



House of Commons
Education Committee

Ofsted's work with schools

First Report of Session 2023–24

Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 16 January 2024*

The Education Committee

The Education Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Education and its associated public bodies.

Current membership

[Robin Walker MP](#) (*Conservative, Worcester*) (Chair)

[Caroline Ansell MP](#) (*Conservative, Eastbourne*)

[Apsana Begum MP](#) (*Labour, Poplar and Limehouse*)

[Flick Drummond MP](#) (*Conservative, Meon Valley*)

[Anna Firth MP](#) (*Conservative, Southend West*)

[Nick Fletcher MP](#) (*Conservative, Don Valley*)

[Kim Johnson MP](#) (*Labour, Liverpool, Riverside*)

[Andrew Lewer MP](#) (*Conservative, Northampton South*)

[Ian Mearns MP](#) (*Labour, Gateshead*)

[Mohammad Yasin MP](#) (*Labour, Bedford*)

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select Committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2024. This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament Licence, which is published at www.parliament.uk/site-information/copyright-parliament.

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/education-Committee and in print by Order of the House.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Niamh Baker (Committee Operations Officer), Laura Daniels (Clerk), Bushra Islam (Committee researcher), Anastasia Lewis (Committee Specialist), Charlotte McDonough (Committee Specialist), Michael McGrath (Committee Specialist), Robert McQuade (Committee Operations Manager), Ffion Morgan (Second Clerk), Frederick Quinlan (Assistant Inquiry Manager (Apprentice)), Owen Sheppard (Senior Media Officer), Sian Woodward (Clerk).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Education Committee, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 2370; the Committee's email address is educom@parliament.uk.

You can follow the Committee on X (formerly Twitter) using [@CommonsEd](https://twitter.com/CommonsEd).

Contents

Summary	3
1 Ofsted as an organisation	6
Our inquiry	6
Ofsted's role	7
Response to criticism and to the death of Ruth Perry	8
2 The inspection process	11
Length and frequency of inspections	11
Inspection frequency	11
The length and depth of inspections	12
Notice period	13
Engagement with different groups in the inspection process	15
Engagement with parents	15
Engagement with pupils	16
Engagement with staff, governors and trustees	17
Inspector expertise and behaviour	18
Training materials	20
Inspector behaviour	21
3 Following an inspection	23
Ofsted reports and feedback	23
The single-word judgement	24
Consequences of inspection judgements	26
Impact on wellbeing of teachers and school leaders	27
Impact of judgements on schools and school improvement support	29
Support for school improvement	30
Complaints procedure	32
4 The scope of inspections	36
The Education Inspection Framework	36
Focus on the curriculum	36
Suitability for primary schools, small schools and special schools	38
Impact on workload	38
Disadvantage	41
Safeguarding	43
Inspection of multi-academy trusts	45

Conclusions and recommendations	48
Formal minutes	56
Witnesses	57
Published written evidence	58
List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament	65

Summary

Ofsted was established in 1992 as an independent inspectorate of schools and is now responsible for inspecting and regulating a wide range of education and care settings. The inspectorate has been the subject of intensified public scrutiny and debate over the past year, especially following the tragic death of Ruth Perry, headteacher at Caversham Primary School, who took her own life in January 2023 after the school was downgraded from 'outstanding' to 'inadequate'. This inquiry was not set up to look into the specific circumstances surrounding her case, but aimed to take a broader look at the way in which Ofsted inspects schools, and to develop recommendations for the new His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) to take forward this year. However, we have taken careful note of the issues raised in the coroner's report and in the public debate more widely, many of which relate to the issues we have heard about in this inquiry. The Committee will want regular updates on how Ofsted respond to the seven areas of concern set out in the coroner's report and we expect HMCI to report to this Committee on a six-monthly basis on Ofsted's progress in addressing these significant concerns. We extend our deepest condolences to Ruth Perry's family, friends and colleagues, and thank all of those who engaged with our inquiry at this difficult time.

There is broad agreement on the importance and value of an independent inspectorate in holding schools accountable and assessing their strengths and weaknesses. However, we heard strong concerns among many about the way in which the system is currently working. We heard that Ofsted has lost trust and credibility among many in the teaching profession and that it is perceived to have become defensive and unwilling to respond to criticism. The appointment of the new HMCI provides a crucial opportunity to reset and restore these relations and doing so should be a key priority for Sir Martyn Oliver in his first year in post.

The inspection process

There is a widespread view that school inspections are not currently carried out in sufficient length or depth to cover the full range of areas of a school's work. As a result, there is a risk that inspections are not giving an accurate picture of a school's performance. We accept that the resourcing of inspections is constrained by budget limitations, but think that, in the long term, Ofsted should be funded to carry out more in-depth inspections. In the shorter term, this could be achieved without the need for additional funding by reducing the frequency of inspections for some schools.

The short notice period also appears to be causing operational difficulties for many schools, particularly small schools. While we do not believe that schools should be given several weeks to prepare for inspections, we think there is a case to be made for extending the notice period slightly, to reduce the pressure on school leaders, and let schools know in which term they might anticipate an inspection. Ofsted should also explore ways in which it can improve its engagement with parents, pupils, governors, and trustees before and during the inspection process, to ensure that the voices of all groups are fully heard and taken into account.

We heard some concerning evidence regarding lack of relevant expertise among inspectors, and reports of poor behaviour by some inspectors. There appears to be a particular problem with inspectors lacking relevant experience in primary schools and in specialist education settings. This is exacerbated by high turnover among His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs). A high-quality inspection regime must ensure that inspectors have sufficient expertise in the phase and subject which they are inspecting. At a minimum, Ofsted must ensure that the lead inspector always has expertise in the relevant type of school and, in larger teams, that a majority of members of the team have the relevant expertise.

Following an inspection

The short and formulaic nature of inspection reports is limiting the extent to which they are useful to schools, and there is mixed evidence that parents find the reports useful despite being their intended audience. Alongside increasing the length and depth of inspections, Ofsted should also increase the length and depth of analysis in inspection reports to ensure that they are a useful tool for both schools and parents.

One of the most strongly criticised aspects of inspection is the single-word overall effectiveness judgement. We heard evidence that this does not capture the full detail of a school's work, and that it is a key cause of stress and anxiety for teachers and school leaders. While we recognise that the grades are closely linked to many Department policies and that any changes will require broader reform of the system, the extent of the criticism we have heard suggests that change is needed. Ofsted and the Department should work together to develop an alternative to the current single-word grade, looking at other jurisdictions to explore what has worked well outside the English context.

The intervention measures linked to the single-word grades are putting further stress on schools by creating a 'high-stakes' system of inspections. In particular, there is an overwhelming fear among headteachers of losing their job following a negative inspection outcome, which has been exacerbated by the extension of academy orders to schools with two consecutive judgements of 'requires improvement'. While there must be consequences for schools which are performing badly, the Department should assess whether this extension is proportionate, and publish guidance setting out the criteria by which decisions on academy orders are made. The Department and Ofsted should ensure that there is strong support available to school leaders during and following an inspection, and Ofsted must publish a clear policy, and train inspectors, on their approach to dealing with distress among school leaders during an inspection. There must also be a review of the support available to schools to help them improve following a negative inspection judgement, and proper accountability and scrutiny of the work of Regional Directors.

Ofsted's complaints procedure has come under heavy criticism, with many suggestions that the system amounts to the inspectorate "marking its own homework". Ofsted's proposed changes to the process are welcome, but do not go far enough to alleviate the concerns expressed. Ofsted and the Department should explore the option of setting up an independent body with the powers to investigate inspection judgements, and schools must be allowed to gain access to the evidence base used to reach a judgement when making a complaint.

The scope of inspections

We heard broad support for the 2019 Education Inspection Framework's (EIF) move away from focusing on data, but there appear to be some problems with how the framework has worked in practice. In particular, we heard concerns that it is less suitable for primary schools and small schools, and that it has generated additional workload for schools. Ofsted should review the implementation of the framework in its planned evaluation this year, and work with the Department to undertake a programme of research to fully understand the causes of inspection-related workload pressure. Ofsted must also ensure that inspectors are taking a school's size and context into account in reports and judgements, to reflect and recognise the challenges faced by schools with high numbers of pupils from disadvantaged groups.

There have been many suggestions that safeguarding should be inspected separately from routine school inspections. Safeguarding is an essential aspect of every school's work, and we think there is a role for Ofsted in ensuring that schools are identifying and acting on serious safeguarding concerns. However, we agree that there is merit in schools being audited more regularly for compliance with safeguarding procedures and recommend that the Department consult on the best approach to this. We have also heard the concerns about the policy of judging schools 'inadequate' solely on safeguarding issues, following the inquest into the death of Ruth Perry, and suggest that Ofsted should review its policy on this and ensure that schools are only being judged 'inadequate' in cases where they are fundamentally failing to keep children safe.

There have been repeated calls from this Committee and others for Ofsted to be able to inspect multi-academy trusts, which the Department has so far failed to deliver. Given the significant role that trusts now play in the school system, this must be delivered as a matter of urgency. The Department must authorise Ofsted to develop a framework for the inspection of trusts and ensure that Ofsted is appropriately resourced to develop their expertise in this area.

1 Ofsted as an organisation

Our inquiry

1. This inquiry was launched in June 2023 to look at Ofsted's inspection of schools, with the aim of providing recommendations for the incoming His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI), Sir Martyn Oliver, to take forward in 2024. We received almost 300 written evidence submissions and held three oral evidence sessions with a range of witnesses. We appointed Adrian Gray, school improvement consultant and former Ofsted His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), as a specialist adviser to the inquiry, and we are grateful for the support and insight he has provided to the Committee. In our final oral evidence session, we took evidence from the outgoing HMCI, Amanda Spielman, and from the Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, then Minister of State for Schools. We also held two informal engagement roundtables, one with teachers and school leaders and one with current and former Ofsted inspectors and His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs). We have published anonymised summaries of these discussions on our website.¹

2. Ofsted has been the subject of intensified public scrutiny and debate, especially following the tragic death of Ruth Perry, headteacher at Caversham Primary School, who took her own life in January 2023 after her school was downgraded from 'outstanding' to 'inadequate'. The inquest into her death concluded that the Ofsted inspection had contributed to her taking her own life.² It is important to be clear that our inquiry was not set up in order to look into the specific circumstances surrounding this case. Additionally, as the inquest was underway for much of the timeframe for this inquiry, we did not accept and publish evidence concerning the circumstances of Ruth Perry's death, or make reference to the case in our oral evidence sessions. This is due to the sub judice resolution agreed by Parliament, which is in place to prevent Parliament from appearing to influence the work of the courts.³

3. A separate inquiry into the future of school inspection, Beyond Ofsted, was also set up earlier this year to look more broadly at alternatives to the current inspection system. This inquiry was sponsored by the National Education Union (NEU) and chaired by Lord Knight of Weymouth, both of whom also appeared as witnesses in our inquiry.⁴ Our inquiry aimed to take a different approach to that of the Beyond Ofsted inquiry, looking at the immediate challenges that the new HMCI will face and the changes that he should implement when taking up his post. However, we have taken careful note of the issues raised in the coroner's report, the Beyond Ofsted inquiry, and in the public debate more widely, many of which relate to the issues we have heard about in this inquiry. We therefore hope that our work will be timely for Ofsted and for the education sector as a whole, and that our recommendations will go some way towards addressing the issues raised and result in tangible improvements to the system. We would like to extend our deep condolences to Ruth Perry's family, friends and colleagues, and thank all of those who engaged with our inquiry at this difficult time.

1 Education Select Committee ([OWS0298](#)); Education Select Committee ([OWS0299](#))

2 Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, [Regulation 28: Report to Prevent Future Deaths](#), December 2023

3 House of Commons, [Standing Orders - Public Business](#), 2023, Appendix: Matters sub judice

4 Beyond Ofsted, [The launch of the Beyond Ofsted inquiry](#), accessed 18 December 2023

Ofsted's role

4. Ofsted was established in 1992 as an independent inspectorate of schools, replacing the previous system of inspections and thematic survey work undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) nationally.⁵ It is now responsible for inspecting and regulating a wide range of education and care settings including schools, colleges, childcare providers, initial teacher training, apprenticeship providers, and children's social care services.⁶

5. Our predecessor Committee held an inquiry into the role and performance of Ofsted in 2011. They concluded that Ofsted had “grown too big to discharge its functions as efficiently as smaller, more focussed and specialist organisations might” and recommended that it be divided into two new organisations—one for education and one for children's social care.⁷ This question was not within the scope of our inquiry. However, we received some evidence echoing this finding, most notably from Sir Michael Wilshaw, the former Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI), who told us that the remit of the HMCI was too broad and that Ofsted needed to be “slimmed down”.⁸

6. Overall, we heard broad agreement on the role that an independent inspectorate plays in the education sector. In the main, the organisations, schools, teachers, school leaders and other individuals who gave written and oral evidence to this inquiry agreed that schools needed to be held accountable for their work, and that it was important to have some form of external assessment to identify areas of strength and weakness for schools and to provide information to parents. We also heard that the quality of education had improved significantly since Ofsted was established:⁹ Sir Michael Wilshaw told us that standards in schools in the 1970s and 1980s were “shocking” and that Ofsted had “played a big part in raising standards in our schools”.¹⁰ The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, then Minister of State for Schools, also highlighted that standards had risen since 2010, with England's performance in international education surveys rising over that period.¹¹

7. However, the bulk of the evidence we received expressed strong concerns about the way the system is currently working and suggested that changes are now needed. There were suggestions that inspections do “more harm than good” and that Ofsted presents a “barrier to genuine school improvement”.¹² Tom Middlehurst, Assessment and Inspection Specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), told us that Ofsted had “lost the trust of the profession” in recent years and that there was a need for the incoming HMCI to listen to the concerns of the sector.¹³ In our roundtable with teachers and school leaders the word “terror” was frequently mentioned in connection with Ofsted, and we were told that “the credibility of the organisation has taken a big hit with teachers and the profession in recent times.”¹⁴ In particular, we heard much about the impact of Ofsted

5 Adrian Elliott, [Twenty years inspecting English schools – Ofsted 1992–2012](#), Research and Information on State Education Review, November 2012

6 Ofsted, [About us](#), accessed 5 December 2023

7 Education Committee, Second Report of Session 2010–11, [The role and performance of Ofsted](#), HC 570-I

8 [Q112](#)

9 Mr Andrew David Cox (Teacher of English at Tudor Grange Academy, Solihull) ([OWS0083](#)); John Ross (Head at Great Wood School) ([OWS0099](#))

10 [Q113](#)

11 [Q175](#)

12 NAHT ([OWS0098](#)); National Education Union ([OWS0228](#))

13 [Q28](#)

14 Education Select Committee ([OWS0298](#))

on the workload and wellbeing of teachers and school leaders, and fear about the 'high-stakes' consequences of inspection judgements. These issues will be discussed in more detail in later chapters of this report.

