachers' careers. It's incredibly stressful and yet what really is it?

(Parent FG)

You see the dynamics change... we went from the teachers really celebrating the small things, swimming awards, managing to go to school five days a week, and now the reports we're getting home, it's how

we did in phonics and I just think I don't want to know that they're not doing too well in phonics, or they're not interested in mathematics. I want to celebrate the good things, not the negatives.

(Parent FG)

We've all seen staff at our schools absolutely driven to distraction by Ofsted. That is negative to our children and as a parent I want the best environment for my children to learn and flourish, and grow. I don't think that's a punitive one, in fear, where teachers are frightened of doing the wrong thing. They're stressed, they're overworked, they're unhappy, they're underpaid. It's wrong.

(Parent FG)

Finally, several parents discussed the hollow nature of inspection and claimed it was a game or performance. One parent noted that inspection pressure and stress experienced by teachers is also felt by parents:

There's a pressure on that because you want the school to succeed in that as a parent.

(Parent FG)

The need for a performance thus appears to extend even to the parents and carers, who want their child's school to be given a positive grade. This is also suggestive of a lack of trust in the process, again casting doubt on the idea that parents need or want a grade.

Evidence from governors

In our focus groups, generally, governors believed external inspection in some form to be important for school improvement, but expressed the opinion that Ofsted inspections in their current form do not serve that purpose. Governors noted the lack of consistency with inspections and the variation in the quality of inspectors, in line with educators' views above.

Additionally, some governors criticised the use of grades and believed that Ofsted reports are not designed to improve schools. They also raised issues surrounding the impact of inspections on staff wellbeing and highlighted the prevalence of stress and a culture of fear. Several governors expressed the need to rebuild trust with schools in order to properly support school improvement after schools have experienced "draconian" and "autocratic" inspection regimes.

In line with the survey comments, one noted the need for schools to be properly supported rather than judged:

The improvement in Ofsted would be if it was a dialogue of improvement that the one-word judgement grade does nothing to help. Schools make progress. Luckily inside, you know your schools are generally well aware of... where their gaps are and where they need to make improvements and what else needs developing, and what they're looking for is support to do that.

(Governor focus group)

This suggests that the desire for reform towards a more supportive system is felt by some governors as well as teachers and senior leaders.

Additional evidence

During the inquiry representatives from the Board and Lord Knight held various informal meetings with stakeholders such as former inspectors (HMIs), heads (including of independent and alternative provision), executive heads and members of involved organisations such as HeadsUp and States of Mind. Below is an anonymised summary of the main points made in the discussions.

- There were concerns about the political independence of Ofsted: *“What they’re inspecting should be determined by what’s in the education system, and the values then remain constant, so they don’t just change with the whims and vagaries of whichever HMCI comes in.”*
- On the matter of equalities, the former HMIs were particularly keen to emphasise that one of Ofsted’s most useful roles should be monitoring the performance of different pupil groupings, using their unique overview of the whole education system. One said: *“Equalities isn’t an add-on, it’s about those pupils in the classroom, their learning experiences and we are looking blandly across the board at ‘knowing more’ and ‘remembering more.’”*
- Ofsted creates an *“obsession cycle”* – Ofsted conducts research, decides what is wrong with the system, then uses this to change what is inspected. Schools become *“obsessed with what Ofsted wants”*, and this creates a narrow view of what makes a good school, stifling innovation and creativity.
- The brand name has become toxic, particularly considering recent events. Also, the notion of inspection is necessarily ‘top down’.
- On student voice, a representative from States of Mind told us that students are not involved in the evaluation of schools and should be involved in discussions on how their education is evaluated.
- Another problem was identified as the nature of the evidence base on which judgements are made. High-stakes judgements are based on two-day visits including ten-minute lesson observations and deep dives are often not carried out by specialists. Furthermore, Ofsted does not look at the trend over time of a school’s performance, and thus does not encourage improvement over time.
- Our experts felt that inspections are not giving enough attention to how schools are promoting equalities or looking at pupil groups or cohorts who may face disadvantage. They thought there should be a role for inspection in looking at outcomes in the context of the school, but attainment measures should not be everything – inspection needs to be looking at inclusion as well.
- There was much discussion about inspector expertise and training. Under the current system inspections are made at short notice and the lead inspector decides with the head the subjects that will be scrutinised. The team for the inspection is pre-chosen and not matched to the focus for the visit, so the result is inspectors doing deep dives in subjects they do not necessarily have a background in. There were concerns about a decline in inspector training and inspector pay – and thus quality.

Summary of evidence

- Ofsted does not improve schools and is not fit for purpose.
- Inspectors are perceived as biased, antagonistic, inconsistent and lacking expertise.
- Problems with the one-size-fits all approach.
- Current problem with the evidence base and deep dives.
- Single grade contributes to stress and is not useful.

- Ofsted is not useful for parents, governors or students.
- Schools perform for inspections so do not show their real selves.
- There are concerns about Ofsted's political independence.
- Ofsted should monitor equalities.
- Ofsted causes stress and high workload, and creates a disempowering culture of fear.
- Ofsted is perceived as toxic by teachers and experts, and impacts wellbeing.

WHAT COULD A

**new vision
look like?**

What could a new vision look like?

Global comparisons

The remit for this review was to see if and how school inspection is done in other nations.

We reviewed the PISA 2018 data (Schleicher, 2019) (acknowledging criticisms of how these rankings are decided) to identify countries deemed as having high quality education based on the total average score as well as the individual rankings for mathematics, science and reading. We analysed in detail the top nine systems, then, having identified some of the characteristics, also looked at Sweden, the Netherlands and Spain as examples of countries with lower PISA scores than the UK. This review began with a search for government literature on inspection for each nation supplemented with existing international comparisons and a search for academic papers investigating each system. In addition, a review of practices in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland was introduced to consider variations within the UK.

Internationally 77 per cent of countries use some form of external inspection to evaluate schools, though the majority employ some form of self-assessment. While recognising the limitations of the review, it can be concluded that there are a diverse set of inspection regimens in

place internationally, ranging from none to those conducted at a distance with limited consequences to those that are intrusive and high stakes.

From the literature, no clear association between the kind of inspection and school performance as measured by grades can be determined.

Inspection in the PISA top 9

China

(Zheng and Thomas, 2022; Zheng, 2020; Zhou et al, 2018)

A national school inspection system has been evolving in China since 2011 when the government issued a national inspection framework to be deployed at the level of the provinces. Each province is free to develop its plan of how to carry out inspections depending on the local context. What is developing is a combination of regular general inspections alongside targeted and thematic inspections. The model adopted across the provinces involves gathering evidence from lesson observations, stakeholder interviews, and work and document scrutiny. As far as can be assessed, schools are given several weeks' notice of an inspection. These are used to produce a report on the school's performance which is not made public, but the school is expected to act on the

report and is given support to implement its findings.

Singapore

(Ng, 2010; Hwa, 2020; Perry, 2013; Greatbatch and Tate, 2019; Perry, 2012)

In Singapore, the inspection is a compulsory supplement to self-evaluation. Teachers are subject to inspection every five years to validate the self-evaluation. This is meant to support the school's continuous improvement as evidenced by the results the school achieves. Schools receive advance notification of an impending inspection from a few weeks to months giving the school time to review its self-assessment and ensure the relevant documentation is in place. The team usually consists of trained inspectors specialising in different subject areas and educational practices. Inspectors review documentation, observe lessons and conduct interviews/focus groups with staff and students during the inspection. There is a final meeting with school leaders to discuss the report, which identifies areas of excellence alongside areas needing attention. No overall grade is given. Depending on the outcomes, support will be given to the school to achieve the changes recommended by the inspection.

Estonia

(Greatbatch and Tate, 2019; Sylvester, 2022; the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates, 2018; OECD, 2015)

For the Estonian teacher, inspection by an external body is now uncommon as it has moved to a risk-based approach, only deployed when a school is identified as underperforming against national criteria (particularly low examination results, high numbers of pupils leaving) or if a complaint is made about the school. If a school is identified as requiring an inspection, a team of one or two

officials, and potentially an external expert, will visit the school depending on the activating event. During an inspection, inspectors typically review documentation, observe classroom activities, interview teachers, students and other stakeholders, and assess the overall school management and organisation. They evaluate the alignment of the school's practices with the national curriculum, teaching methods, student assessment procedures and compliance with legal requirements. Lessons may be observed if a complaint is made about a specific teacher. When issuing their report, the inspectors identify areas of concern and suggest how these might be addressed. No overall grade is given. The system here is built on the assumption that schools can police themselves by producing a self-evaluation using their local methods every three years, derived from government set standards. It is assumed that the teacher training programme inculcates a professional attitude of self-reflection and a willingness to improve practice. The inspection is a fail-safe mechanism when it is noticed that there is an issue.