Response to criticism and to the death of Ruth Perry

8. We heard that there is a strong perception that Ofsted as an organisation is “defensive” and unwilling to listen to and respond to criticism.¹⁵ This was raised several times in a roundtable we held with current and former Ofsted inspectors and His Majesty’s Inspectors (HMIs). Participants told us that Ofsted “operates to defend itself” and suggested that the general tone of the inspectorate in recent years in response to criticism was that they were “looking in the other direction”.¹⁶

9. In June 2023 Ofsted introduced some changes to the inspection process for schools in response to some of the issues raised following the death of Ruth Perry. These included: returning more quickly to schools judged ‘inadequate’ solely on safeguarding grounds; launching a consultation on the complaints system; providing schools with more clarity as to the year they are likely to be inspected; clarifying that headteachers can decide which colleagues to share provisional judgements with; and referring to the ‘school’ in reports rather than to individuals.¹⁷ Some of these will be discussed in more detail in the relevant sections of this report. In their written evidence to this inquiry, which was submitted in July 2023 before the inquest commenced, Ofsted stated that they had “thought carefully about what more [they] can do to alleviate anxieties” and that they hoped that these measures would “help reassure the sector that we continue to listen, reflect, and respond.”¹⁸

10. Amanda Spielman, then HMCI, told us that she “absolutely” recognised the concerns raised over the past year and highlighted that many of the concerns raised, such as those relating to the consequences of inspections and the school improvement support available, related to Government policy rather than to Ofsted’s responsibilities.¹⁹ The Department for Education stated in their written submission that the accountability system, including inspection, should “develop and evolve”, and that the Department “continues to engage with, and listen to, views from the sector”. They described the changes put in place by Ofsted as a “positive step forward” and stated that “it is right that there should be continual reflection and where appropriate, further change”.²⁰

11. The inquest into the death of Ruth Perry concluded on 7 December 2023, and found that the Ofsted inspection of Caversham Primary School had contributed to her death. The coroner set out seven key areas of concern around the inspection:²¹

- The policy around the ‘inadequate’ overall effectiveness judgement being applied to schools solely because of having ineffective safeguarding processes, in comparison to other schools deemed inadequate in all areas

15 Education Select Committee ([OWS0299](#))

16 Education Select Committee ([OWS0299](#))

17 Ofsted, [Changes made to school inspections](#), June 2023

18 Ofsted ([OWS0259](#))

19 [Q117](#)

20 Department for Education ([OWS0233](#))

21 Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, [Regulation 28: Report to Prevent Future Deaths](#), December 2023

- A lack of training for inspectors on dealing with distress and the absence of a policy on pausing inspections due to distress of a school leader
- The absence of a path to raise concerns during the inspection
- The confidentiality requirement placed on a headteacher after an inspection
- Timescales for report publication
- The lack of a learning review conducted by Ofsted following the case
- A lack of clarity about the Department's expansion of wellbeing support.

Following the inquest, the coroner issued a Regulation 28 Prevention of Future Deaths report²² to Ofsted and the Department for Education.²³ We note that this is the first Regulation 28 report issued relating to the conduct of an Ofsted inspection.

12. In response to the initial inquest findings, Amanda Spielman made a statement apologising for the distress caused to Ruth Perry and stating that Ofsted would “work hard to address” the areas of concern as soon as possible. She announced some changes that would be made immediately, including:²⁴

- Developing training for all inspectors on recognising and responding to visible signs of anxiety.
- Delaying inspections for one day to bring lead inspectors together to discuss the issue of anxiety and what to do when inspections need to be paused.
- Clarifying in the inspection handbook that school leaders can be accompanied by colleagues in meetings with inspectors, and that they can share inspection outcomes with colleagues, family, medical advisers and their wider support group, before they are shared with parents.
- Providing all schools with a number to call if they have concerns about their inspection.

13. In September, we held a pre-appointment hearing with Sir Martyn Oliver, where he told us that his first priority in the role would be to listen to and understand the concerns of the sector. He acknowledged that Ofsted was sometimes perceived to be “combative or cold” and said that the inspectorate needed to be “empathetic” and listen to all the services it inspects.²⁵ On taking up his post in January, he announced that school inspections would begin later in January than usual, in order for inspectors to receive mental health awareness training, and that a rolling programme of further mental health awareness training for all inspectors would be introduced. He also announced that he would embark on a “Big Listen” to hear from parents and professionals from all the sectors that Ofsted inspects and regulates.²⁶ Unions including the ASCL, NEU, and National Association of

22 This happens under paragraph 7 of [Schedule 5](#), Coroners and Justice Act 2009, which provides coroners with the duty to make reports to a person, organisation, local authority or government department or agency where the coroner believes that action should be taken to prevent future deaths.

23 Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, [Regulation 28: Report to Prevent Future Deaths](#), December 2023

24 Ofsted, [Statement from His Majesty's Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman](#), December 2023

25 [Oral evidence taken on 5 September 2023](#), HC 1800, Q2

26 Ofsted, [Sir Martyn Oliver begins term at Ofsted with mental health awareness training for inspectors](#), January 2024

Head Teachers (NAHT) responded positively to these announcements, with the NAHT describing them as a “positive signal”, but suggesting that further steps for longer-term reform were still needed.²⁷

14. **There is general agreement among teachers, school leaders, parents, teaching unions and other organisations on the important role that an independent inspectorate plays, and on the need for strong accountability for schools. However, it is clear that relations between Ofsted and the school sector, teachers, and leaders have become extremely strained and that trust in the inspectorate is worryingly low. There is a perception that Ofsted has become more defensive of its practices in recent years and is unwilling to listen and be open to change. The appointment of the new HMCI provides a crucial opportunity to reset and restore these relations and doing so should be a key priority for the new HMCI in his first year in post. We welcome Sir Martyn Oliver’s proposal to conduct a “Big Listen” with the sector and hope that this will lead to tangible changes.**

15. **Following the tragic death of Ruth Perry, Ofsted has taken some steps to address the concerns raised about the school inspection process. The changes announced are welcome but these announcements, in and of themselves, do not appear to have alleviated concerns and restored Ofsted’s relations with the sector. Ofsted must ensure that they are the beginning, not the end, of a process of listening and reforming. Ofsted must also give careful consideration to the coroner’s judgement and the Prevention of Future Deaths report issued following the inquest into the death of Ruth Perry.**

16. *In his “Big Listen” with the sector, the new HMCI must ensure that he is listening to a wide range of views, including those of teachers, school and trust leaders, governors, parents, and pupils. In doing this, he must ensure that Ofsted is genuinely open to engage and willing to reflect on where it needs to improve.*

17. *The serious nature of a Prevention of Future Deaths report will not be lost on the new HMCI. We expect him to make every effort to address the coroner’s report fully. Ofsted should review the seven areas of concern set out in the coroner’s report following the inquest into the death of Ruth Perry and put in place changes to ensure that each of these have been addressed as a matter of urgency. They must monitor the impact of the changes they have already put in place and commit to making further changes if these have not been shown to have a meaningful impact. Going forward we expect HMCI to report to this Committee on a six-monthly basis on Ofsted’s progress in addressing these significant concerns.*

27 National Association of Head Teachers, [Delay to Ofsted inspections for mental health training ‘positive’, says NAHT](#), January 2024; Association of School and College Leaders, [ASCL comment on pause to Ofsted inspections](#), January 2024; National Education Union, [Sir Martyn Oliver on Ofsted inspections](#), January 2024

2 The inspection process

Length and frequency of inspections

Inspection frequency

18. Ofsted carries out four different types of school inspections: graded, ungraded, urgent, and monitoring inspections.²⁸ Graded inspections (previously known as section 5 inspections) are the most common form of inspections. They use Ofsted's full framework and grade the school for its overall effectiveness, assessed against Ofsted's key judgement grade descriptors. Ungraded inspections (carried out under section 8 of the 2005 Education Act) do not result in individual graded judgements, but focus on determining whether the school remains the same grade as it was at its previous graded inspection.²⁹ In 2022/23, Ofsted carried out 3,720 graded inspections, 3,260 ungraded inspections of good and outstanding schools, and 260 urgent or monitoring inspections.³⁰

19. In 2012 the Department for Education made schools judged 'outstanding' exempt from routine inspection, in order to reduce the perceived burden of inspection and provide greater freedom to highly performing schools. The exemption was lifted in 2020 and inspections of these schools resumed in 2021/22.³¹ In 2022/23, Ofsted inspected 763 previously exempt schools, of which 21% retained their 'outstanding' grade, 66% were downgraded to 'good' and 13% were judged 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate'.³² Ofsted is aiming to inspect all previously exempt schools by the end of July 2025.³³

20. Currently, Ofsted is legally required to inspect schools every five years, or seven years if a school's most recent inspection was before 4 May 2021. Ofsted's policy is to inspect every school judged 'outstanding' or 'good' within four years, and to inspect schools judged 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' every two and a half years. Ofsted state that they use risk assessment to select schools for inspection and determine whether a school should receive a graded or ungraded inspection. This includes: analysing data from the Department and school workforce census; the views of parents, including any qualifying complaints about the school; pupil mobility; and statutory warning notices.³⁴

21. The evidence submitted to this inquiry expressed varying views as to the regularity of inspections, with only limited consensus. Some submissions suggested that more frequent inspections focusing on a narrower range of issues would lessen anxiety around inspections,³⁵ while others highlighted that frequent inspections of schools judged to be less than 'good' placed a burden on leaders and made it more difficult to implement

28 Ofsted, [Summary table of Ofsted state-funded school inspections](#), July 2022

29 Ofsted, [School inspection handbook](#), September 2023

30 Ofsted, [The Annual Report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2022/23](#), November 2023

31 Ofsted, [A return to inspection: the story \(so far\) of previously exempt outstanding schools](#), November 2022

32 Ofsted, [Schools commentary: the emerging picture from 2022/23 inspections](#), November 2023

33 Ofsted, [A return to inspection: the story \(so far\) of previously exempt outstanding schools](#), November 2022

34 Ofsted, [School inspection handbook](#), September 2023

35 SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#)); The Surrey Specialist School Phase Council ([OWS0202](#)); Schools North East ([OWS0244](#)); EDSK think tank ([OWS0211](#)); Adrian Lyons ([OWS0042](#)); Outcomes First Group ([OWS0262](#))

changes in order to improve.³⁶ In his pre-appointment hearing with the Committee, Sir Martyn Oliver, the incoming His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI), said that he thought the current frequency of inspections was “about the right frame”, but that he recognised that this was constrained by budget and workforce availability.³⁷

22. Witnesses discussed the possibility of reducing the frequency of inspections for highly performing schools and using more risk assessment to identify those which needed to be inspected. Sir Michael Wilshaw, the former HMCI, suggested that routine inspection of every school may not be necessary, and that “there is so much data out there that we could identify the schools that need focus”.³⁸ Lord Knight of Weymouth highlighted that the exemption for outstanding schools “did not go so well”, but agreed that “an element of risk-based differentiation”, such as through parent and pupil surveys, would be appropriate.³⁹ Amanda Spielman, then HMCI, suggested that three to five years was broadly the right frequency, and stated that:

One of the things we learned from the “outstanding” exemption was that it is a problem to have too long in between. On going back and re-inspecting outstanding schools, we have found quite a lot that schools have become just a bit detached from what the rest of the world had been learning, seeing and recognising [...] I also think that sometimes long gaps can be more stressful and create more time for anxiety to build up.⁴⁰

The length and depth of inspections

23. Inspections usually last two days and take place from 8am to 6pm. Ungraded inspections of small primary schools with fewer than 150 pupils will usually last for one day. The size of the inspection team varies according to the size and nature of the school.⁴¹

24. Much of the evidence we heard expressed the view that inspections were too short and that there was too much material to fully cover in two days. Written submissions described inspections as “rushed”, “pressured”, and “intense” and said that the timetable did not allow for detailed discussions and consideration of the full range of evidence.⁴² Ian Hartwright, Head of Policy at the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), said that the framework was “overstuffed” and that inspectors “struggle to gather the evidence and to do so securely in the time available to them”;⁴³ Carole Willis, Chief Executive of the National Foundation for Educational Research, said that it was “very challenging” for inspectors to cover the framework in two days.⁴⁴ We also heard some suggestions that this timeframe caused stress for the inspectors themselves, as it required them to work

36 Dr Bernardita Munoz-Chereau (Lecturer at UCL-Institute of Education, Center Educational Leadership); Mrs Jo Hutchinson (Director for SEND and Additional Needs at EPI); Professor Melanie Ehren (Professor in the Governance of Schools and Education systems at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands) ([OWS0246](#))

37 [Oral evidence taken on 5 September 2023](#), HC 1800, Q26

38 [Q91](#)

39 [Q91](#)

40 [Q145](#)

41 Ofsted, [School inspection handbook](#), September 2023

42 The Surrey Specialist School Phase Council ([OWS0202](#)); Schools North East ([OWS0244](#)); Confederation of School Trusts ([OWS0257](#)); Fair Education Alliance Youth Steering Group ([OWS0261](#)); The Free Churches Group of England and Wales ([OWS0264](#)); Greene ([OWS0069](#)); David Jefferson ([OWS0144](#)); Norwood Primary School, Southport ([OWS0223](#))

43 [Q3](#)

44 [Q60](#)

long days to complete the necessary paperwork, adding to the sense of pressure during an inspection.⁴⁵ Sir Michael Wilshaw said that it would not be possible to increase the length or frequency of inspections “unless the budget is doubled or trebled”, suggesting that the only way in which to increase the length and depth of inspections within the current budget would be to “move away from routine inspection of every school”.⁴⁶

25. Amanda Spielman told the Committee that Ofsted “get a good picture of what is going on” within the timeframe, but stated that “in an unconstrained world, I would probably want to do something more in line with what other inspectorates do—that is, typically, a week, or the inside of a week, and with a bigger team”.⁴⁷ Ofsted also referred to funding constraints in their written evidence to this inquiry, highlighting that Ofsted’s spending had fallen in real terms by approximately 40% since 2005–06 while its remit had expanded, and that there were approximately 75 schools per inspector in England, four times the European average of around 18 schools per inspector.⁴⁸ The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, then Minister of State for Schools, stated that the current approach was “reliable” and highlighted the need both to balance budgets and to limit the pressure put on schools, stating that longer inspections would be “a massive intrusion into the day-to-day life of the school.”⁴⁹

26. There is broad agreement that inspections are not currently long enough to cover the full framework and give an accurate picture of a school’s performance. We accept that, in a context of finite funding, any increase to the length of inspections would require a decrease in their frequency. We are clear that we do not wish to return to the previous exemption for outstanding schools, which stayed in place for too long. On balance, we recognise that there is a case to be made for a small reduction in the frequency of inspection in order to increase the value, length and depth of inspections.

27. In the shorter term, the Department should work with Ofsted to enable the inspectorate to reduce the frequency of inspections to approximately five to six years for ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ schools and three to four years for schools judged ‘requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’. This should be supported by better use of risk assessment to identify schools in most need of inspection. Ofsted should use the additional resource released by this change to enable inspections to be carried out in more depth.

28. In the longer term, the Department should support Ofsted in making a strong case to the Treasury for additional funding to carry out more in-depth inspections, without compromising on frequency or the principle that all schools are subject to periodic inspection. Funding for Ofsted should not be seen to be in competition with school funding, and any additional funding for the inspectorate must not result in less funding being made available for schools.

Notice period

29. Ofsted will usually contact the school to give notice of the inspection between 9.30am and 2pm on the school day before the inspection. However, Ofsted has powers to undertake

45 The Surrey Specialist School Phase Council ([OWS0202](#)); Surrey Primary Headteachers’ Phase Council, on behalf of all Surrey Primary Schools and their headteachers ([OWS0194](#))

46 [Q96](#)

47 [Q115](#)

48 Ofsted ([OWS0259](#))

49 [Q182](#)

no-notice inspections in certain circumstances, for example where serious concerns have been reported. Inspectors hold a preparatory telephone call with the headteacher to discuss both practical arrangements for the inspection, and the school's progress since the last inspection. Ofsted also requires the school to make certain information available to inspectors by 8am on the day of inspection, including strategic and operational documents, records of attendance and behaviour, and safeguarding information.⁵⁰

30. Much of the evidence we heard suggested that the short notice period causes practical problems for schools and adds to the stress on school leaders and school governors. Ian Hartwright told the Committee that the notice period is causing “enormous operational difficulties in schools”, as school leaders were worried about being away at meetings or school trips when an inspection was announced, and that heads were “carrying a grab bag full of Ofsted documents with them” in order to be prepared for the introductory telephone call with Ofsted.⁵¹ The National Association of Small Schools highlighted that this was particularly difficult for small schools, as “one class out could mean half of the school and two thirds of staff”.⁵² We heard many references to school leaders experiencing particular stress from Monday to Wednesday, as this is the timeframe during which inspections are announced: Tom Middlehurst, Assessment and Inspection Specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), described a school leader's week as “one of two halves”, with Thursday and Friday being the days when they could “actually get on with the business of leadership”.⁵³

31. Sir Michael Wilshaw explained that, under his tenure, the notice period had been reduced from between two and three days as there had been “what was colloquially known as the wet wall syndrome or the wet paint syndrome. If you gave schools too much notice, all sorts of things happened that did not happen before and we did not see schools as they really were.”⁵⁴ Amanda Spielman described the current notice period as “a sort of compromise that has evolved over the years” between those who would like no-notice inspections and those who would like longer notice periods. She stated that longer periods of notice had been shown to add to the pressure on schools, as “staff have sometimes been worked flat out for many weeks to have everything absolutely perfect to an inhuman degree”, and that the current period meant “having one intense evening, rather than seven weeks of their life.”⁵⁵ This was echoed in our roundtable with teachers and school leaders, who said that pressure increased significantly once the inspection had been announced.⁵⁶ We did not receive many suggestions of what the notice period should look like, but some participants in our roundtables with teachers, school leaders, and current and former inspectors suggested that five working days would be a more appropriate length of time.⁵⁷

32. In June 2023, Ofsted published a blog setting out more detail about the year in which schools were likely to be inspected, in order to provide more clarity to schools.⁵⁸ Ian Hartwright described this as “a little bit helpful” but said that the timetable was “fiendishly complicated”, and that it would be more helpful for schools to understand in which term

50 Ofsted, [School inspection handbook](#), September 2023

51 [Q10](#)

52 National Association of Small Schools ([OWS0192](#))

53 [Q4](#)

54 [Q96](#)

55 [Q147](#)

56 Education Select Committee ([OWS0298](#))

57 Education Select Committee ([OWS0298](#)); Education Select Committee ([OWS0299](#))

58 Ofsted, [When will my school be inspected?](#), June 2023

or half term they would be inspected.⁵⁹ The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) recommended that schools should be told in which academic year they were likely to be inspected.⁶⁰

33. We have heard a range of views as to the appropriate notice period for inspections and accept that this is an issue that is difficult to fully resolve. While we do not believe that there should be a return to the much longer notice periods of the past, the current notice period appears to be causing operational difficulties in many schools, particularly smaller schools, and creating additional stress and anxiety for school leaders.

34. Ofsted should consider the case for a small increase in the notice period given to schools—we heard suggestions that around five working days would be appropriate. The notice period should remain relatively short in order to limit the pressure on leaders and avoid a situation where schools are spending a long time preparing for inspection, but should be long enough to ensure that waiting for an inspection does not cause undue difficulties in the way schools operate. Ofsted should also consider whether schools could be given a specific term in which to anticipate an inspection.

35. Ofsted should consider whether smaller schools could be given a longer notice period or greater flexibility around deferrals to take into account the particular operational challenges they face during inspections.

Engagement with different groups in the inspection process

Engagement with parents

36. Schools are required by law to notify parents of registered pupils when a graded inspection is announced. Ofsted provides schools with a letter to pass on to parents and encourages them to use other methods such as text message, if available. Inspectors also have a statutory duty to “have regard to the views of parents and other relevant persons” on graded inspections. Inspectors review the evidence from Ofsted’s Parent View Questionnaire, which parents can complete at any time to provide feedback on their child’s school, along with any other evidence such as surveys or serious issues raised by individual parents.⁶¹

37. Parentkind stated that an “accountability gap exists between parents wanting to be involved and consulted during the inspection process and what parents perceive in actuality”, highlighting that their survey of parents found that 86% of parents agreed that Ofsted should consult parents, but that less than a quarter (24%) felt that this actually happened in practice.⁶² The National Network of Parent Carer Forums stated that parents are concerned about being potentially identifiable from their responses to the questionnaire, and that they do not feel there is enough scope to provide detailed answers, particularly around SEND provision.⁶³

59 [Q10](#)

60 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) ([OWS0272](#))

61 Ofsted, [School inspection handbook](#), September 2023

62 Parentkind ([OWS0237](#))

63 National Network of Parent Carer Forums ([OWS0157](#))

38. Jason Elsom, Chief Executive of Parentkind, suggested that parents who had had negative experiences of school themselves would be less likely to have a positive perception of Ofsted, and may be less likely to engage with the online survey.⁶⁴ He also suggested that the short timeframe of inspections was a barrier to participation, stating:

The short-term drop-in nature of Ofsted inspections does not give you the ability to ensure that you have parents from both ends of the spectrum and every point in between giving their voice and representing the whole body of parents and children.⁶⁵

This was echoed by Place2Be, who stated in their written evidence that the surveys in their current form were “an ineffective tool”, as parents may not have the time or capacity to complete the survey at short notice.⁶⁶

39. Ofsted's most recent survey of parents in 2021 found that 30% of parents whose child's school had been inspected in the last two years said that they had had the opportunity to contribute during the last inspection, and that 28% said that they had not. A quarter (26%) of parents said that they had completed a Parent View survey, either at the time of inspection (18%) or outside of the inspection (8%). 29% said they did not know what Parent View was.⁶⁷ Ofsted data shows that response rates to Parent View are low, with an average response rate of 22%, and Ofsted highlights that “any conclusions should be made with caution”.⁶⁸

40. Sir Michael Wilshaw suggested that parents should be more involved in the feedback process at the end of an inspection, suggesting that inspectors should hold meetings with parents to discuss the findings of the inspection before the report is published.⁶⁹ However, Amanda Spielman expressed the view that this could add to the stress on school leaders and that parents should not be told of a provisional judgement, as the school needed time to be able to challenge elements of the inspection before it was presented to parents. She also highlighted that this would require additional funding, as inspectors would need time to return to the school for the meeting.⁷⁰

Engagement with pupils

41. Ofsted gathers the views of pupils in inspections through online questionnaires, which are sent to the school when the inspection is announced. Pupils are expected to complete the questionnaires by 3pm on the first day of the inspection. Inspectors may also hold informal meetings with pupils without staff present to gather their views.⁷¹

42. Some written evidence submissions suggested that the short time in which pupils have to complete the survey, and the fact that schools are not required to help pupils complete it or ensure it reaches absent pupils, limits its effectiveness.⁷² The Fair Education Alliance Youth Steering Group said that this meant that students felt that their voice

64 [Q53](#)

65 [Q40](#)

66 Place2Be ([OWS0234](#))

67 Ofsted, [Parents Annual Survey 2021](#), April 2021

68 Ofsted, [Parent View management information as at 4 September 2023](#), October 2023

69 [Q83](#)

70 [Qq126–127](#)

71 Ofsted, [School inspection handbook](#), September 2023

72 Fair Education Alliance Youth Steering Group ([OWS0261](#)); Place2Be ([OWS0234](#))

was disregarded and that there was a “disconnect between inspections and student opinion”.⁷³ Charlotte Rainer, Coalition Lead for the Children and Young People’s Mental Health Coalition, said that young people are not always aware of the surveys or given the opportunity to participate.⁷⁴ She suggested that Ofsted should look beyond surveys in its engagement with pupils to ensure that all pupils, particularly those with SEND, have the opportunity to feed in their views, saying:

I think it comes down to making reasonable adjustments to ensure that they are able to be involved. If a young person finds being in school really stressful—we know that neurodivergent children are more likely to have school-based avoidance—is there another way we could communicate with them? Could we do an online session that facilitates that? I think it is just making sure that we identify those young persons’ needs and then make reasonable adjustments to ensure that they can partake in those sessions. It might not necessarily be talking; they could be writing things down.⁷⁵

43. We also received some suggestions that schools “cherry-pick” high-performing pupils to meet with inspectors, while ensuring that other pupils do not come into contact with inspectors by planning their day accordingly, or even sending them home.⁷⁶ Some submissions also stated that inspectors did not appear to be genuinely interested in gathering pupils’ views, or that they would guide the discussion to suit a particular agenda.⁷⁷ Sam Henson, Director of Policy and Communications at the National Governance Association (NGA), said that the approach inspectors took to interactions with pupils was “mixed”, which the NGA was “a little bit concerned” about.⁷⁸ However, we also heard some positive examples about engagement with pupils: one teacher we spoke to said that, in a recent inspection, there was a “real focus on speaking with young people”, which meant that inspectors saw a fuller picture of the school.⁷⁹