Japan

(NCEE, 2021a; Perry, 2013; OECD, 2015)

It is challenging to assess the inspection system in Japan and its effects on teachers because it is very teacher-focused. Teachers are expected to transfer to alternative schools within a prefecture every three to six years and cover a quarter of the twelve geographic areas that make up a prefecture with their first four transfers. Schools are responsible for identifying high-performing teachers who are expected to transfer to low-performing schools within the area. Structured inspections are conducted, but these are used to support the self-evaluation that the school is expected to produce every year.

South Korea

(OECD, 2010)

All schools are inspected between one and five years using a partially structured system. This is not a punitive system but is orientated toward supporting schools in identifying issues, ways of addressing their shortcomings and the means of putting these changes into practice. There is no targeting of underperforming schools. Self-assessment is key to the process of evaluation.

Canada

Canada does not have a national inspection regime. Rather, each province is allowed to organise its methods of evaluating practice. Self-evaluation is key alongside using a diverse set of inspections depending on the goal of the inspection, either punitive or supportive. In British Columbia, external inspection is used as verification of self-evaluation and to ensure that the school meets its legal requirements. Lessons may be observed, but the primary purpose is to verify the documents that the school publishes.

Finland

(Hwa, 2020; Greatbatch and Tate, 2019; Vainikainen et al, 2017)

Finland is the exception in that it does not have a school inspection system. Schools hold themselves to account through an embedded practice of self-evaluation. Trust is placed in the school to monitor the effectiveness of their teachers and for teachers to embody the practice of continuous professional development.

Poland

(NCEE, 2021b; OECD, 2015)

When and how schools in Poland are inspected varies across the country. Each regional education authority is

responsible for implementing the central government directive of identifying poor-performing schools and increasing the visibility of high performers to highlight good practices. The average time between inspections is six years, and they are frequently highly structured. Part of the inspection is to validate the school self-inspection, part of the accountability system. The way in which self-inspections are carried out is devised at the level of the school board.

Ireland

(Jones et al, 2017; Inspectorate, 2022; Ehren et al, 2015)

School inspection in Ireland works in tandem with self-evaluation. All schools can expect to be inspected at least once within a five-year period. There are twelve kinds of inspection, ranging from the whole school to subject-specific inspections, potentially increasing the regularity of school inspections. Depending on the focus of the inspection, a team of qualified inspectors will conduct interviews with school leaders, teachers, students and other stakeholders, scrutinise schoolwork and review school documentation/policies. All teachers can expect to be observed by an inspector as the process is dominated by classroom observations designed to enhance educational practice. Following an inspection, the inspectorate provides a publicly available written report to the school outlining the findings, giving commendations for effective practices and recommendations for improvement. The school must respond to the report and develop an action plan. The system is built on a model of supportive accountability.

Conclusion

The conclusion that can be drawn from this review is that school inspection is a

Further examples of the contrasting systems

Country	Estonia	Ireland	Sweden
PISA ranking	5th	12th	16th
When an inspection is done			
Cyclical			●
Differentiated/risk-based	●	●	●
Thematic		●	●
To gain an educational licence	●		
On a complaint	●		●
Who inspects schools			
Experienced teachers	●	●	●
Qualified non-teachers			●
What is inspected			
Meeting legal requirements	●	●	●
Provision of learning, support and guidance		●	●
Learning outcomes			●
Leadership/management		●	●
Threshold for failure	●		
What evidence is gathered			
Review of school documentation	●	●	●
Review of school data	●	●	●
Interviews	●	●	●
Lesson observations		●	●
Reporting			
School is given an overall grade			
School is graded on individual standards		●	●
Strengths and limitations of school are identified		●	●
Public school specific reports	●	●	
General thematic reports		●	●
Role of inspectorate post-inspection			
Advising on sanctions	●		
Imposing sanctions	●		●
Providing support	●		
Checking on progress		●	

Netherlands	Spain	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
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diverse set of practices implemented for ideological and practical reasons. This variation cannot be linked to outcomes, given the diversity of practices within the top nine PISA countries. It is not possible to adopt a particular country's method of inspection as there is little detail on how these practices are implemented at the micro level of the school. What can be done is to make decisions about the kind of system that would reduce stress on teachers, raise the quality of education, provide the government with evidence that money is being well spent and finally give parents the information they might want to have about the school they are sending their child to.

What was identifiable through the process of the review was that the implementation of a school inspection system could be considered from the perspective of a series of eight choices/decisions that governments and others implicitly or explicitly answer. The resulting inspection system is the product of the answer to these various questions. Consequently, this review supports the view that it is possible to redesign an inspection regimen by reconsidering each of these questions. We used these to inform our survey and also to construct the table (p46-47).

The future of inspection in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

Wales

Since 2017, school inspection in Wales has undergone change, following the Donaldson review in 2018 in which its school inspectorate, Estyn, was criticised for enhancing a high-stakes accountability culture. Reform has also been a result of the introduction of a new curriculum. Estyn announced it would make changes to inspection between

2020 and 2024, and make a full transition to a new approach by the end of 2024, partially suspending inspections before the new framework was introduced in 2021, and piloting the changes until 2024. The new approach would focus on validating schools' self-improvement processes and "provide schools and parents with more frequent, up-to-date feedback". This will start a new six-year cycle for the inspectorate.

In discussions, Wales NEU Cymru staff indicated that the reforms have been positive, although there are still issues to be worked through as well as areas that could be improved. They supported the proposed removal of grades and use of schools' self-assessment as a basis for inspection.

Scotland

In June 2021, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills indicated that the inspection function would be removed from Education Scotland. The Muir report (2022) recommended that the new inspectorate should be independent of government and its role should be to support improvement, evaluate major changes in the education system, and report annually and over longer periods on the performance of Scottish education. Critically it should support the drive towards empowerment with a strong focus on self-evaluation and an establishment's capacity to improve. Teacher unions in Scotland welcomed the recommendations of the 2022 Muir report to create a stand-alone inspection agency but felt that the recommendations for reform could be far more ambitious. However, they commented that the vision and values surrounding the school empowerment agenda is inspiring and, a similar framework incorporated into an inspection approach in England could lead to a significant change in culture and approach. Context is considered

through the key performance indicators used in inspection, framed in a manner that would credit the work of the school with a challenging environment. Thematic inspections were described positively and as a good mechanism to capture the temperature of the system to build on improvement. These sorts of inspections were generally described as being more light touch and less disruptive.

Northern Ireland

In 2017 a new framework was introduced but had limited impact due to industrial action short of strike by teaching unions, which included schools not engaging with Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) inspections. Industrial action meant that although ETI has been able to visit schools, inspections have not been 'normal'. For instance, if a school is informed by ETI that it wants to inspect, the school can inform ETI that due to industrial action short of strike by the teaching unions, the school would not co-operate with the inspection team/process. Where ETI has visited a school, reports have been published but without grades. Since the settlement of the previous pay and workload dispute the inspectorate has been engaging in consultations on a new approach to school inspection. The changes are not currently publicly available, but teacher union colleagues described it as a "high trust" model.

How could inspection be different?

Do we need external inspections of schools?

This is not necessarily a given. Focusing on Europe, seven countries (Bulgaria 50th, Croatia 37th, Greece 43rd, Cyprus 45th, Luxembourg 35th, Finland 10th and Norway 23rd) do not have any formal

external inspection (European Education Culture Executive Agency et al, 2016). From an accountability perspective, these countries rely on monitoring student results, assessing local authorities and evaluating individual teachers to ensure quality. What is also the case is that in all the countries that were part of the view, schools were either obliged or encouraged to engage in self-evaluation as a mechanism for improvement. From an international perspective, having an external inspection system is a choice.

What is inspection for?

Ehren and Visscher (2010) suggest that the purpose of an inspection is to bring about school improvement, a position reflected in all the countries surveyed with an inspection system. The necessity for this is built on the assumption that schools within a country vary in the quality of the education they provide. The theme running through all the research on inspection is that all schools need to attain a minimum standard to ensure that every child has equitable access to high quality education. The question is, therefore, not so much what inspection is for but how it acts to implement change.

When should an inspection be carried out?

1. **Cyclical:** every school is inspected within a given time frame.
2. **Differentiated/at risk:** those schools identified as at risk of failing against a given national criteria are inspected.
3. **Thematic:** a percentage of all schools are inspected to provide evidence for government reports on the implementation, effectiveness and development of policy/strategies.
4. **When there is a complaint/concern:** if someone makes an official complaint about a school.

The review suggests that most countries have started with or used a cyclical model at some point. This relates to the use of resources and the function that the inspection serves. In England, the cyclical approach was replaced by a partially differentiated approach if a school became Outstanding or below Good. This approach has now been partially reversed.

Who inspects a school?

1. Appropriately qualified teachers who are or have been managers/leaders.
2. Appropriately qualified teachers.
3. Appropriately non-qualified teachers.

It can be suggested that the extent to which teachers will accept the findings of an inspection report is related to whether they trust the opinions of those who are inspecting them. In England, the inspectorate is made up of teachers with at least five years of experience, along with having been in a leadership role. Historically, England did use subject specialists alongside managers. What was of interest is that Sweden and the Netherlands added sociologists, legal experts, educational experts and data analysts to their teams. Each group has a different focus within the school.

What gets inspected?

1. Fulfilment of legal requirements.
2. The provision of learning, guidance and support.
3. Learning outcomes.
4. Leadership and management.
5. Does the school pass the threshold for failure?

It might seem that all inspections might inspect all these features, but again the pattern was not consistent, suggesting it is possible to adopt a mix-and-match

approach. All inspectorates considered the fulfilment of legal requirements, and the majority assessed learning, support and guidance, alongside leadership and management. Learning outcomes and passing the threshold for failure were not always in place. This variation was seen to be dependent on the purpose of the inspection. For example, in Sweden (Kemethofer et al, 2017) the type of inspection might be basic, widened or deepened, utilising different measures depending on the focus of the inspection.

What evidence is gathered to support a judgement?

1. Review of school documentation.
2. Review of school data.
3. Interviews/questionnaires with stakeholders, such as parents/carers/pupils/staff.
4. Lesson observations.

What was noteworthy here was that some countries excluded lesson observations as part of the inspection, notably Estonia and the Netherlands. In these cases, this evidence was not needed to support the judgements made about the school. Given the fluctuating role of lesson observation within the English inspection system, this is worth considering in the future as it is often cited as the most stressful part of the inspection for classroom teachers.

The consequences of the inspection: reporting outcomes

1. The school is given an overall grade.
2. The school is given grades on individual standards.
3. The strengths and limitations of the school are identified.
4. A public school report is produced.
5. A general thematic report is produced.

The question that ran through the comparison between countries was whether to grade or not to grade. Grading could occur at the whole school level, at the standards level or not at all. This could be seen as tied to the extent to which inspection is used as means of accountability. A grade is a supposedly standardised measure that can be used to compare schools within and between different localities. The problem with grading is that it potentially turns the inspection into a high-stakes affair. As Ehren et al (2015) have suggested, the high-stakes inspection can positively impact action taken but it can also hinder further development. This risk is potentially amplified in already underperforming schools (Munoz Chereau et al, 2022). It is noteworthy that neither Scotland nor Wales provides an overall grade, but Northern Ireland does, and none of the jurisdictions at the top of the PISA rankings have an overall grade.

The consequences of the inspection: sanctions and support

1. Advising the educational authority on sanctions to impose.
2. Imposing sanctions.
3. Providing developmental support.
4. Checking on progress.

Post-inspection involvement of the inspectorate varies from doing nothing to actively imposing sanctions on the school. Sanctions can range from fines to closing the school. Potentially incongruously, the inspection team can be involved in giving support to the school on how to improve at the same time as imposing sanctions.

A conclusion

The review of different countries shows that there is a diverse set of possible options from which to choose when designing an inspection system. It has been well documented the degree to which teachers in England distrust the inspection process, find it stressful and so are not engaged with its outcomes. The options presented here suggest a way forward by offering teachers the opportunity to design an inspection system for themselves from the bottom up.

Evidence from educators on reform

The survey and focus group evidence reveal a clear desire for change, including in the aims and objectives underpinning inspection. When asked what respondents thought the aims and objectives of school inspections *currently* are, the top responses were:

- making all schools run in the way the government wants (77 per cent)
- ensuring the school is meeting legal safeguarding requirements (72 per cent)
- providing evidence for the effectiveness of government policy (63 per cent).

Notably, only 20 per cent of respondents thought the current purpose of Ofsted was to raise standards.

However, when asked what they thought the aims and objectives *should be*, the top responses were:

- helping schools identify strengths and weaknesses (77 per cent)
- making sure every child has access to high quality education (75 per cent)
- ensuring the school is meeting legal safeguarding requirements (72 per cent)
- raising standards (71 per cent).

Other than safeguarding, these different objectives suggest a need for a reformed system which works with schools to help them improve, while also ensuring high quality education and standards.

This need for major change was also shown in responses to the question: Overall how well do you think school inspections are working?

- 79 per cent of respondents wanted to see a complete overhaul of how inspections work
- 19 per cent of respondents wanted to see substantial modification to how inspections work
- two per cent of respondents wanted slight modification to how inspections work
- 0.4 per cent of respondents said that they thought school inspections were working fine or really well.

The following sections outline the main priorities for reform arising from the survey and focus group data.

Removing grades and moving towards support

Evidence from the survey and focus groups indicated the priorities for a new vision for inspection among teachers and school leaders. The most popular option for change among the selection presented was to remove the labelling and grading of schools associated with Ofsted; more than three quarters of respondents agreed with this idea. More detailed responses from the survey participants and in the focus groups identified the need to move beyond simplistic grades to more nuanced descriptions of schools:

[We need] an ongoing story rather than just as this horrendous one-word judgement.

(Senior leader focus group)

I believe an overall grade is unnecessary and not appropriate as you can't sum up the complexities of a working school in a one-word judgement. I feel that parents don't need this and should HAVE to read more detail about a school in order to get a feel about whether it's the right environment for their child.

(Primary middle leader, Outstanding)

These are the other functions our respondents suggested in open responses:



No head teacher or teaching staff should have to go out there and face an inadequate label that's slapped on their school and then published in the papers and on the internet and it's just, it's horrible.

(Teacher FG)

This final quote was typical of the links made between the need to move on from simple grades and a shift to a system which is more supportive overall. More than 40 per cent of survey respondents agreed with a shift to 'school improvement' as a focus, and a slightly higher percentage agreed with using self-evaluation as a model. Among the survey comments, there were many educators across both sectors who argued for a change in the nature of inspections, so that the focus is on support and collaboration, rather than on judgement:

Inspections should be remodelled as supportive partnerships, with ongoing relationships with schools, which can support schools and enable them to improve on an ongoing basis – more continuous assessment than exam.

Providing a collaborative, supportive structure for schools to work together

to improve. School improvement needs to be a school-led, teacher-led, collaborative improvement model, run for the profession, by the profession. That is the only way it will have the trust of the profession.

(Primary with additional responsibilities, Good)

A word cloud created from the high number of responses to the question of how inspection might be carried out differently, similarly suggests a more supportive system is a priority.

Similar views were expressed in the focus groups, by both head teachers and teachers; respondents talked about "dialogue" and having a "*collegial, collaborative conversation*". There was a desire from some for greater collaboration with other schools to aid school improvement, for example:

If you could work collegiately to actually address those things, the whole process, it would take the stress out of it and actually it would lead to school improvement.

(Teacher FG)

How might inspections be carried out differently?



The theme of collaboration was strong in the leaders' focus groups with a sense that much of this is already in place, making external inspection an unnecessary additional layer:

I personally think that quite a lot of it could be done more localised, quite a lot of it could be done with local authorities or now we have lots of academies we could be doing a lot more collaborative monitoring, any decent school is doing that anyway... Schools have been outward facing for as long as I've been working in education.

(Leader FG)

I know exactly what we're really, really good at and I know exactly what we need to work at because as a leadership team we're always talking about that, and I think for somebody to come and work alongside you and validate and challenge that can only be a healthy thing.

(Governor FG)

I've got a diocese on side, I've got my school improvement adviser, I've got governors, all these reports they're bringing are aligning to say this and this, and actually that's good for us because it all says good things in certain things.

(Governor FG).

They emphasised the role that Ofsted could have in sharing good practice and that the role of the head in sharing good practice could be formalised.

It should be part of the head teacher's job, like three days a year, they have to go to a different school because then you've got that bit of shared practicing and then they really know what it's like. Not call an Ofsted inspector in but actually, as a head teacher [it could] be your CPD [continuing professional development]) to go and see what they're doing. Then just tell them what they're doing well, what could they do better, not stick a big judgement label.

(Governor FG)

Responses to the options for a future inspection system in the survey were similarly focused on support and improvement. The most popular option for the question: What kind of sanctions and support from Ofsted should result from an inspection? was: *providing developmental support for schools* (more than 75 per cent of respondents agreeing).

Reforming the inspectorate

Participants expressed a desire to move towards a more supportive system overall, and within this a key reform would be to change the inspectors. Among survey respondents, 45 per cent agreed that local inspectors should be linked to schools. There were calls for a more collaborative relationship with the person inspecting the school, so that leaders could have honest conversations with an experienced colleague about how to improve:

Somebody that knew your school that you could have a conversation with about the school. So yeah, something like, maybe a school improvement partner would improve it... somebody that knows the school over time.