Engagement with staff, governors and trustees

44. During an inspection, inspectors will meet early career teachers (ECTs) and gather their views on how the school is supporting their development. They also gather the views of staff in the school through online questionnaires, which are sent to the school by Ofsted along with the pupil survey. Inspectors will usually meet the school governors or members of the trustee board during an inspection, without school leaders being present.⁸⁰

45. We heard some suggestions that inspectors should engage more with governors and trustees during inspections. The NGA stated that those responsible for governance are “not provided with sufficient time to engage in discussion with inspectors”, with meetings varying in length between 15 and 45 minutes.⁸¹ Sam Henson told the Committee that governance is “reducing in visibility” in inspections, and that NGA research had found

73 Fair Education Alliance Youth Steering Group ([OWS0261](#))

74 [Q38](#)

75 [Q47](#)

76 National Network of Parent Carer Forums ([OWS0157](#)); Fair Education Alliance Youth Steering Group ([OWS0261](#))

77 National Education Union ([OWS0228](#)); Cheshire East Secondary Headteachers Association, The Macclesfield Academy ([OWS0256](#))

78 [Q48](#)

79 Education Select Committee ([OWS0298](#))

80 Ofsted, [School inspection handbook](#), September 2023

81 National Governance Association ([OWS0193](#))

that, of the reports they looked at, a third did not mention governance at all.⁸² The Confederation of School Trusts stated that there are “reports of inconsistencies in how inspectors engage with trust boards and local governing committees” and that Ofsted should “provide clearer and more consistent engagement with trust staff”.⁸³ However, Steve Rollett, Deputy Chief Executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, also highlighted the difficulty of being able to engage chairs of trust boards of large multi-academy trusts, who may be responsible for up to 50 schools and would be unlikely to be able to provide the same level of detailed feedback as the chair of a small trust or a local authority maintained school.⁸⁴

46. The short timeframe of inspections does not allow for in-depth engagement with different groups in the inspection process. While we do not believe that Ofsted should introduce feedback meetings with parents following an inspection, there is a case to be made for improving the ways in which the inspectorate engages with different groups, as long as this does not give undue weight to small but vocal groups of parents or pupils. Better engagement outside the inspection process would also be highly valuable and would support Ofsted to better assess which schools are in most urgent need of inspection. We are also concerned at the reduction in focus on school governance in Ofsted reports.

47. Ofsted should explore ways in which it can improve its engagement with parents, pupils, governors, and trustees before and during the inspection process, ensuring that opportunities are well-communicated and that those with additional needs are supported to engage. Our previous recommendation to extend the notice period would also help to address this. In particular, they must ensure that inspectors are fully engaging with governors and trustees during an inspection, and that governance, including the quality and regularity of engagement with parents, is sufficiently covered in the final report.

48. Ofsted should introduce regular surveys of parents, pupils and staff outside the inspection process and use this information as part of its risk assessment to identify schools most or least in need of inspection.

Inspector expertise and behaviour

49. We heard a great deal of concern that inspectors lack relevant expertise and experience in the age group or subject they are inspecting. A high number of written submissions described inspections where the inspector did not have the appropriate expertise, with lack of experience in primary, early years, and specialist education particularly highlighted as recurring problems.⁸⁵ We heard examples such as a secondary food technology specialist

82 [Q37](#)

83 Confederation of School Trusts ([OWS0257](#))

84 [Q40](#); [Q43](#)

85 NAHT ([OWS0098](#)); PRUsAP ([OWS0105](#)); National Association of Small Schools ([OWS0192](#)); Surrey Primary Headteachers' Phase Council, on behalf of all Surrey Primary Schools and their headteachers ([OWS0194](#)); The Surrey Specialist School Phase Council ([OWS0202](#)); School of Education, University of Exeter ([OWS0207](#)); National Education Union ([OWS0228](#)); Nasen ([OWS0236](#)); Schools North East ([OWS0244](#)); The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) ([OWS0272](#)); Mrs Janet Doherty (Head teacher at Manchester Hospital School) ([OWS0055](#)); Mrs Pam Young (Retired Primary School Special Needs Teacher at City of York Council) ([OWS0139](#)); Mr Mark Wilson (Chief Executive Officer at Wellspring Academy Trust) ([OWS0174](#)); Mrs Jenifer Capper (Proprietor Silver Stars Day Nursery at Early Years Setting) ([OWS0188](#)); The Brook Special Primary School ([OWS0214](#)); Northway Community Primary School ([OWS0235](#)); London South East Academy Trust ([OWS0251](#)); Outcomes First Group ([OWS0262](#))

inspecting primary social, emotional and mental health provision; a sixth form music specialist leading on the early reading part of an inspection; and former secondary heads inspecting early years provision.⁸⁶ None of the union representatives who gave oral evidence to the inquiry were aware of any attempt by Ofsted to actively recruit specialists with the appropriate type of expertise.⁸⁷ Lord Knight said:

The evidence that I have seen bears out that there are problems around people not understanding context [...] It is a sort of sausage machine. In trying to get all of these inspections done we are allocating people who have not been properly trained and do not have the proper expertise.⁸⁸

The former HMIs who participated in our roundtable told us that they had received much more comprehensive training than inspectors currently do, recalling a one-year induction scheme that they felt helped establish consistency of standards across the inspectorate; current inspectors said they had received much less training.⁸⁹

50. We heard some suggestions that high turnover of HMIs was contributing to the lack of expertise among inspectors. We heard that the average length of service for an HMI was around two to four years, which affected the reliability and level of expertise of the inspector.⁹⁰ The Surrey Primary Headteachers' Phase Council suggested that this could be partly attributed to the pressured nature of inspections, with inspectors being required to work long days due to the compressed timeframe.⁹¹ Some submissions suggested that the growth of academy trusts had meant that the role of HMI was no longer seen as a "career pinnacle", but rather as a "stepping stone to more lucrative roles in multi-academy trusts", which meant that HMIs were less experienced and did not stay in the role for long.⁹²

51. Amanda Spielman said that it was "a matter of Government policy going back 20 years that inspectors would be generalists in this reduced inspection system", but that Ofsted "recruit[s] strong people with experience in all the sectors [they] inspect" and provides training to enable inspectors to work across different areas. However, she acknowledged that it was preferable for inspectors to have relevant expertise in the subject and age group they were inspecting: expertise would be taken into account when constructing a team for an inspection, as they would try to "spread the inspection responsibilities around to fit people's particular skills and experience".⁹³

52. Both the former and current HMCIs also suggested that there was a problem with too many primary specialists inspecting secondary provision. Sir Michael Wilshaw told us that he had found it "particularly difficult" to recruit secondary heads as inspectors due to salary expectations, and that therefore "there will be a lot of ex-primary heads as

86 [Q5](#) [Daniel Kebede]; Education Select Committee ([OWS0298](#)); Mrs Jenifer Capper (Proprietor Silver Stars Day Nursery at Early Years Setting) ([OWS0188](#)); Northway Community Primary School ([OWS0235](#))

87 [Qq6-7](#)

88 [Q79](#)

89 Education Select Committee ([OWS0299](#))

90 Surrey Primary Headteachers' Phase Council, on behalf of all Surrey Primary Schools and their headteachers ([OWS0194](#)); Adrian Lyons ([OWS0042](#)); Mr Frank Norris (Former Senior HMI, MAT CEO and currently adviser to a number of northern business groups and local authorities at Northern Powerhouse Partnership and Blackpool Education Improvement Board); Ms Julie Price Grimshaw (Education Adviser at Self employed) ([OWS0159](#)); Education Select Committee ([OWS0299](#)); [Q78](#) [Lord Knight]; [Q92](#) [Sir Michael Wilshaw]

91 Surrey Primary Headteachers' Phase Council, on behalf of all Surrey Primary Schools and their headteachers ([OWS0194](#))

92 NAHT ([OWS0098](#)); SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#)); Adrian Lyons ([OWS0042](#))

93 [Qq137-140](#)

inspectors or lead inspectors inspecting secondary schools and not so much the other way round.”⁹⁴ Amanda Spielman said that a “fairly large proportion of our inspectors are primary, partly because civil service pay is nowhere near as high as school sector headteacher pay and MAT [multi-academy trust] pay”, but argued that it is “certainly not the case” that secondary specialists were disproportionately inspecting primary schools.⁹⁵

Training materials

53. We also heard some concern around the issue of transparency of training materials for inspectors. Tom Middlehurst told us that Ofsted inspectors who are serving school leaders have access to training materials that are not available to other school leaders, which means that they have the “inside track” as to what Ofsted looks at in inspections. He suggested that this was particularly unfair for small primary schools, who could not afford to release school leaders to work for Ofsted as frequently.⁹⁶ The NAHT argued that this “helps to contribute to a sense of an uneven playing field.”⁹⁷ A recent academic study found that schools where a member of staff currently works as an Ofsted inspector are more likely to receive ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ inspection grades than those which do not, after controlling for school characteristics.⁹⁸ Last year, there were calls for materials to be published after materials were leaked online.⁹⁹ We also heard calls for Ofsted to be more transparent in general in the data it publishes, especially for the purposes of academic research. Dr Sam Sims, Lecturer at the UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities, told us that Ofsted did not currently publish enough data to allow for in-depth academic research on inspections, and stated that it was “quite remarkable” that “a publicly funded body in 2023 does not release its data in a secure and safe way to qualified researchers.”¹⁰⁰

54. Amanda Spielman told us that Ofsted is “extremely transparent” in the materials it publishes, and highlighted that they publish “a whole series of videos, blogs and webinars” covering what inspectors are trained in. She explained that the unpublished training materials are designed to be used in interactive sessions where discussions are facilitated, and expressed concern that, if these were to be published, it would be “prone to being misused or misinterpreted” and may be treated as a “tick list” of what Ofsted requires.¹⁰¹ She stated that, overall, Ofsted makes a “tremendous amount” of data available, and highlighted the risks in publishing certain types of data, particularly personal information about inspectors.¹⁰²

94 [Q80](#)

95 [Q140](#)

96 [Q7](#)

97 NAHT ([OW50098](#))

98 Christian Bokhove, John Jerrim, Sam Sims, [Do schools that employ an inspector get better inspection grades?](#), Working Paper, October 2023

99 [Schools Week](#), 4 October 2022

100 [Q56](#)

101 [Qq141–142](#)

102 [Q121](#)

Inspector behaviour

55. We received several reports of positive experiences of inspectors.¹⁰³ Data from Ofsted's post-inspection surveys shows that 96% of respondents agreed that the inspector(s) carried out the inspection in a professional manner, and that 93% were satisfied overall with the way the inspection was carried out. However, just under half (48%) of schools responded to the survey, with higher response rates among those with positive inspection ratings.¹⁰⁴

56. However, we also received some concerning reports of poor behaviour from inspectors. Written evidence submissions described inspectors as being “unapproachable”¹⁰⁵, “abrupt”¹⁰⁶, and “hostile”¹⁰⁷, with reports of inspectors speaking rudely to staff, holding their hands up to stop staff from speaking and speaking to children in age-inappropriate ways. Several submitters suggested that they had felt bullied by the inspector or treated in an “aggressive” manner.¹⁰⁸ The NAHT said that they had received “far too many reports of adversarial, inquisitorial, and even aggressive approaches” and that “on too many occasions, the conduct of inspection teams falls below the required standard”.¹⁰⁹

57. Amanda Spielman told the Committee that Ofsted hires inspectors “for their bedside manner as well as for their knowledge and experience” and that inspectors “conduct themselves sensitively and carefully”. She acknowledged that “there are occasions when it’s not right” and that, in those cases, Ofsted will “monitor and make sure that any individual who needs additional training gets it.”¹¹⁰

58. We are concerned that the lack of relevant phase-specific expertise among inspectors appears to be a widespread problem, particularly in primary schools and in specialist education settings. A high-quality inspection regime must ensure that inspectors have sufficient expertise to be able to accurately assess the quality of provision and offer useful feedback. We welcome the incoming HMCI’s call for more school leaders to move into inspection and hope that this will be reflected in recruitment of HMIs with expertise across all types of school. However, the Committee felt that Ofsted had not provided sufficient evidence to reassure that it was prioritising relevant expertise in all inspection teams.