(Head teacher FG)

During the focus groups there were examples of positive relationships with school improvement partners which could be the model for a changed inspection system:

I've got a new school improvement adviser, from my local authority, who actually is coming this year, and she was a head and has stepped down. Her approach has been this straightforward: "What do you need? Let's look at it". And it is working unbelievably. So actually, you know, being a critical friend. But in a positive way, because I think the problem with Ofsted is that unfortunately it focuses on negative rather than all the good stuff that's going on.

(Primary LA head FG)

This form of positive, collaborative and supportive relationship, alongside the removal of grades, was central to the vision expressed by many of a reformed system.

There were also calls for a more diverse inspectorate, with more representation from marginalised groups:

It should be representative of the workforce, how many Ofsted inspectors are working as well? I mean Black and ethnic minorities absolutely but women and LGBTQ+.

(Teacher FG)

[They] should be reflective of where we come from because at the moment they haven't got a lot of ethnic minority Ofsted inspectors so when they come to the school how can they judge it?

(Teacher FG)

This issue of representation was also related to the need for inspectors with local contextual knowledge of the school, particularly in areas of deprivation:

Inspectors need to be subject specialists in the subjects they are inspecting and also need experience in the context of the schools they are inspecting. Inspectors who have not taught in inner city schools or deprived areas are not qualified to make judgements on them.

(Secondary middle leader, Good)

Much greater context of the school and not comparing to schools without the same context (just look at the Ofsted graded schools compared to their FSM [free school meals] per cent intake for example).

(Primary head teacher, Good)

They could truly understand the context in which the school operates to enable teachers to make a real positive difference

instead of imposing a one-size-fits-all framework and grading criteria. The socio-economic conditions of each school can vary significantly and as such Ofsted should be people who positively work with the school over time instead of passing on judgement on one moment in time.

(Secondary middle leader, Requires Improvement)

These comments are reinforced by the data discussed earlier relating to Ofsted judgements and schools in areas of disadvantage. For many, the local context was highly important. More than 60 per cent of survey respondents, when asked: Who should inspect a school? chose the option of: schools in the local area working together to evaluate each other. A participant noted the need for *"local experts shared across schools in key fields. Academies are already doing this, and it works well"*.

Respondents, particularly those working in primary and early years, thought inspectors should have specialist knowledge of the sector and age-appropriate pedagogy:

EYFS [early years foundation stage] should be inspected by EYFS inspectors and primary by primary inspectors. It isn't rocket science. You should only be recruited if you have sufficient experience in teaching and leading in the phase.

(Primary teacher, Requires Improvement)

Ofsted inspectors should only visit settings that they have practical as well as theoretical experience of – our latest inspection was carried out by an inspector with a specialism in secondary English but she looked at primary maths and the EYFS and made several claims that were factually inaccurate.

(Primary senior leader, Requires Improvement)

The identity of the inspectors was therefore a key part of educators' visions for a new system; there was a desire for more specialist, local and diverse inspectors who had a greater understanding of the school's context. This clearly ties in with the idea of a more supportive and collaborative relationship overall.

Safeguarding

The issue of separating safeguarding from the rest of inspection was also regarded positively, with a majority of teachers (52 per cent) agreeing with this change.

To take safeguarding judgements out... This is the real fear factor, isn't it? That you know if your door's unlocked you immediately fail Ofsted.

(Teacher focus group)

When asked what should be inspected, the most popular option (agreed by over 70 per cent of respondents) was: if the school is meeting legal requirements, eg safeguarding. The issue of limiting judgements relates to this point about separating the different aspects, but would be resolved by removing grades and separating out safeguarding inspections.

In the focus groups there was also clear support for safeguarding to be separate, one secondary head arguing: *"It's almost where it's a role where it wouldn't have to be Ofsted, where it's an administrative sort of process, where the administration bit works fairly okay at present."* Another said that safeguarding *"should be picked up way before by your LA or by your MAT or your governors, not needing Ofsted to come in and say, 'by the way, you've got a big hole in your fence'"* and this would fall more naturally under the governance of the LA or MAT. It was pointed out that it

depends on the quality of the LA or MAT, and one head said safeguarding was dealt with in their cluster: *"The model we use in our cluster is a bit like this, in a way, it's almost this model and it's working more effectively to support each other collaboratively than any Ofsted or the LA."*

There were concerns that if LAs were going to be responsible for safeguarding, they should be properly resourced. Some said they already paid for it to be done privately: *"Someone comes in for half a day, they produce a report, they look at our documentation. We pay for it."*

One secondary head welcomed the idea of the responsibility for safeguarding being taken from his shoulders:

I have to be a HR expert, the safer recruitment expert, the safeguarding expert. There's a lot there and that's the responsibility that you accept but again that brings it back to that fear of, hang on a minute I could slip up here quite easily because actually I'm head teacher and my background is teaching and learning, and curriculum, and school improvement and a lot of this safeguarding stuff, no one would argue that it isn't important, but actually you need to accept that, you need other experts to come in and do that with you to make sure that you are being safe.

(Head FG)

Removing the link between academisation and inspecting governance

Another popular option for how to change inspection was to decouple Ofsted from the academisation agenda; more than 45 per cent of survey respondents agreed with this (and 45 per cent of those in academies). Additional survey comments identified the need to avoid using inspection as part of the decision to force schools into academy trusts.

There were also calls for a new system to improve accountability in MATs, and some of the respondents commented on the need to inspect the work of governance:

I would welcome some accountability towards MATs. Central teams are acting like a permanent Ofsted on schools (certainly in mine). They are imposing unsuitable and dogmatic systems into schools in an appalling manner.

(Secondary middle leader, Requires Improvement)

Schools must be held accountable, but I am troubled by the overall absence of accountability measures, especially financial, for large multi-academy trusts, who take vast top slices, recruit large leadership teams and pay out obscene salaries to staff who rarely enter schools or classrooms.

(Head FG)

There seemed to be a distrust of the academy system – participants called for inspection to *“hold MATs to account. A school is RI or worse due to MAT level of support and their CEO’s name should be on every report”* and *“holding academy heads and management accountable for the decisions and changes they make within a school”*.

Some also questioned who was scrutinising academies’ use of public money and for all schools to have *“an audit of management effectiveness, safeguarding, budgets and governance (and other related items) [which] should be separate from the education side”*.

This view reflects wider calls for greater accountability for MATs. Ofsted itself argued in 2019 that it needed the power to inspect MATs saying: *“Many MATs play a central role in setting school policies, monitoring performance, recruitment, and training. They are also legally responsible for their schools and therefore for the governance of them.”*

However, the report also finds there is weak internal accountability at trust level,” (Ofsted, 2019). There were fresh calls for trust-level inspections in 2022 when one trust was found to contain three inadequate schools (Belger, 2022). However, Geoff Barton of the Association of School and College Leaders (ACSL) warned that this would add a layer of complexity, saying: *“There may be a case for extending inspections further, but Ofsted would need to define what functions it would inspect and how it would conduct these inspections in a meaningful and consistent way across a large number of organisations which vary in size and shape”* (FE News, 2019).

However, others suggested that academies (and also local authorities) should be trusted to do quality assurance *“by the CEOs of the MATs of schools – with their experience in teaching they would have the knowledge to monitor how schools are doing and help them collaboratively”*, and that the efforts of inspection should be limited to this level of governance.

Inspections could also be more moderation within school partnerships or MATs instead of complete strangers with little or no knowledge of the phases making unfounded judgements.

(Primary with additional responsibilities, Good)

Local authorities should be inspected in how they support schools in their area. Academies having to pay for their expertise. No grades for schools but instead appropriate action and support for schools within their context.

(Secondary teacher, Good)

Focus Ofsted on checking MATs are monitoring and supporting their own schools well and then license them to get on with it locally.

(Secondary head teacher, Outstanding)

Reduced stress and more trust

The evidence from educators strongly supports changes to the inspection system which reduce the stress and anxiety associated with Ofsted, both during inspections and between them. A clear message from the research data is that educators want to change how the system makes them feel; instead of fear, they wish to feel trusted, professional and supported.

Ensuring staff wellbeing is included to offer supportive function not a punitive, judgemental one.

(Secondary middle leader, Requires Improvement)

Ofsted could assess whether teachers are being overworked and provide a clear framework to ease the burdens whilst making meaningful improvements to teaching and learning.

(Secondary middle leader, Requires Improvement)

The wellbeing of staff should also be surveyed and checked regularly.