103 National Association of Small Schools ([OWS0192](#)); Surrey Primary Headteachers’ Phase Council, on behalf of all Surrey Primary Schools and their headteachers ([OWS0194](#)); Mrs Carmel Davison-Culmer (Teacher at Bishop Young Academy) ([OWS0068](#)); London South East Academy Trust ([OWS0251](#))

104 Ofsted, [Responses to post-inspection surveys: inspections and visits between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023](#), July 2023

105 The Federation of St Paul and St. Martin of Porres, St Martin of Porres Catholic Primary School, St. Paul’s Catholic Primary School ([OWS0022](#)); Sarah Hawke (Director at Sarah Taylor Hawke Coaching for Business and Personal Development) ([OWS0032](#))

106 National Association of Small Schools ([OWS0192](#)); The Federation of St Paul and St. Martin of Porres, St Martin of Porres Catholic Primary School, St. Paul’s Catholic Primary School ([OWS0022](#))

107 Mrs Pam Young (Retired Primary School Special Needs Teacher at City of York Council) ([OWS0139](#)); Dr Tessa Crilly (Vice Chair of Governors at Hitherfield Primary School) ([OWS0196](#))

108 Sarah Hawke (Director at Sarah Taylor Hawke Coaching for Business and Personal Development) ([OWS0032](#)); Mrs Clare D’Netto (Head Teacher at Manor Junior School) ([OWS0066](#)); Mrs Pam Young (Retired Primary School Special Needs Teacher at City of York Council) ([OWS0139](#)); Miss Elizabeth Keeble (Chief Operating Officer at Omnia Foundation) ([OWS0180](#)); Dr John Stephens ([OWS0181](#)); Dr Tessa Crilly (Vice Chair of Governors at Hitherfield Primary School) ([OWS0196](#))

109 NAHT ([OWS0098](#))

110 [Qq154–155](#)

59. *Ofsted should publish data on HMIs' and contracted Ofsted inspectors' expertise regarding phase of education and subject, and the proportion of inspections led by at least one inspector with the relevant phase expertise.*

60. *Ofsted must ensure that they are matching inspectors' expertise with the appropriate phase and subject as much as possible, and ensure that their recruitment processes are targeting particular gaps in expertise. At a minimum, they must ensure that the lead inspector always has expertise in the relevant type of school and, in larger teams, that a majority of members of the team have the relevant expertise.*

61. *We recognise the value and expertise that experienced inspectors can bring, particularly long-serving HMIs. Ofsted should commission an independent assessment of the factors affecting retention of experienced HMIs and take appropriate steps to address the issue.*

62. *We have heard that access to training materials gives school leaders working as inspectors a disproportionate advantage over those who do not, and that Ofsted does not make enough data available to qualified researchers. While we accept that Ofsted publishes many other materials to support schools with inspections and that there are some restrictions in publishing personal data, we believe that Ofsted should improve its transparency by publishing as much information as possible.*

63. *Ofsted must ensure that it is publishing as much information as possible to maximise the transparency of its work. In particular, it must make more data available to key educational research organisations to allow for high-quality research to be conducted. Ofsted must also publish the training materials which are available to their inspectors, with appropriate caveats where necessary to explain what they are, and are not, intended to be used for.*

3 Following an inspection

Ofsted reports and feedback

64. At the end of the final day of inspection, Ofsted holds a feedback meeting with the school to discuss the key findings, areas for improvement, and the provisional grade awarded. This is normally attended by the headteacher, academy trust senior staff, governors or trustees, and local authority representatives. Following the inspection, Ofsted produces a report with the key findings and judgements. The school is sent a draft report within 18 working days, and the final report within 30 working days of the inspection. The final report is usually published three working days later.¹¹¹

65. Amanda Spielman, then His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI), told the Committee that the reports are "primarily designed for parents" and that Ofsted had consulted extensively with parents on the design.¹¹² However, there is conflicting evidence as to whether or not parents find the reports useful. A Parentkind survey found that only 24% of parents agreed that reports were useful, and that slightly more parents (39%) did not look at Ofsted reports at all when choosing a school for their child than did (38%).¹¹³ Jason Elsom, CEO of Parentkind, suggested that reports did not include all the issues that mattered to parents and should address a wider range of areas to be effective for parents.¹¹⁴ Conversely, a survey of parents by Ofsted found that 84% of parents said the report they read was useful, and 71% said that the information provided in reports was reliable.¹¹⁵

66. We heard many suggestions that the reports were of limited use to schools. Many written evidence submissions stated that the reports were too short, lacked detail, and followed a generic, "cookie cutter" template.¹¹⁶ The Schools, Students and Teachers Network said that the "lack of detail in the reports makes it difficult to identify and address issues effectively".¹¹⁷ Sam Henson, Director of Policy and Communications at the National Governance Association (NGA), said that they had "seen a gradual decline" in how useful the reports were, particularly with reference to governance.¹¹⁸ Participants in our roundtable with teachers and school leaders said that the feedback they had been given in the report was "useless" and felt as though inspectors were "ticking off a checklist" rather than giving helpful feedback and points for improvement.¹¹⁹ Some evidence submissions highlighted that the verbal feedback provided in the final meeting was more helpful but was not fully captured in the inspection report, and a 2022 survey from the NGA found that 62% of governing boards said that the feedback meeting was valuable to the governing board and other school leaders.¹²⁰

111 Ofsted, [School inspection handbook](#), September 2023

112 [Q123](#)

113 Parentkind ([OWS0237](#))

114 [Q34](#)

115 Ofsted, [Parents Annual Survey 2021](#), April 2021

116 National Society - Church of England ([OWS0062](#)); SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#)); NAHT ([OWS0098](#)); Lancaster and Morecambe Primary HT Cluster, NA ([OWS0170](#)); National Governance Association ([OWS0193](#)); Surrey Primary Headteachers' Phase Council, on behalf of all Surrey Primary Schools and their headteachers ([OWS0194](#)); Schools North East ([OWS0244](#)); The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) ([OWS0272](#))

117 SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#))

118 [Q37](#)

119 Education Select Committee ([OWS0298](#))

120 National Governance Association ([OWS0193](#)); Speech and Language UK ([OWS0254](#)); Confederation of School Trusts ([OWS0257](#))

67. There is widespread agreement amongst schools, governing bodies and other organisations that inspection reports are too short and formulaic and do not provide enough useful information, particularly for schools. Targeting the reports at a parent audience means that schools do not always receive an in-depth assessment of their strengths and areas for improvement, and there is conflicting evidence as to whether parents themselves find the reports useful. School leaders find the oral feedback given in meetings more helpful, but this is often not fully reflected in the final published report.

68. *As part of our recommended increase to the length and depth of inspections, we also recommend that Ofsted increase the length and depth of analysis provided in inspection reports to ensure that they are genuinely useful in providing parents and schools with the information they need. This should be developed in consultation with representatives of schools, governing bodies, and parents.*

The single-word judgement

69. Following an inspection, a school is provided with an overall effectiveness (commonly referred to as the 'single-word') judgement, which is one of four grades: outstanding, good, requires improvement, or inadequate. Inadequate is further divided into two subcategories: schools judged as having serious weaknesses and schools requiring special measures.¹²¹ Ofsted data shows that, as of November 2023, 16% of schools were 'outstanding'; 74% were 'good'; 8% were 'requires improvement'; and 2% were 'inadequate'.¹²²

70. As well as the overall effectiveness judgement, the inspection report sets out judgements for four areas: the quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management.¹²³ In general, to receive a 'good' or 'outstanding' grade, the quality of education must be judged 'good' or 'outstanding' respectively, and all other key judgements should be 'good' or 'outstanding', other than in "exceptional circumstances". A school will be judged 'inadequate' overall if any one of the four judgements is 'inadequate' and/or safeguarding is ineffective.¹²⁴

71. The single-word judgement was one of the most strongly criticised issues in the evidence we received. We heard concerns from teaching bodies and school leader unions that reducing a school to a single word was a "blunt instrument" that does not capture the full detail and nuance of the work of a school.¹²⁵ Tom Middlehurst, Assessment and Inspection Specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), said that the single-word judgement "undermines the usefulness of the report for schools and colleges".¹²⁶ Sir Michael Wilshaw, the former HMCI, said that the single-word judgement was "not giving parents an accurate picture of what is happening in the school" and meant that, if a school was judged as good, headteachers could "relax and not address the weaknesses that there are in that school".¹²⁷ The Fair Education Alliance Youth Steering Group stated that "reductive labels such as 'inadequate' and 'requires improvement' have the capacity

121 Ofsted, [School inspection handbook](#), September 2023

122 Ofsted, [State-funded school inspections and outcomes: management information](#), December 2023

123 Ofsted, [School inspection handbook](#), September 2023

124 Ofsted, [School inspection handbook](#), September 2023

125 SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#)); NAHT ([OWS0098](#)); NASUWT ([OWS0137](#)); Place2Be ([OWS0234](#));

126 [Q1](#)

127 [Q82](#)

to stigmatise schools, teachers and pupils.”¹²⁸ In the coroner’s report following the inquest into the death of Ruth Perry, the coroner highlighted concerns around the system of judging a school ‘inadequate’ solely on the grounds of safeguarding where a school is good in all other areas, and queried whether this message was helpful to parents.¹²⁹ This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 of this report.

72. We also heard about the stress and pressure caused by the overall effectiveness judgement, with the Association of School and College Leaders describing this as the “biggest area of anxiety” for school leaders.¹³⁰ Participants in our roundtable with teachers and school leaders described staff feeling as though they were under the “shadow of Ofsted” and experiencing a “real level of fear” due to concerns about the impact of a negative inspection judgement.¹³¹ Tom Middlehurst told the Committee:

The single biggest impact that Ofsted could have on the wellbeing and workload of school leaders, college leaders and staff and teachers, which would therefore trickle down to the students and therefore recruitment and retention, which is probably the biggest problem our members face, is to remove single-phrase judgments.¹³²

73. Ofsted state that the overall effectiveness judgement “offers an easy way for parents to understand the quality of their child’s school.”¹³³ The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, then Minister of State for Schools, told us that it provides “the clarity that parents need”, as parents do not necessarily have the time to read the full report.¹³⁴ The evidence we received was mixed as to whether and how far parents find the single-word judgement useful. A Parentkind survey found that 72% of parents said they were dissatisfied with the model of a single overall grade, and only 8% considered a school’s latest Ofsted inspection to be the most important factor in choosing a school; Jason Elsom, Chief Executive of Parentkind, said that “the vast majority of parents do not agree with the current structure, they do not agree with the single-word judgment, and they do not think it tells the whole story.”¹³⁵ However, a 2021 survey of parents by Ofsted found that two-thirds of parents agreed that the four-point grading system helped them to make decisions about their child’s education, and that Ofsted judgements were the third most decisive factor in choosing a school.¹³⁶ Academic research has found that parents change their preferences in response to new information about Ofsted grades, and even that Ofsted grades have an effect on local house prices.¹³⁷

74. We received a number of suggestions as to alternatives to the overall effectiveness judgement. Some suggested maintaining the judgements for the different categories in the report without having an overall judgement, in line with the practice of the Independent Schools Inspectorate, and suggested this approach would be popular with parents.¹³⁸ The National Society of the Church of England highlighted the new approach taken by the

128 Fair Education Alliance Youth Steering Group ([OWS0261](#))

129 Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, [Regulation 28: Report to Prevent Future Deaths](#), December 2023

130 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) ([OWS0272](#))

131 Education Select Committee ([OWS0298](#))

132 [Q15](#)

133 Ofsted ([OWS0259](#))

134 [Q183](#)

135 Parentkind ([OWS0237](#)); [Q34](#)

136 Ofsted, [Parents Annual Survey 2021](#), April 2021

137 [Q64](#) [Carole Willis; Dr Sam Sims]; Dr Iftikhar Hussain (Lecturer at University of Sussex) ([OWS0151](#))

138 [Q82](#) [Lord Knight]; SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#)); Parentkind ([OWS0237](#))

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS), where the outcome is expressed as a “narrative judgement” rather than a grade.¹³⁹ The NAHT and NASUWT suggested adopting a “binary” approach to assess whether or not a school is providing an acceptable standard of education, accompanied by a report providing more in-depth description of a school’s strengths and weaknesses. The NAHT highlighted that this would be possible within the existing legal framework, which sets out intervention measures for schools causing concern, but only requires Ofsted to inspect and report on the quality of education provided.¹⁴⁰ Others suggested a “report card” or “scorecard” approach, where information is provided about a number of different areas without an overall grade.¹⁴¹ Evidence highlighted different approaches being taken in other jurisdictions, both within and outside the UK, as potential models to learn from.¹⁴²

Consequences of inspection judgements

75. Maintained schools judged ‘inadequate’ are subject to an academy order to mandate conversion to an academy. If an academy is judged ‘inadequate’, the Secretary of State has a power to terminate the funding agreement, and the academy may join another trust.¹⁴³ Since autumn 2022, this can also be applied to schools judged less than ‘good’ in their two most recent Ofsted inspections. The Department for Education’s guidance states that, for this group of schools, the Regional Directors will “assess each school on a case by case basis” and take any representations from local authorities or other bodies into account before “deciding whether intervention and further support are necessary.” However, “there will be a presumption in favour of issuing the maintained school with an academy order so that it may join a strong multi-academy trust unless exceptional circumstances apply.”¹⁴⁴

76. The Department also uses Ofsted inspection grades as “qualifiers” for wider school improvement initiatives. Their written evidence submission set out a list of 17 initiatives that are linked to Ofsted grades, including: maths, English, language and computing hubs; behaviour and attendance hubs; funds including the Condition Improvement Fund and the Trust Capacity Fund; free schools; induction for early career teachers; and school improvement support and the National Leaders of Education programme.¹⁴⁵

77. Amanda Spielman, then HMCI, told the Committee that the reason why the overall judgement “ha[d] such freight and weight” was because of the consequences and interventions which arose from it.¹⁴⁶ She said she was unable to change the system of overall grades because this would have the effect of “deliberately thwarting the regulatory system that hangs off it” but that any replacement system would in any case “become

139 National Society - Church of England ([OWS0062](#))

140 NAHT ([OWS0098](#)); [Q15](#) [Ian Hartwright]; NASUWT ([OWS0137](#))

141 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) ([OWS0272](#)); EDSK think tank ([OWS0211](#)); [Q15](#) [Daniel Kebede]

142 [Q19](#) [Tom Middlehurst]; [Q113](#) [Lord Knight]; Barnardos ([OWS0220](#)); National Education Union ([OWS0228](#)); Children and Young People’s Mental Health Coalition, Schools Wellbeing Partnership ([OWS0247](#)); Professor Gemma Moss (Professor of Literacy at UCL Institute of Education) ([OWS0267](#))