(Primary senior leader, Good)

Thus a related further aspect of educators' visions for a reformed system was the need to prioritise staff wellbeing within inspection. Respondents were keen to emphasise that schools needed to remain accountable for their work, but were also clear that the impact on wellbeing should not be as damaging as it is at present; in other words, the toxicity of Ofsted should be replaced by something which both helps to improve schools and does not damage teachers.

The need for major reform

Finally, the evidence from educators pointed to the need for major reform,

rather than tinkering with the current system. This was based on the need to change the entire nature of inspection to one of support, so that it was experienced completely differently from Ofsted. In some cases, this vision involved abolishing Ofsted altogether: 16 per cent of respondents to the question of how often inspections should be carried out answer 'never'. A number of written comments and focus group participants also argued for abolition; for instance: *"We don't need inspections. [We need] a national framework of peer support and accountability."* Others felt the need for a pause in inspections, given the current damage, while a solution is worked out:

I don't think we should worry too much about replacing, I think we should get rid of [Ofsted] first and then see what we need.

(Teacher focus group)

They should be paused now and redesigned with schools and academic researchers included in the process. This should be schools from all parts of the country and representative of all the different types of schools and contexts there are.

(Primary middle leader, Good)

Pause them immediately pending a review and reform. The current system is not just poor, it is actively damaging schools, curriculum and staff. It is a safeguarding hazard in itself – staff feel unsafe. Anything that damaging needs to stop immediately.

(Primary head teacher, Good)

In other cases, there were calls for a change of name for the inspectorate, alongside the more substantial changes in who the inspectors are and their relationships with schools, as discussed above. One suggested that the language of Ofsted could be reformed:

Another facet is the use of language which is less judgemental and promotes development and improvement. Like using the term QA [quality assurance] rather than inspection. It is there to ratify the judgements, not to find them.

(Teacher FG)

Another participant summed up these ideas with the request for *“a radical and brave rethink of the purpose and form of school inspection”*.

It is important to emphasise the strength of feeling that major change is needed, even while there were differences in views about how Ofsted should be replaced exactly; the educators’ visions for the future were in the majority focused on a very different system of inspection.

Evidence from focus groups

Parents

In imagining the future of inspection, parents called for a descriptive narrative of school progress which offers a nuanced picture of the school rather than a single-word grade. Additionally, parents called for information on wraparound services and a holistic picture of what the school can offer students. Parents advocated for collaborative improvement, not a punitive one-size-fits-all model.

A collaborative approach to it with an action plan that comes out of it of where it can improve. (Parent FG)

Many parents supported separating safeguarding from the overall inspection and centring the wellbeing and progress of staff and pupils.

We’re parents, we don’t have anything to benefit from Ofsted coming in or not, it’s not that we are against an inspection

regime per se, and obviously safeguarding is incredibly, incredibly important but does that have to be done by Ofsted?... I hate the way that it seems to pit one school against another, couldn’t this somehow be collaborative, some sort of school inspectorate drawn across the profession who can come in and instead of punitive inspections, have inspections that are there for the benefit of the staff and the pupils? (Parent FG)

Governors

In moving towards a new vision, governors called for inspectors to spend more time in schools and develop a continuous dialogue of feedback and support. Governors focused on the value of inspectors functioning in a supportive, coaching role rather than a punitive, judgmental role.

I would like a new framework that was much more supportive, and perhaps in the ways that people have been suggesting. And, as you said, continuity is important. Consistency is important. So they get to know the school. (Governor FG)

Informal evidence from experts

When presented with some of our ideas, the experts reacted as follows:

- **Safeguarding:** Good to keep it separate as there is not enough time to do it properly during a normal inspection. They suggested that this could be led by social care inspectors, separate from Ofsted as “their experience of safeguarding, their leading of safeguarding is in most cases spot on”.
- **Grading:** There needs to be more of a focus on the areas for improvement for the school, and the single grade should be abolished. One former inspector said

inspection should be an appreciative activity, more like a theatre critic. It is a professional but subjective assessment of some aspects of a school's work in a particular time place and context. So, the judgement should not be final – it must be tentative and temporary.

- **Finance:** In the past inspection teams would have a lay inspector with financial expertise who was there to look at the accounts and value for money when schools were all in the LA. This could be reconsidered with a focus on MATs given their influence on the policies and procedures of schools. The focus should be on the quality of governance.
- **Self-evaluation:** Schools do extensive self-evaluation, and they know their schools – so validation of that would be better. MATs do extensive self-evaluation and often have harsher judgements. Inspection has a part to play but the culture needs to change – what is going well, what do we need support with. A well-governed school will know what is going on. This could also be combined with report cards which should not be prescribed from the centre; there were concerns that report cards could become unwieldy, and the card could easily grow into a book.
- **Inspection at LA and MAT level:** One former HMI described the previous system when they inspected local authorities. These were area-wide inspections across two local authorities which involved looking at schools and colleges over a week and giving feedback.
- **Hold government to account:** Restoration of independence of HMI from government enabling HMI to report back to the government of the effect of its policies. This is what HMI did in the past and would help enhance trust.
- **Possible moratorium:** Routine inspections should cease. Inspectors could continue to work on surveys and do their own self-evaluation. That break would help schools change mindset.
- Ofsted must have duty of care for teachers.

BEYOND

Ofsted

Beyond Ofsted

Recommendations

Ofsted is in need of major reform. Our research found that it is currently seen as not fit for purpose, and as having a detrimental impact on schools which some perceive as toxic. We acknowledge the need for quality assurance of schools as any institution in receipt of public money should be subject to accountability. However, we need to build trust back into the system so that it can work. The need for change is compelling and urgent.

The chair, UCL researchers and the advisory board have explored a range of models to inform the inquiry's vision of school inspection. Each model was based on a range of evidence from the survey and focus groups, international comparisons, research literature, comments from the advisory board and other stakeholders. Models proposed included systems where there is no inspection at all to a system similar to what we have now in England but with greater levels of support.

After considering a range of options, a hybrid model was chosen as the most impactful and appropriate given the inquiry's evidence and the unique trajectories of education policy in England. It is a combination of external accountability to parents, self-evaluation and long-term support at school level and inspection of the governance of, and

capacity for, school improvement at the school group level.

We believe that it is essential for the health of the system as a whole that we build trust in the profession. This must be part of measures to urgently address the acute problems of recruiting and retaining people in the teaching profession. We need a system based on support which recognises and develops teachers' expertise, rather than one based on fear and compliance. We agree with the consensus that there should no longer be any single-phrase judgements in school inspection system.

Schools still need to be accountable to their local community, and better transparency of outcomes to parents through the proposed school performance review will do that. This should include surveying parents and pupils. We are persuaded by the international comparisons that **self-evaluation through a long-term relationship with an adviser is the best approach to school improvement**. This is best achieved by using a school improvement partner for external validation of the school performance review.

We are encouraged in this conclusion by our reflections on evidence from similar systems in other countries:

- Denmark, Estonia, Italy and Japan have no regular external school inspection but do require self-evaluation.

- Singapore has inspection as a compulsory part of self-evaluation; no overall grade is given. Depending on the outcomes, support will be given to the school to achieve the changes recommended by the inspection.
- South Korea sees self-evaluation as a key part of inspection, but also inspects schools directly. This is not a punitive system but is orientated toward supporting schools in identifying issues, ways of addressing their shortcomings and the means of putting these changes into practice.
- Canada varies from province to province. In British Columbia external inspection is used as a verification of self-evaluation and to ensure that the school meets its legal requirements. Lessons may be observed, but the primary purpose is to verify the documents that the school publishes.
- The USA also varies from state to state. New York City uses a quality review to validate the data produced in a report card. Chicago has a report card with no external validation. Inspections are not experienced by the majority of American schools.
- Scotland's new proposals support the drive towards empowerment with a strong focus on self-evaluation and an establishment's capacity to improve.

We thus recommend removing Ofsted from direct contact with schools and reforming it to operate at the level of school group-level governance. Our proposals for inspection and accountability are focussed on strong governance which should always secure good compliance with legal requirements and equally ensure that there is internal capacity for school improvement to meet the needs of every child in their care.

How would this work?

School-level quality assurance

This part of the model would involve the following elements:

- Schools conduct an annual self-evaluation of strengths and challenges and plans for improvement called a school performance review (SPR).
- The content of the SPR will be based on a list of contents agreed at national level, but schools can add/adapt according to context. This means that self-evaluation can be consistent but also appropriate and suitable to local context and community.
- The SPR should prioritise pupil and staff mental health and wellbeing, a broad and balanced curriculum, inclusive and supportive practices, and a sense of belonging, ie the school's environment where all can flourish personally and academically.
- This process will be supported and validated by a school improvement partner (SIP), who is trained to support school leaders in evaluation and improvement, and is appointed by the school's governing body. They will have an understanding of the school context.
- The validated SPR is published as an action plan. This will include areas of good practice that others can learn from, alongside aspects where they need to learn from others.
- There are no grades on the SPR and it is not used as part of school accountability to the DfE or Ofsted.