143 Department for Education, [Schools causing concern: Statutory guidance for local authorities and regional directors](#), July 2023

144 Department for Education, [Schools causing concern: Statutory guidance for local authorities and regional directors](#), July 2023

145 Department for Education ([OWS0233](#))

146 [Q129](#)

the new extreme pressure”.¹⁴⁷ The Minister said that Ofsted judgements also provided accountability for the best performing schools and were used “to make sure that the schools we are using to help spread best practice are providing a strong education to their children”. He suggested that, in the absence of an overall grade, “people would pick out things from the report, like a theatre review”.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, Carole Willis, Chief Executive of the National Foundation for Educational Research, suggested that the Committee should “be wary of the knock-on and unintended consequences” of removing the overall grade, as inspection grades are used throughout the education system for a variety of purposes, and there was a risk that a report card system would “expand and proliferate the information, making it overwhelming and difficult for parents to engage with but, more importantly, pushing decisions by parents or others in the system back on to the performance data alone.”¹⁴⁹

78. We heard many criticisms of the extension of academy orders to schools judged less than ‘good’ in their two most recent Ofsted inspections. The NEU described this move as “hugely regrettable” and said that it had “undoubtedly added to the pressure and fear that Ofsted inspections engender and has moved focus away from other means to support the school to improve.”¹⁵⁰ The NAHT said that this had “undermined” the Department’s Trust and School Improvement Offer, while Ian Hartwright highlighted that schools in this category were legally seen as providing an acceptable education, and that “no school leader should lose their job” for being in this category.¹⁵¹ Amanda Spielman said that the policy had “clearly raised the stakes for schools and MATs, and we see that pressure coming through into inspections.”¹⁵²

Impact on wellbeing of teachers and school leaders

79. We heard strong concerns that the consequences of inspection judgements, and the public nature of the judgement, causes a perception that inspections have “high stakes”, which is a key cause of stress and anxiety among school leaders and teachers.¹⁵³ In particular, there is a strong fear among headteachers that an Ofsted inspection could result in losing their job: Daniel Kebede, General Secretary of the NEU, described the inspection judgements as “career-ending for a school leader and career-shaming for a teacher”.¹⁵⁴ Teachers and school leaders told us that the pressure because of this was “immense” and was deterring teachers from moving into leadership positions.¹⁵⁵ Lord Knight suggested that Ofsted and the Department should have a “duty of care” towards those who work in the system, and that the “combined effect of the inspection and accountability fails in this duty of care”.¹⁵⁶ Ian Hartwright, Head of Policy at the NAHT, told the Committee:

147 [Q131](#)

148 [Q171](#); [Q183](#)

149 [Q75](#)

150 National Education Union ([OWS0228](#))

151 NAHT ([OWS0098](#)); [Q4](#)

152 [Q117](#)

153 SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#)); NAHT ([OWS0098](#)); NASUWT ([OWS0137](#)); National Education Union ([OWS0228](#)); The Free Churches Group of England and Wales ([OWS0264](#)); The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) ([OWS0272](#))

154 [Q17](#)

155 Education Select Committee ([OWS0298](#))

156 [Q91](#); Lord Knight of Weymouth ([OWS0291](#))

Every time a school leader has an inspection, they have that cliff edge of “Is this the day that I lose my job?” It is just the same for their staff, because that drives the same stress, ill health and worry among all the people who work in a school: school leaders, teachers and school support staff, all of whom are trying to do their very best for the school.¹⁵⁷

80. It is unclear from the Department's guidance whether, and in what circumstances, leadership changes are required following a less than 'good' inspection judgement. The guidance states that Regional Directors (RDs) “will only mandate academy conversion, leadership change or academy trust transfer of a school in relation to educational standards if Ofsted has judged it Inadequate, or if the school has met the new coasting definition (schools that are not making necessary improvements) and the relevant RD has assessed that the school would benefit from such interventions.”¹⁵⁸ However, the evidence we have received suggests that there is an overwhelming perception that a judgement of 'inadequate', or two consecutive judgements of 'requires improvement', will inevitably lead to a change of leadership, and the NAHT said that the reality is that “very few school leaders remain in post” following an academy order.¹⁵⁹

81. The coroner's report following the inquest into the death of Ruth Perry highlighted the lack of training on how to deal with distress during an inspection, or policy as to pausing inspections due to distress, as an area of concern.¹⁶⁰ This was not an issue which we received much evidence on or discussed during our inquiry. However, Amanda Spielman acknowledged this issue in her immediate response to the conclusions of the inquest, noting that “in the light of Mrs Perry's sad death, it's also vital that we do all we can to minimise stress and anxiety when we inspect”.¹⁶¹ In response to a written parliamentary question in December 2023, Ofsted stated that they did not hold a central record on the number of inspections that had been paused, or the reasons why, and therefore could not provide data on how many inspections had been paused due to headteacher distress.¹⁶²

82. The Department stated in their written submission that they are “committed to taking a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing” and highlighted the voluntary Education Staff Wellbeing Charter and the mental health and wellbeing scheme, which is funded by the Department, to provide counselling and support to school leaders. As part of the changes announced in June 2023, the Department committed to expanding this scheme to support an additional 500 school leaders by March 2024, and to further expand it beyond March.¹⁶³ Juliet Chua, Director General of the Schools Group at the Department, confirmed that the expansion to the further 500 leaders had been put in place, and said that the scheme was being “well received”.¹⁶⁴

83. Evidence from groups representing teachers, school leaders, parents and pupils was highly critical of Ofsted's single-word overall judgements. There is much concern that they simplify the complex environment of a school and the many efforts of its

157 [Q4](#)

158 Department for Education, [Schools causing concern: Statutory guidance for local authorities and regional directors](#), July 2023

159 NAHT ([OWS0098](#))

160 Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, [Regulation 28: Report to Prevent Future Deaths](#), December 2023

161 Ofsted, [Statement from His Majesty's Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman](#), 7 December 2023

162 [DEP2024-0007](#), 20 December 2023

163 Department for Education ([OWS0233](#))

164 [Qq197-198](#)

leadership and staff into a single headline. We have heard many suggestions as to possible alternatives, including examples from other jurisdictions, which should be further explored to assess the benefits and disadvantages of different approaches. However, we recognise that the grades are closely linked to many Department policies and that any changes will require broader reform of the system. Any reforms must also be mindful of the use made by parents of Ofsted gradings in school choice.

84. *The Department and Ofsted should work together as a priority to develop an alternative to the current single-word overall judgement that better captures the complex nature of a school's performance, and ensure that these changes interact effectively with Department policies. In doing so, they should look at other jurisdictions both within and outside the UK, to assess what has worked well beyond the English context.*

85. *As a first step, Ofsted and Department for Education websites should always show the full list of judgements, not just the overall judgement, and encourage schools to do the same on their websites and published materials.*

86. The 'high-stakes' nature of the current system is clearly causing a significant amount of stress and worry for school leaders. In particular, there is an overwhelming fear among headteachers that they risk losing their job following a less than 'good' judgement, and the Department's guidance is unclear as to whether this is routinely the case. The extension of academy orders to schools with two consecutive judgements of 'requires improvement' has further exacerbated this problem. We are clear that there should be consequences for schools which are performing badly, but that this should be proportionate, and there must be suitable mechanisms available to support leaders.

87. *The Department should assess whether the decision to impose academy orders on schools that have received 'requires improvement' ratings on more than one occasion is proportionate. As a first step, it should ensure that Regional Directors are genuinely taking into account the views of local authorities, trusts, and other relevant bodies before taking a decision, and that this consultation process is clearly communicated to schools. The Department should publish guidance setting out the criteria by which Regional Directors come to these decisions.*

88. *The Department and Ofsted should review the support mechanisms available to school leaders during and following an inspection and ensure that these are as strong as possible to support the wellbeing of school leaders. Ofsted must publish a clear policy, and train inspectors, on their approach to dealing with distress among school leaders during an inspection, and in what cases inspections can and should be paused or deferred. We note that lessons could be learned from Ofsted's approach to deferring inspections in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, but deferrals alone are not enough to resolve this issue.*

Impact of judgements on schools and school improvement support

89. We received mixed evidence as to whether and to what extent receiving a negative Ofsted judgement leads to improvements in schools. We heard evidence that this can lead to falling pupil rolls, low staff morale, and difficulties with recruitment and retention of staff; the Schools, Students and Teachers Network described the impact as "devastating"

for a school community.¹⁶⁵ Research from the Education Policy Institute has found that, after an initial negative Ofsted grade, the intake of a school tends to become more disadvantaged and teacher turnover increases: this makes it more difficult for a school to improve and result in schools becoming “stuck” in low Ofsted grades.¹⁶⁶ Daniel Kebede also described the impact of academisation or rebrokering as “incredibly disruptive” to a school.¹⁶⁷

90. However, there is also evidence to suggest that a poor inspection outcome can lead to improvements, with some academic studies showing that school performance and test scores improve following a negative inspection judgement.¹⁶⁸ Ofsted stated that, in 2022/23, 73% of schools that had previously been judged ‘requires improvement’ improved to ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ at inspection, and that 96% of ‘inadequate’ schools inspected in 2022/23 improved their grade.¹⁶⁹ Carole Willis, Chief Executive of the National Foundation for Educational Research, told the Committee that the evidence on this was “mixed” and suggested that it is “about the nature of the individual school and its capacity to improve”.¹⁷⁰ The Minister highlighted that the proportion of schools judged ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ had increased from 68% in 2010 to 88% today, and that “England’s schools have seen their schools rise in international surveys”, which he said “reflects genuine improvement”.¹⁷¹

Support for school improvement

91. Ofsted was keen to emphasise that they do not hold responsibility for school improvement, stating that the sector “misattributes the responsibility for regulatory consequences to Ofsted itself.”¹⁷² Amanda Spielman told us that “Ofsted has a problem with a poor understanding of Government policy. For more than a decade, we have been responsible only for diagnosis; responsibility for support and improvement lies entirely with others.”¹⁷³

92. Schools which receive a ‘requires improvement’ judgement are eligible for the Department’s trust and school improvement offer, in which they will be offered up to 10 days’ support and advice from a system leader.¹⁷⁴ The Department’s submission stated that an assessment of the programme in 2022 showed that the offer was seen as valuable, “with the large majority of system leaders and supported trusts/schools being satisfied or very satisfied with the relevance and focus of the support”.¹⁷⁵ As outlined in the previous section, the Department also offers a range of school improvement initiatives which are linked to Ofsted grades. Trusts and local authorities also provide school improvement

165 SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#)); NAHT ([OWS0098](#)); Schools North East ([OWS0244](#)); The Free Churches Group of England and Wales ([OWS0264](#)); The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) ([OWS0272](#)); [Q20](#) [Daniel Kebede]

166 Dr Bernardita Munoz-Chereau (Lecturer at UCL-Institute of Education, Center Educational Leadership); Mrs Jo Hutchinson (Director for SEND and Additional Needs at EPI); Professor Melanie Ehren (Professor in the Governance of Schools and Education systems at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands) ([OWS0246](#))

167 [Q20](#)

168 National Foundation for Educational Research ([OWS0227](#)); Dr Iftikhar Hussain (Lecturer at University of Sussex) ([OWS0151](#))

169 Ofsted ([OWS0259](#))

170 [Q67](#)

171 [Q175](#)

172 Ofsted ([OWS0259](#))

173 [Q117](#)

174 Department for Education ([OWS0233](#))

175 Department for Education ([OWS0233](#))

support to academies and maintained schools respectively.¹⁷⁶ Juliet Chua, Director General of the Schools Group at the Department, also highlighted the role of Regional Directors in school improvement, saying that they “will, within an area, be able both to provide an assessment and to work with a school or a trust on particular areas where they might want support”.¹⁷⁷

93. However, the evidence we heard expressed a mixed picture of the support available to schools to help them improve following an inspection, with some schools and trusts stating that they had received little or no support, although others had had positive experiences.¹⁷⁸ Submissions highlighted that support varied by local area and according to whether the school was maintained or in a trust: the Nottingham Institute of Education said that schools rely on “the arbitrary strengths and understandings of their MAT or LA”.¹⁷⁹ Ian Hartwright also said that the improvement offer following a negative judgement is “often too slow to arrive”.¹⁸⁰ Evidence also highlighted low capacity within local authority school improvement teams:¹⁸¹ Ian Hartwright said that many of these are “really down to just a few people now” and Daniel Kebede said that there were “real concerns” about the resources of school improvement teams.¹⁸² The NASUWT also expressed concerns about the lack of accountability for the Department’s Regional Directors, describing the system as “opaque” and stating that there are “no effective measures in place to ensure that [Regional Directors] are held accountable in ways that are adequately transparent and secure public and professional confidence that they are discharging their functions equitably and effectively.”¹⁸³

94. The Minister stated that the Department offered a “huge number of school improvement programmes” and said that these were coordinated by local teaching school hubs.¹⁸⁴ He highlighted that the academisation process “is itself having an improvement process that we know is successful”, with seven out of ten schools that had become academies due to low standards now graded ‘good’.¹⁸⁵ When asked about accountability for Regional Directors, the Minister stated that they were “senior civil servants who report directly to the Secretary of State” and that they were therefore held to account by the Committee in accountability hearings with ministers.¹⁸⁶

176 Department for Education ([OWS0233](#))

177 [Q205](#)

178 SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#)); NAHT ([OWS0098](#)); National Association of Small Schools ([OWS0192](#)); XP School Trust ([OWS0027](#)); Mrs Pam Young (Retired Primary School Special Needs Teacher at City of York Council) ([OWS0139](#)); Mrs Sam Bailey (Executive Principal at Wellspring Academy Trust) ([OWS0210](#)); Tweedmouth Prior Park First School ([OWS0269](#))

179 SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#)); Nottingham Institute of Education, Nottingham Trent University ([OWS0120](#)); The Free Churches Group of England and Wales ([OWS0264](#)); The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) ([OWS0272](#)); Mr John Cosgrove ([OWS0143](#))

180 [Q23](#)

181 Mrs Jeannette Mackinney (Educational Consultant, Chair Halesowen Teaching & Learning Community at Halesowen Teaching & Learning Community); Mr Steve Payne (Headteacher at Newfield Park primary school) ([OWS0195](#)); National Education Union ([OWS0228](#)); Schools North East ([OWS0244](#)); pensby primary school ([OWS0138](#)); Mr Frank Norris (Former Senior HMI, MAT CEO and currently adviser to a number of northern business groups and local authorities at Northern Powerhouse Partnership and Blackpool Education Improvement Board); Ms Julie Price Grimshaw (Education Adviser at Self employed) ([OWS0159](#)); Mrs Carole Thomson ([OWS0167](#))

182 [Q23](#)

183 NASUWT ([OWS0137](#))

184 [Q203](#)

185 [Q207](#)

186 [Q180](#)

95. We have heard that there is not enough support for schools to improve following a negative inspection judgement, and that the support available does not always arrive as quickly as is needed. We recognise that the role of school improvement no longer sits with Ofsted, and that much of this work is now commissioned by Regional Directors and undertaken by multi-academy trusts. However, the evidence we have received suggests that there is a desire for greater support to help schools improve.

96. It is essential that there is proper scrutiny of the regional system of school improvement. We do not agree with the former Schools Minister's view that it is sufficient to scrutinise Regional Directors solely through parliamentary scrutiny of ministers.

97. *The Department must conduct a full audit of the support available to schools to help them improve, reviewing whether the amount of support is sufficient and what more is needed. In the interim, the Department should ensure that all schools and trusts are aware of the support on offer and develop a 'one-stop shop' to signpost relevant support. It must also ensure that support following a negative inspection judgement is provided as quickly as possible.*

98. *The Department must improve the transparency and accountability of the work of the Regional Directors. At a minimum, it should provide an annual report to Parliament setting out the scope, detail and impact of their work and make Regional Directors available to give evidence to the Committee.*

Complaints procedure

99. If schools are unhappy about the way the inspection was carried out or about the outcome of the inspection, they can initially raise any issues once they have received Ofsted's draft report. If they still have concerns, they can raise a formal complaint within five working days, to which Ofsted will provide a response. If schools are not satisfied with this, they can request an internal review. Following this, they can refer their complaint to the Independent Complaints Adjudication Service for Ofsted (ICASO), who will review the way that Ofsted has responded to the complaint. ICASO does not look at the inspection judgement itself.¹⁸⁷

100. Ofsted's corporate annual report for 2022/23 shows that they received 747 complaints from providers in that period, 247 of which were from schools. This is an increase from 640 in 2021/22. It states that 2.5% of all inspections resulted in a complaint, but does not provide this percentage for schools separately.¹⁸⁸ Ofsted's post-inspection surveys also show that 91% of schools were satisfied with the way the inspection was carried out, with a response rate of just under half (48%) of schools.¹⁸⁹

101. The evidence we received was heavily critical of Ofsted's complaints procedure. Many submissions commented that Ofsted were "marking their own homework" and described

187 Ofsted, [Complaints procedure](#), accessed 7 December 2023

188 Ofsted, [The Annual Report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2022/23](#), November 2023

189 Ofsted, [Responses to post-inspection surveys: inspections and visits between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023](#), July 2023

the process as “inadequate”, “ineffective” or “not fit for purpose”.¹⁹⁰ We heard that the process was difficult to access and “cumbersome”, which meant that many schools did not go through it or complete the process; the London Diocesan Board for Schools said that “inexperienced headteachers are much less likely to follow the complaints process to the end”.¹⁹¹ There was also a sense that the process was weighted in favour of Ofsted, with many commenting that only a very small number of inspection judgements are changed following the process;¹⁹² a former HMI who had dealt with appeals in Ofsted told us that the “system is set up to make sure [appeals] don’t succeed”.¹⁹³ Ofsted’s annual report states that, of the 1,199 complaints closed this year, 23% had an aspect upheld or partially upheld, and the overall effectiveness judgement was changed for five inspections (just two of which were for schools).¹⁹⁴

102. In March 2023, Amanda Spielman acknowledged that the complaints procedure was “not a satisfying process” for schools and that Ofsted was looking at how to improve it.¹⁹⁵ In June 2023, Ofsted launched a consultation setting out proposed changes to the complaints procedure. These include:

- Enhanced on-site professional dialogue to help address issues during inspections
- A new opportunity for providers to contact Ofsted the day after an inspection with any unresolved concerns
- New arrangements allowing providers to formally challenge inspection findings before the report is finalised and published
- Removing the current internal review step and escalating complaints directly to ICASO.¹⁹⁶

In November, Ofsted published their response to the consultation, which stated that responses to the proposals were positive overall, and that they would be taking all four proposals forward.¹⁹⁷

190 SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#)); NAHT ([OWS0098](#)); NASUWT ([OWS0137](#)); Education Support ([OWS0245](#)); Confederation of School Trusts ([OWS0257](#)); The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) ([OWS0272](#)); Humanists UK ([OWS0285](#)); Big Education ([OWS0094](#)); Mr John Cosgrove ([OWS0143](#)); Lancasterian Primary School ([OWS0019](#))

191 National Association of Small Schools ([OWS0192](#)); Mrs Jeannette Mackinney (Educational Consultant, Chair Halesowen Teaching & Learning Community at Halesowen Teaching & Learning Community); Mr Steve Payne (Headteacher at Newfield Park primary School) ([OWS0195](#)); London Diocesan Board for Schools ([OWS0242](#)); Mr Pete Talbot (Headteacher at Castle Hill Community Primary School) ([OWS0049](#)); Sims ([OWS0142](#)); Mrs Jenifer Capper (Proprietor Silver Stars Day Nursery at Early Years Setting) ([OWS0188](#)); Mr Stephen Tierney (Formerly Headteacher & CEO of a MAT at @LeadingLearner Ltd) ([OWS0190](#)); Mrs Julie Fellowes ([OWS0268](#))

192 SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#)); NAHT ([OWS0098](#)); NASUWT ([OWS0137](#)); Mr Stephen Tierney (Formerly Headteacher & CEO of a MAT at @LeadingLearner Ltd) ([OWS0190](#)); Mr Michael Walters (Executive Principal at KCSP) ([OWS0198](#)); Mr David McPartlin (Headteacher at Flakefleet Primary School) ([OWS0226](#))

193 Education Select Committee ([OWS0299](#))

194 Ofsted, [The Annual Report of His Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills 2022/23](#), November 2023

195 [Ofsted chief: Complaints process not ‘satisfying’ schools](#), Times Educational Supplement, 10 March 2023

196 Ofsted, [Changes to Ofsted’s post-inspection arrangements and complaints handling: proposals 2023](#), November 2023

197 Ofsted, [Changes to Ofsted’s post-inspection arrangements and complaints handling: report on the responses to the consultation](#), November 2023

103. The evidence we received was generally positive about the changes proposed in the consultation, but there was a feeling that they did not go far enough to fully address the problems with the process. Tom Middlehurst said that the ASCL “strongly agree[d]” with all of the proposals, but that they did not go far enough, and that the key issue was around schools being able to understand why a complaint had not been upheld.¹⁹⁸ Ian Hartwright said that the NAHT supported the proposal for enhanced dialogue during the inspection process, but that overall, Ofsted “continues to mark its own homework”.¹⁹⁹

104. In particular, there were many suggestions that the process should be completely independent of Ofsted, carried out by a separate body.²⁰⁰ The Schools, Students and Teachers Network commented that “most public bodies have some form of arm’s length independent body or ombudsman for arbitration and it would seem reasonable for Ofsted to be subject to the same checks and balances.”²⁰¹ ICASO was not seen to be currently fulfilling this function, as its role is limited to assessing the way in which Ofsted responded to the complaint, rather than the complaint itself, which will continue to be the case following the changes set out in the consultation.²⁰² Ian Hartwright described ICASO as a “toothless organisation” as it does not have the power to make binding recommendations for Ofsted.²⁰³ One written evidence submitter had had the experience of their complaint being upheld by ICASO, who recommended that the school be re-inspected, only for this to be rejected by Ofsted.²⁰⁴

105. Amanda Spielman said that that the reports from ICASO have been “very positive indeed” about Ofsted’s work, finding that, of the 18 cases that went to ICASO this year, Ofsted had dealt with 14 in line with the published complaints procedure.²⁰⁵ She told us that, in the other four cases, ICASO had made specific recommendations, but “did not think that the cases reflected an underlying wider, systemic problem with how [Ofsted] addressed complaints”.²⁰⁶

106. A further issue raised, which was not addressed in the consultation, was that schools do not have access to the evidence base which inspectors use to come to a decision, in particular the notes made by inspectors during the inspection.²⁰⁷ The NAHT said that this made it “difficult for a school to successfully dispute the inspection judgements it has received or question the evidence that underpins the judgement, without resorting to instructing lawyers or even seeking a judicial review.”²⁰⁸

107. Amanda Spielman told us that it is difficult to publish the full evidence base due to the confidential nature of the notes, as this would be “betraying personal details about

198 [Q32](#)

199 [Q32](#)

200 SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#)); NAHT ([OWS0098](#)); Lancasterian Primary School ([OWS0019](#)); Marc Carlucci ([OWS0277](#))

201 SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#))

202 [Q32](#) [Ian Hartwright]; NASUWT ([OWS0137](#)); Confederation of School Trusts ([OWS0257](#)); The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) ([OWS0272](#))

203 [Q32](#)

204 Mr Pete Talbot (Headteacher at Castle Hill Community Primary School) ([OWS0049](#))

205 [Q166](#)

206 [Q167](#)

207 National Association of Small Schools ([OWS0192](#)); School of Education, University of Exeter ([OWS0207](#)); The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) ([OWS0272](#)); Tuplin ([OWS0107](#)); Mr John Cosgrove ([OWS0143](#)); Mr Stephen Tierney (Formerly Headteacher & CEO of a MAT at @LeadingLearner Ltd) ([OWS0190](#)); Outcomes First Group ([OWS0262](#)); Mrs Julie Fellowes ([OWS0268](#))

208 NAHT ([OWS0098](#))

individuals, and sometimes their very difficult circumstances”, especially conversations with parents.²⁰⁹ However, in 2015, the then HMCI Sir Michael Wilshaw told the Committee that Ofsted “has, for some time, been providing inspection ‘evidence bases’ to the public on request (redacted where appropriate to remove personal data)”.²¹⁰

108. We have received substantial evidence suggesting that Ofsted’s complaints process is not seen to be working and amounts to Ofsted “marking their own homework”. The changes announced in Ofsted’s consultation on the process are welcome, and we particularly welcome the introduction of a telephone number which schools can call to raise concerns during an inspection, but these do not go far enough to address these concerns. In particular, there is tangible frustration that the role of the Independent Complaints Adjudication Service for Ofsted (ICASO) is limited to looking at how Ofsted has handled the complaint, rather than managing the complaint itself, which has not been addressed in the consultation.

109. Schools have also told us that the complaints process is hampered by a lack of access to inspectors’ notes and documents that have been used to reach a conclusion. While we understand that there are considerations around confidentiality regarding these documents, schools cannot effectively challenge a judgement if they are unable to access the evidence base used to support this judgement. There is also limited data available as to the proportion of complaints upheld relating to schools and how this has changed over time. This has contributed to a perceived lack of transparency and willingness from Ofsted to listen to and respond to criticism.

110. The Department for Education and Ofsted should conduct an in-depth review of the complaints process to ensure that there is an efficient and independent process for schools to challenge the findings as well as the conduct of an inspection. In doing so, they should explore the option of setting up an independent body with the powers to investigate inspection judgements through scrutiny of the evidence base.

111. Ofsted must allow schools to gain access to the evidence base used to reach a judgement when making a complaint, making redactions to ensure that confidentiality and protection of the identity of individuals is maintained where this is necessary.

112. In its annual report and accounts, Ofsted should publish separate complaints data for each sector in their remit, including data on the number and percentage of complaints per inspection, whether these relate to conduct or judgements, and the percentage of complaints for each that have been upheld. The annual report should also set out what improvements Ofsted has made as a result of learning from complaints.

209 [Q168](#)

210 [Supplementary written evidence submitted by Ofsted to the Education Committee’s inquiry into the work of Ofsted \(OFS0055\), October 2015](#)

4 The scope of inspections

The Education Inspection Framework

113. The Education Inspection Framework (EIF) forms the basis for Ofsted inspection, setting out Ofsted's inspection principles and the main judgements that inspectors make.²¹¹ Ofsted introduced the current EIF in 2019, following a consultation. The main aim of the 2019 framework was to have a stronger focus on the curriculum and move away from an emphasis on data collection, as well as greater recognition of work to support personal development and a greater focus on behaviour.²¹² Ofsted's current strategy includes a commitment to evaluating the EIF in 2023 and 2024 for the quality of implementation and its impact on education, which "will help ensure that it is updated where and when necessary."²¹³ This evaluation has not yet been published.