- There will be collaboration, peer review and mutual support via networking with local schools in MATs or appropriate clusters.
- Safeguarding is a vital component of accountability and is dealt with separately as detailed below.

School group-level accountability

Many schools are now in MATs. Others are in local authority control, some are in federations and in single academy trusts. These proposals can work effectively across all modes of governance; they can work equally for local authority schools with some resource from the DfE to LAs to rebuild their school improvement capacity. It is vital that capacity is built at local authority level as these have become seriously under-resourced in the last decade.

On this basis, school groups (including LAs and single academy trusts where relevant) would be inspected by Ofsted on a regular cycle of every three to five years. The focus would be on their leadership and governance and capacity for accurate self-evaluation to address challenges and serve all learners' needs. Features would include:

- Examination of the governance of the delivery of school progress reviews and action plans.
- MATs, federations or school governing boards would need to demonstrate that their quality assurance, resource management, risk management and school improvement capacity were all sufficient, drawing on the information from school action plans and performance reviews.
- Inspections of governance would be published, but with no single-phrase judgement. If inspection found weakness in the quality and

capacity for self-evaluation, they could recommend areas for improvement and further support. In the case of MATs and single academy trusts, this would be support to the members and the trust board as appropriate. For LAs, this would be support to the portfolio member of the LA cabinet for education and the director of children's services or their equivalent. If there is significant failure, they could impose an interim executive board to replace the governance body.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding matters, and we want it to be better than it currently is. It should be conducted separately under the governance of a national safeguarding body. It will eventually be the responsibility of local authorities but, given that LA safeguarding competence has been allowed to erode due to lack of resourcing over the last decade, the national safeguarding body would have to carry out the routine inspections until LAs are deemed ready. Full and proper attention should be paid to safeguarding and other legal frameworks such as the Equalities Act. Failure to meet safeguarding requirements would require immediate responses from the school leadership, with a follow-up check in place before outcomes are published.

The work of inspectors

Ofsted inspectors' role and expertise will be enhanced in terms of being used constructively for thematic inspections and research reports, as well as their inspection of group-level governance. There is a critical role for them in capacity building in response to the many complex issues facing the education service – especially if they are seen as independent of government. Hence in this system, as well as inspecting governance, Ofsted would continue to exist, and would

conduct research and thematic reviews to inform government policy and Ofsted. The chief inspector would be independent of government. Inspectors would be experienced and trained in the sectors they inspect. The existing right of parents to trigger an inspection would remain.

A pause

Given this fundamental and transformative change, we recommend an immediate pause to routine inspections. Parents and governing bodies will, however, retain the right to call for a school-level inspection if concerns are raised. Schools can request a school-level inspection, with schools currently designated Requires Improvement having priority.

Although these recommendations are based on research in the primary and secondary sector it is hoped that the model is applicable to other sectors and that its context-specific nature and focus on governance will be welcomed. These reforms would perhaps have impacts on Ofsted's other functions relating to early years and initial teacher education, and we would recommend more detailed reviews of their work in these areas too.

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APPENDIX 1

the survey

A P P E N D I X 1

the survey

Q1.1

An Inquiry into School Inspection in England

A research team based at the UCL Institute of Education are inviting all education professionals to take in part in a research project looking at school inspection in England, funded by the National Education Union (NEU). The aim of the inquiry is to use your experiences to contribute to an evidence base about the strengths and weaknesses of school inspection, using that evidence to develop recommendations for an alternative approach.

This survey will take between ten and twenty minutes of your time depending on how much detail you choose to provide us with about your experiences. You will be asked some questions about your teaching experience, school inspection and its effects, and how you might redesign inspection from the perspective of an education professional.

We very much hope that you would like to contribute your voice to this debate.

If you would like to participate please select **YES** below and you will be taken to a more detailed briefing. If not, please select **NO** and will be taken to the end of the survey, or you can close your browser window.

Yes (4)

No (5)

Q2.1

School Inspection in England

Thank you for considering taking part in this study. Please read through the information below which aims to answer any questions you might have about the project.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if there is anything else you would like to know, at j.perryman@ucl.ac.uk

Why am I being invited to take part?

We are conducting this survey of education professionals to find out what they think about school inspection. Why are we doing this research? In exploring how school inspection in England is currently working and identifying solutions to the problems identified, there is an opportunity to propose an alternative approach that leads to more equitable and fair outcomes for all.

Who is carrying out the research?

The Principal Investigator leading this project is Professor Jane Perryman, the Co-Investigator is Professor Alice Bradbury, and we have two research Associates, Dr Graham Calvert and Katie Kilian. They work at the Institute of Education, part of University College London. The UCL Research Ethics Committee has approved the research study. The National Education Union (NEU) funds the project, but you do not need to be a NEU member to participate.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

If you agree to participate you will complete an online questionnaire that we estimate will take ten to twenty minutes. This will vary depending on whether you complete the open questions, and the amount of detail you provide. We will ask you some questions based on the topics outlined above to determine your views on inspection. The questionnaire is divided into six main sections. Part one is about you as a teacher. Parts two and three ask you to recount your inspection experiences and their effects on you and your school. Parts four and five ask you to consider what you think inspection is for and how you might redesign it. The final part collects some demographic details about you and your school.

Could there be problems for me if I take part?

We don't think this is particularly sensitive, but you can always opt not to answer any questions. Please be assured that you do not have to answer every question and if, at any point, you feel uncomfortable at any point then you are entitled to stop.

Will anyone know I have been involved?

It is very important for us that you know that no one will be able to find out you have been involved in the project unless you choose to tell people. This means that all your contributions will be anonymised before we use them. In the open questions, if you describe or name particular schools or people, we will change these before we use them. The last question will ask if you would like to be contacted about the research (to help with our planned focus groups). If you give us this information we will separate it from your questionnaire answers to keep your responses confidential.

What will happen to the results of the research?

The findings will be put together into a report to be published in autumn 2023 and may be used in other project publications and publicity. Following this, the findings may be written up in academic publications. All reporting will be fully anonymised. The data collected will be stored on a secure password-protected network, for up to ten years, in line with UCL's data retention policy. Only the research team and NEU will have access to the data, and we will remove your names and give you a pseudonym in the stored data.

Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you whether you choose to participate. We hope that if you do choose to be involved you will find it an interesting experience. Ultimately, our research will help make recommendations to improve the inspection system for everyone involved.

If you want to participate in this survey, please answer **YES** and **press CONTINUE** below. If you do not want to participate, please answer **NO** and **press CONTINUE** below, or close this browser window.

Data Protection Privacy Notice:

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information from research studies can be found in our 'general' privacy notice for participants in research studies here.

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices. The lawful basis that will be used to process any personal data is: 'Public task' for personal data and 'Research purposes' for special category data. We will be collecting personal data such as names and email addresses.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

- Yes I would like to participate in this study (3)
- No, I do not want to participate in this study (4)

Q3.1

Section 1

You and your role

In this section, we will ask you some questions about your current, or previous, work in schools. When you have completed each page press the 'next page' button in the bottom right.

If you wish to go back to a previous page you can use the 'previous page' button in the bottom left.

Q3.2

Are you currently working, or have you ever worked, in a mainstream Primary or Secondary school in England?

- Yes (7)
- No (8)
- I do not want to answer this question (this will end the survey for you) (9)

Q3.3

Thank you for being interested in this survey. However, this study focuses on the experiences of those who have worked in England in either a mainstream Primary or Secondary school. Even though you have declared that you do not belong to either of those groups we would still be interested in your views on school inspection if you would like to share them in the space below. If not, please click on the button in the bottom right to end the survey. If you have worked in a mainstream Primary or Secondary school in England, please click the button in the bottom left to take you back to the previous question and answer yes.

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Q3.4

What year did you start teaching in a mainstream school?

Q3.5

Which of the following best describes you:

- I am currently employed by, or working in, a mainstream primary school (1)
- I am currently employed by, or working in a mainstream secondary school (2)
- I am not currently working in a mainstream school but I used to work in a mainstream primary school (6)
- I am not currently working in a mainstream school but I used to work in a mainstream secondary school (7)

Q3.6

Which of these best describes your current role?
(If more than one applies, please select the best fit for your role)

- Teaching assistant or other support staff (1)
- Training to teach (2)
- Classroom teacher (3)
- Classroom teacher with additional responsibilities (4)
- Middle leader (5)
- Senior leader (6)
- Head Teacher (7)
- School inspector (8)

Q3.7

Which of these best describes the role you occupied before leaving teaching?
(If more than one applies, please select the best fit for your role)

- Teaching assistant or other support staff (1)
- Training to teach (2)
- Classroom teacher (3)
- Classroom teacher with additional responsibilities (4)
- Middle leader (5)
- Senior leader (6)
- Head Teacher (7)
- School inspector (8)

Q4.1

Section 2

Your experiences of school inspection

In this section, we will ask you about your experiences of Ofsted inspections, focusing on your most recent one.

Q4.2

What is your current (or most recent) school's Ofsted rating, even if you were not working at this school when it was last inspected?

- Outstanding (1)
- Good (2)
- Requires Improvement (3)
- Inadequate (4)

Q4.3

How often have you been working in a school when it was subject to a graded inspection? Please enter a number. If you have never been working in a school when it was inspected please enter 0 and you will be taken to Section 3.

Q4.4

Ofsted school inspections were introduced in 1992. Since then there have been five different frameworks determining how inspections were to be carried out. Do you think the current framework introduced in 2019:

- is better than previous versions (1)
- is worse than previous versions (2)
- It is just the same as previous versions (6)
- I cannot tell because I have not experienced the new inspection framework (3)
- I cannot tell because I have only experienced the current framework (4)
- I don't know (5)

Q4.5

Could you tell us why you think the current framework is better than, worse than or just the same as previous versions?

Q4.6

What grade did the school receive?

- Outstanding (1)
- Good (2)
- Satisfactory (only if this inspection was before 2012) (5)
- Requires Improvement (3)
- Inadequate (4)

Q4.7

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
During the inspection I felt the inspectors had the necessary expertise to make their judgments. (1)					
During the inspection I experienced higher levels of personal stress. (2)					
During the inspection I felt empowered. (3)					
During the inspection I felt I could voice my concerns. (4)					
During the inspection I felt my work in the school was valued. (5)					
During the inspection I changed my normal classroom practice. (6)					
During the inspection the inspectors saw the 'real' school. (7)					
During the inspection there was an increase in workload. (8)					
During the inspection I taught 'normal' lessons. (9)					

Q4.8

Do you think your role in the school affected your experience of inspection?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't know (3)

Q4.9

If you wish, please elaborate on whether or not your role in school affected your experience of inspection.

Q4.10

Which of the following best describes how you felt about the final judgement (and sub-judgements) that the inspection team reached?

- It was a fair and accurate assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of my school (1)
- It was too harsh and failed to see the positive elements (2)
- It was too lenient, missing some problems (3)
- Not sure (4)

Q4.11

How did the inspection make you feel about your career?

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Unsure (3)
It made me want to stay in the education profession (1)			
It made me want to leave my current school (2)			
It made me want to stay in my current role (3)			
It gave me the skills to apply for other jobs (4)			
It had no effect on my career plans (6)			

Q4.12

Overall, would you say your experience of inspection was...?

- Very negative (1)
- Somewhat negative (2)
- Neither positive nor negative (3)
- Somewhat positive (4)
- Very positive (5)

Q4.13

Please explain your answer further if you wish

Q5.1

Section 3

The effects of inspection on the school Inspections can have many different effects on you and your school. In this section, please reflect on what those effects might have been.

Q5.2

Please describe, if you can, the thoughts and feelings you have had, or might have, when you are told that Ofsted are coming to inspect your school.

Q5.3

In between inspections, does your school use any of the following to prepare specifically for future inspections? (please tick all that apply)

- Mock Ofsted inspections (1)
- Lesson observations without grades (2)
- Graded lesson observations (3)
- Book scrutiny (4)
- Data meetings in preparation for Ofsted (5)
- Training on 'what Ofsted wants' (6)
- Training on Ofsted's curriculum research reviews (7)
- Preparation of paperwork for Ofsted (8)
- Mock deep dives (9)
- Learning walks (10)
- The school does nothing special to prepare for Ofsted (11)
- Other (please specify) (12)

Q5.4

Please tell us more about the things your school does to prepare for Ofsted if you wish

Q5.5

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about Ofsted inspections

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Ofsted inspections acts as a reliable and trusted arbiter of standards across all different types of schools/colleges (1)					
Ofsted inspections are a force for improvement in the education system (2)					
Ofsted inspections are carried out independently of Government (3)					
Ofsted inspections are a valid method of monitoring performance and holding schools to account (4)					
Ofsted inspections undermine the ability of senior leaders to focus everyone's efforts on achieving the best outcomes for our pupils (5)					

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Ofsted inspectors have the relevant frontline experience, skills and qualifications to make informed judgements about the school (6)					
Ofsted inspections introduce unsustainable or harmful levels of burden into the system (7)					
Ofsted inspections stifle innovation and creativity in my school (8)					
Ofsted inspections prevents my school from working with other schools in collaborative ways (9)					
Ofsted inspections have a negative impact on the retention of teachers in my school (10)					
Ofsted inspections give the school the chance to show how good it is (11)					
Ofsted inspections create extra, but manageable, work for the staff in a school (12)					

Q5.6

Based on your experience please describe, if you wish, any other effects of Ofsted inspections on you or your school

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Q6.1

Section 4

Having thought about your experience of inspection, we would like to know what you think the aims of school inspection currently are, and what the aims should be if we were to keep them.

	What are the aims and objectives of the current inspection system?	What do you think the aims and objectives of an inspection system should be?
Enabling teachers to improve their teaching (1)		
Enabling teaching assistants to improve their classroom practice (23)		
Providing parents with information to make choices (2)		
Holding schools to account for the money they spend (3)		
Raising standards in education (4)		
Making sure every child has access to the same high-quality education (5)		
Helping headteachers accelerate a change agenda within the school. (6)		
Helping schools identify their strengths and weaknesses (7)		
Assessing effectiveness of leadership and management (14)		
Making all schools run in the way the Government wants (18)		
Assessing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment (15)		
Assessing pupils personal development, behaviour and welfare (16)		
Ensuring that the school is meeting its legal safeguarding requirements (20)		

	What are the aims and objectives of the current inspection system?	What do you think the aims and objectives of an inspection system should be?
Helping Ofsted gain a picture of current issues in the education sector (21)		
Providing evidence for the effectiveness of Government policy (22)		
It has no purpose (17)		

Q6.2

What is inspection for?

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Q6.3

Are there any other functions that inspections serve or could serve that we have not included?

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Q6.4

So, overall how well do you think school inspections are working (chose the option that best fits how you feel)?

- They are working fine as they are (1)
- They are working really well (5)
- They need slight modification (2)
- They need substantial modification (3)
- They need a complete overhaul (4)

Q7.1

Section 5

How might we change inspections? In this final, main, section, having thought about your experience of inspection, and what has been positive and negative, we want you to think about how you might redesign school inspections to make them better.

Q7.2

In your view, how might inspections be carried out differently?

Q7.3

In your view, when should an inspection be carried out?
(please tick as many as you agree with)

- Regularly – For example every school is inspected within a given time frame. (1)
- When a risk is identified – For example those schools identified as failing or at risk of failing are inspected. (2)
- When needed for evidence – For example some schools are inspected on one theme to provide evidence for Government reports on the implementation, effectiveness and development of policy/strategies. (3)
- When there is a complaint/concern – For example only if someone makes an official complaint about a school. (4)
- The current triggers for school inspection are fine as they are we do not need to change them. (7)
- Never, we do not need school inspections. (6)
- Other (please specify) (5)

Q7.4

What should be inspected? (please tick as many as you agree with)

- If the school is meeting its legal requirements (e.g. safeguarding and pupil safety) (1)
 - The provision of learning (2)
 - The effective deployment of teaching assistants (18)
 - Early career teachers (3)
 - Curriculum delivery (5)
 - If there is a broad and balanced curriculum (14)
 - How the school is governed (15)
 - Pupil behaviour and attitudes (16)
 - Off-rolling (17)
 - Learning outcomes (6)
 - Progress in reducing attainment gaps (7)
 - Leadership and management quality (8)
 - The relationship between the school and home (9)
 - A review of the schools self inspection documentation and outcomes (11)
 - The current list of what should be inspected is fine as it is we do not need to change it (13)
 - Nothing, we do not need inspections (12)
 - Other (please specify) (10)
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Q7.5

What evidence should be gathered to support a judgement?
(please tick as many as you agree with)

- Review of school documentation e.g. policies (1)
- Review of school attainment data (2)
- Interviews/questionnaires with stakeholders, such as parents/pupils/staff/ those responsible for governance (3)
- Lesson observations (4)

- The current system of inspection gathers the necessary information to make a valid judgment and does not need changing (7)
 - None as we do not need inspections (6)
 - Other (please specify) (5)
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Q7.6

Who should inspect a school? (please tick as many as you agree with)

- Appropriately qualified teachers who are or have been managers/leaders (1)
 - Appropriately qualified teachers (2)
 - Non-qualified teachers with educational expertise (3)
 - Schools in the local area working together to evaluate each other (8)
 - The people who currently inspect schools are suited to the task so we do not need to change them (6)
 - A local team of advisors (7)
 - Nobody as we do not need inspections (5)
 - Other (please specify) (4)
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Q7.7

How should the school be graded?

- The school is given an overall grade only (1)
 - The school is given an overall grade and graded on individual standards (2)
 - The schools is not given an overall grade but is graded on individual standards (3)
 - Only the strengths and limitations of the school are identified but no grades are given (4)
 - The current grading system is the most appropriate and does not need changing (7)
 - We do not need judgments about schools (6)
 - Other (please specify) (5)
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Q7.8

How should the outcome of the inspection be communicated?

- A publicly available school report is produced (1)
 - A report is produced for use by the school and stakeholders only (2)
 - The current way inspection outcomes are communicated is fine as it is and does not need changing (7)
 - No report is required as we do not need inspections (5)
 - Other (please specify) (3)
-
-

Q7.9

What kind of sanctions and support from Ofsted should result from an inspection?

- Advising an appropriate education authority on any sanctions to impose (1)
 - Imposing sanctions directly on schools (2)
 - Providing developmental support for schools (3)
 - Checking on the progress the school is making to rectify its weakness (4)
 - The post inspection role of Ofsted is fine as it is and does not need changing (7)
 - None (6)
 - Other (please specify) (5)
-
-

Q7.10

Some organisations and individuals have suggested reforming the system of inspection in schools in England in other ways. Which of the following suggestions would you agree with? (please tick all that apply)

- Having focused inspections on one particular theme (1)
- Having local inspectors linked to schools (2)
- Having separate regular inspections for safeguarding (18)
- Having a no labelling or grading approach (5)

- ▣ Having school improvement as the basis of inspections (6)
 - ▣ Having school self-evaluation/self-assessment as the basis for inspections (7)
 - ▣ Including pupil voice in inspections in more meaningful ways (8)
 - ▣ Publishing all materials used by inspectors to inspect a school (10)
 - ▣ Decoupling Ofsted grades from the academisation agenda (11)
 - ▣ Decoupling Ofsted grades from SLT performance management (12)
 - ▣ Having no external involvement in school self-assessment (17)
 - ▣ None of the above (14)
 - ▣ Other (please specify) (13)
-
-

Q7.11

Finally, reflecting on your experience and thoughts about inspection we would like to know:

Q7.12

If you were able to design a new inspection system, what would you prioritise?

Q7.13

Is there anything else you wish to say about inspection in schools?

Q8.1

Section 6

To help us understand the range of views, please tell us a bit more about yourself and where you are working.

Q8.2

Are you a member of the NEU?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q8.3

How many years have you worked in primary and or secondary education in total?

- Less than 2 years (1)
- 2 or more years but less than 5 years (2)
- 5 or more years but less than 10 years (3)
- 10 years or more years but less than 20 years (4)
- 20 years or more (5)

Q8.4

Which region of England do you work in currently (or most recently)?

- North East England (1)
- North West England (2)
- Yorkshire and the Humber (3)
- West Midlands (4)
- East Midlands (5)
- Greater London (6)
- East of England (7)
- South West England (8)
- South East England (9)

- Other (please specify) (10)
-
-

Q8.5

Which of the following categories best describes your current or most recent school?

- Local Authority Maintained (Community or Voluntary Aided) (1)
 - Academy in a MAT (2)
 - Standalone Academy (3)
 - Free School (4)
 - Independent (5)
 - Post-16 Corporation (6)
 - Other (Please describe) (7)
-
-

Q8.6

Can you estimate the percentage of pupils in your current, or most recent school, who are, or were, in receipt of free school meals.

Q8.7

How would you describe your ethnicity? (please select from the following)

- Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi (1)
- Asian or Asian British – Chinese (2)
- Asian or Asian British – Indian (3)
- Asian or Asian British – Pakistani (4)
- Asian or Asian British – Any Other (5)
- Black or Black British – African (6)
- Black or Black British – Caribbean (7)
- Black or Black British – Any Other (8)
- White British – English (9)

- White British – Northern Irish (10)
- White British – Scottish (11)
- White British – Welsh (12)
- White British – Any Other (13)
- White Other – Gypsy or Irish Traveller (14)
- White Other – Irish (15)
- White Other – White European (16)
- White Other – Any other (17)
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Asian and White (18)
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Black African and White (19)
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Black Caribbean and White (20)
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Any Other (21)
- Other ethnic groups – Any Other (22)
- Prefer not to say (23)

Q8.8

How would you describe your gender? (please select from the following)

- Female (1)
- Male (2)
- Non-binary (3)
- Other (4)
- Prefer not to say (5)

Q8.9

Which age group do you belong to? (please select from the following)

- Under 25 years old (1)
- 25-29 years old (2)
- 30-34 years old (3)
- 35-39 years old (4)
- 40-44 years old (5)
- 45-49 years old (6)
- 50-54 years old (7)
- 55-59 years old (8)
- 60 years old or older (9)

Q9.1

What happens next

As part of the Inquiry into School Inspection in England, we plan to hold some focus groups for teachers and school leaders. If you are willing to participate in a focus group on inspection, please add your name and email below. This information will be kept separate from your responses above. By adding these, you consent to someone from the research team contacting you, if needed. Please continue to the end of the survey if you do not wish to add this information.

Q9.2

Your name

Q9.3

Your Email address

Q9.4

And so...

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey. If you have any other comments about school inspections that you have not been able to express elsewhere, please use the box below. If not, please click the 'next page' button to end the survey and save your responses.

APPENDIX 2

respondent demographics

APPENDIX 2

respondent demographics

Areas respondents working in

Region	Percentage
South East England	17.92%
Greater London	15.46%
North West England	13.79%
South West England	10.36%
West Midlands	10.01%
East Midlands	9.53%
East of England	9.09%
Yorkshire and the Humber	8.16%
North East England	4.52%

School types

School Type	Percentage
Local Authority Maintained (Community or Voluntary Aided)	49%
Academy in a MAT	37%
Standalone Academy	7%
Other (Please describe)	3%
Independent	2%
Free School	1%

Ethnicity participants identify with

Ethnicity	Percentage
White British – English	76%
White British – Any Other	4%
White Other – White European	3%
White British – Welsh	2%
White Other – Any other	2%
White Other – Irish	2%
White British – Scottish	1%
Asian or Asian British – Indian	1%
White British – Northern Irish	1%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Any Other	1%
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	1%

Gender participants identify as being

Gender	Percentage
Female	74%
Male	23%
Prefer not to say	3%

Age distribution of participants

Age	Percentage
Under 25 years old	1%
25-29 years old	6%
30-34 years old	11%
35-39 years old	13%
40-44 years old	15%
45-49 years old	15%
50-54 years old	17%
55-59 years old	12%
60 years old or older	10%

Current teaching roles of respondents

Teaching role	Percentage
Teaching assistant or other support staff	4%
Classroom teacher	28%
Classroom teacher with additional responsibilities	25%
Middle leader	18%
Senior leader	13%
Head Teacher	12%

Current employment

Phase and employment	Percentage
I am currently employed by, or working in, a mainstream primary school	55%
I am currently employed by, or working in a mainstream secondary school	28%
I am not currently working in a mainstream school but I used to work in a mainstream primary school	10%
I am not currently working in a mainstream school but I used to work in a mainstream secondary	7%

Most recent inspection grade

Inspection Grade	Percentage
Outstanding	12.81%
Good	67.21%
Requires Improvement	14.42%
Inadequate	4.70%

NEU membership

Field	Percentage
Yes	79%
No	21%

Which region of England do you work in currently (or most recently)? – Selected Choice

Field	Percentage
North East England	5%
North West England	14%
Yorkshire and the Humber	8%
West Midlands	10%
East Midlands	10%
Greater London	15%
East of England	9%
South West England	10%
South East England	18%
Other (please specify)	1%

APPENDIX 3

schedule of focus groups

APPENDIX 3

schedule of focus groups

Date	Members	Facilitator
4/04/2023	Teachers x 5	All
3/07/2023	Governors	Katie Kilian
5/07/2023	Governors	Graham Calvert
5/07/2023	Parents	Jane Perryman
6/07/2023	Parents	Alice Bradbury
4/04/2023	Primary teachers	Jane Perryman
3/07/2023	Primary MAT	Katie Kilian
4/07/2023	Primary LA	Alice Bradbury
4/04/2023	Secondary teachers	Graham Calvert
4/04/2023	Secondary teachers	Alice Bradbury
5/07/2023	Secondary/primary leaders	Graham Calvert