Focus on the curriculum

114. Much of the evidence we received in this inquiry was supportive of the principle of focusing more on the curriculum. Written submissions welcomed the shift in focus away from performance data and towards a broader range of subjects, noting that this was seen in theory to be fairer for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and that this had improved recognition of other activities such as extra-curricular activities and careers advice.²¹⁴ Research from Parentkind has also found that parents are supportive of this approach.²¹⁵ Tom Middlehurst, Assessment and Inspection Specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), told us that "the intent behind the EIF was very good" and that it has "done a lot of good and encouraged very rich conversations about the curriculum and what young people are taught."²¹⁶ Some teachers and school leaders we spoke to felt that the framework was much better than the previous one due to the increased focus on what children were learning, rather than outcomes.²¹⁷

115. However, there was a feeling that, through focusing on the curriculum, Ofsted had gone too far in describing what they thought the curriculum should look like, which some submitters and witnesses suggested was not Ofsted's role. Written submissions expressed concerns about Ofsted appearing to indicate "preferred approaches" to the curriculum and suggested that this had led to an overly narrow focus in what was being taught in

211 Ofsted, [Education Inspection Framework](#), July 2023

212 Ofsted, [Education inspection framework 2019: a report on the responses to the consultation](#), July 2019

213 Ofsted ([OWS0259](#))

214 NASUWT ([OWS0137](#)); National Governance Association ([OWS0193](#)); SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#)); EDSK think tank ([OWS0211](#)); Schools North East ([OWS0244](#)); Education Support ([OWS0245](#)); Confederation of School Trusts ([OWS0257](#)); The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) ([OWS0272](#)); New Reflexions ([OWS0036](#)); Mrs Gillian Bryant ([OWS0041](#)); Professor Colin Richards ([OWS0045](#)); Mr Stephen Tierney (Formerly Headteacher & CEO of a MAT at @LeadingLearner Ltd) ([OWS0190](#))

215 Parentkind ([OWS0237](#))

216 [Q29](#)

217 Education Select Committee ([OWS0298](#))

schools.²¹⁸ The National Education Union (NEU) said that the framework had “led to a worrying and unwarranted extension of the inspectorate’s remit”, arguing that Ofsted should not be “an arbiter of curriculum quality”.²¹⁹

116. We also heard that the move away from data had led to greater inconsistency between inspection judgements, as judgements on the curriculum were necessarily more subjective than those based on data.²²⁰ Dr Sam Sims, Lecturer at the UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities, said that the focus on the curriculum “probably makes it less likely that two inspectors come to the same decision on the grounds that this is a big subjective judgment call” and that this had meant a “trade-off” on the consistency of judgements.²²¹ This was echoed by the school leaders we spoke to, one of whom told us:

That’s stress on all members of staff. They don’t know who’s going to walk through the door. We get things like, “Well, one inspector might think that this is this and one inspector might think ...” That’s not right. There should be a consistent approach around inspection teams.²²²

117. Finally, we heard some concerns that Ofsted had moved too far away from inspecting the quality of teaching in the new framework. Sir Michael Wilshaw, the former Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector (HMCI) of Ofsted, told us that there was now an “overdue” focus on the curriculum, and that Ofsted was now not focusing enough on other aspects such as outcomes and the quality of teaching.²²³ Participants in our roundtable with current and former inspectors told us that there “currently isn’t enough emphasis on classroom observation”, meaning that inspectors are unable to effectively assess the quality of teaching. However, there was not a consensus on this point, as some felt that looking at the quality of teaching was ineffective and reduced the reliability of inspections.²²⁴

118. Ofsted state in their written submission that around 80% of consultation responses were supportive of the increased focus on the curriculum, and that the EIF “has had a particular impact in supporting a resurgence in thinking about, and demonstrable improvements in, curriculum design and delivery across the sector”.²²⁵ Amanda Spielman, then HMCI, told us that the framework was “truly built off the evidence” and that she had taken care to base the framework on evidence, rather than on her own interests and preferences.²²⁶ She also highlighted that, after the pandemic, the sector had expressed a

218 Mr Frank Norris (Former Senior HMI, MAT CEO and currently adviser to a number of northern business groups and local authorities at Northern Powerhouse Partnership and Blackpool Education Improvement Board); Ms Julie Price Grimshaw (Education Adviser at Self employed) ([OWS0159](#)); Big Education ([OWS0094](#)); Dr John Stephens ([OWS0181](#)); Ms Meena Kumari Wood (International Consultant, Author and Trainer / former HMI and Principal of Secondary Academy at Self employed) ([OWS0208](#)); Mrs Sam Bailey (Executive Principal at Wellspring Academy Trust) ([OWS0210](#))

219 National Education Union ([OWS0228](#))

220 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) ([OWS0272](#)); Catholic Education Service ([OWS0189](#)); Confederation of School Trusts ([OWS0257](#)); Big Education ([OWS0094](#)); Mrs Anna Ephgrave (Educational Consultant and Author at Creative Cascade UK Ltd) ([OWS0153](#))

221 [Q61](#)

222 Education Select Committee ([OWS0298](#))

223 [Q81](#); [Q89](#)

224 Education Select Committee ([OWS0299](#))

225 Ofsted ([OWS0259](#))

226 [Q122](#)

wish to stick with the current framework rather than a new one, and that she had “never had anybody ask [her] to revert to a previous inspection framework or to bring back a big element of one”.²²⁷

Suitability for primary schools, small schools and special schools

119. We heard a great deal of concern about the suitability of the new framework for primary schools. Many written submissions commented that the EIF was more appropriate for secondary schools, due to its focus on subject specialism: as primary schools do not necessarily have the same flexibility to appoint subject specialists and staff often have multiple roles, they are seen to be disadvantaged by the new framework. This was also raised as a problem for small schools and special schools.²²⁸ The Surrey Primary Headteachers' Phase Council described the framework as “not fit for purpose” for primary schools.²²⁹ Ian Hartwright told the Committee:

We think that the framework looks at all schools through a mainstream secondary lens, and we do not think it is suitable in primary schools, particularly small ones. There are a surprising number of very small primary schools in our country, not very far from here, that have mixed year groups and so on, and that is really difficult to manage.²³⁰

120. Amanda Spielman argued that it is “just as important for a primary school that they are doing things that are worth doing with children” and that, prior to the introduction of the new framework, research had shown that curriculum in primary schools “was often in a very poor state indeed”. She said that there were “no requirements whatever for what schools need to show and inspect” beyond the Department's requirements, and that Ofsted “want to work with whatever schools work with”.²³¹

Impact on workload

121. We also heard a great deal of evidence stating that the framework had resulted in increased workload for schools. Submissions highlighted that the new EIF had initially resulted in additional workload as schools adapted to the new framework, which the Schools, Students and Teachers Network said had led to subject leaders having to “review

227 [Q118](#)

228 [SSAT](#) (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#)); [NAHT](#) ([OWS0098](#)); Mr Peter Tiltman (Head of School at Lancaster University School of Mathematics) ([OWS0148](#)); [Catholic Education Service](#) ([OWS0189](#)); [National Association of Small Schools](#) ([OWS0192](#)); [Surrey Primary Headteachers' Phase Council](#), on behalf of all Surrey Primary Schools and their headteachers ([OWS0194](#)); [The Surrey Specialist School Phase Council](#) ([OWS0202](#)); [National Education Union](#) ([OWS0228](#)); [Schools North East](#) ([OWS0244](#)); Sarah Jones (Headteacher and Ofsted Inspector at Sheringdale Primary School) ([OWS0009](#)); Mrs Gillian Bryant ([OWS0041](#)); Mr Frank Norris (Former Senior HMI, MAT CEO and currently adviser to a number of northern business groups and local authorities at Northern Powerhouse Partnership and Blackpool Education Improvement Board); Ms Julie Price Grimshaw (Education Adviser at Self employed) ([OWS0159](#)); [Outcomes First Group](#) ([OWS0262](#))

229 [Surrey Primary Headteachers' Phase Council](#), on behalf of all Surrey Primary Schools and their headteachers ([OWS0194](#))

230 [Q29](#)

231 [Qq143-144](#)

and rewrite all curriculum plans”.²³² Evidence highlighted that this was generally a problem with the introduction of each new framework, describing changes to frameworks as a “moving target for schools”,²³³ as “schools must quickly adapt and prepare for new demands and shifting priorities.”²³⁴ The current and former inspectors we spoke to criticised the “pendulum swings” between different frameworks that occurred with each new HMCI, which created workload for schools as they adapted to the new requirements.²³⁵

122. Submissions also expressed the view that the framework caused additional workload for schools on an ongoing basis, due to the large number of issues included in the framework and the emphasis on subject-specific ‘deep dives’. This was particularly a problem in primary schools, as outlined above, and had increased levels of stress for those with subject leader responsibility.²³⁶ Ian Hartwright told the Committee that the EIF had “driven enormous workload in schools”²³⁷, and a survey by the National Governance Association (NGA) found that 52% of governors thought that the introduction of the new EIF had not reduced the workload and stress for teachers and school leaders.²³⁸

123. We also received a great deal of evidence on the impact of inspections in general on workload for school leaders and teachers. Written submissions described the “burden of stress” placed upon them by the need to ensure that schools were prepared for inspections, with the workload described as “excessive and unreasonable”, “crushing”, and “relentless”.²³⁹ Daniel Kebede, General Secretary of the NEU, highlighted that 75% of NEU members think that “Ofsted add an immense level of workload”, which is affecting recruitment and retention of staff.²⁴⁰ A 2019 survey of teachers by Ofsted found that 51% of teachers thought that an inspection would mean “a huge amount of extra and unnecessary work”,²⁴¹ and a similar survey in 2017 found that 86% thought that inspection “introduces unacceptable levels of burden into the system”.²⁴² These findings are echoed in the evidence provided to our ongoing inquiry into teacher recruitment, training and retention.

124. We heard that teachers are regularly told by school leaders to adopt particular practices out of a perception that this is required by Ofsted, with schools trying to “second guess what Ofsted might want”; one submitter commented that, in some schools, “there

232 SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#)); Professor Colin Richards ([OWS0045](#)); Mrs Sam Bailey (Executive Principal at Wellspring Academy Trust) ([OWS0210](#)); Mr Frank Norris (Former Senior HMI, MAT CEO and currently adviser to a number of northern business groups and local authorities at Northern Powerhouse Partnership and Blackpool Education Improvement Board); Ms Julie Price Grimshaw (Education Adviser at Self employed) ([OWS0159](#))

233 [Q3](#) [Ian Hartwright]

234 National Education Union ([OWS0228](#))

235 Education Select Committee ([OWS0299](#))

236 Mrs Jeannette Mackinney (Educational Consultant, Chair Halesowen Teaching & Learning Community at Halesowen Teaching & Learning Community); Mr Steve Payne (Headteacher at Newfield Park primary School) ([OWS0195](#)); Norwood Primary School, Southport ([OWS0223](#)); London South East Academy Trust ([OWS0251](#))

237 [Q29](#)

238 National Governance Association ([OWS0193](#))

239 Nottingham Institute of Education, Nottingham Trent University ([OWS0120](#)); NASUWT ([OWS0137](#)); Mr Peter Tiltman (Head of School at Lancaster University School of Mathematics) ([OWS0148](#)); Darlington Primary Forum ([OWS0161](#)); The Surrey Specialist School Phase Council ([OWS0202](#)); EDSK think tank ([OWS0211](#)); National Education Union ([OWS0228](#)); Nasen ([OWS0236](#)); Education Support ([OWS0245](#)); The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) ([OWS0272](#)); Nuffield Foundation ([OWS0284](#)); Mrs Moira Cross (Headteacher at Dordon Primary School) ([OWS0016](#)); Mr Graeme Currie (Retired teacher and lecturer, governor of a primary School. at Windmill P.S. Selly Oak, Birmingham) ([OWS0158](#)); Mr Stephen Tierney (Formerly Headteacher & CEO of a MAT at @LeadingLearner Ltd) ([OWS0190](#))

240 [Q26](#); [Q23](#)

241 Ofsted, [Teacher Attitude Survey 2019 report](#), August 2019

242 Ofsted, [Teacher Attitude Survey 2017 report](#), 2017

is never a day when Ofsted is not mentioned".²⁴³ Teachers and school leaders we spoke to told us that they had worked in schools where "everything [they] did was about ticking the Ofsted boxes - at times [...] to the detriment of the students" and gave examples such as teachers being told to write dates on a particular side of their books out of a belief that Ofsted would expect this.²⁴⁴

125. Ofsted state that there are "common misconceptions and 'myths' about inspection", which cause unnecessary workload for teachers, and that the EIF and school inspection handbook aim to "counter any myths" by explicitly stating what they do not require schools to do.²⁴⁵ Amanda Spielman told the Committee that she was "really concerned that people use [Ofsted] as a way to push junior staff into doing more work than they need to" and highlighted the work Ofsted had done to try to address these misconceptions, including through webinars, videos, blogs, and seminars for school leaders.²⁴⁶

126. The evidence we received acknowledged that Ofsted had made efforts to address misconceptions, but on the whole did not believe that this had been effective in reducing workload. Written submissions and witnesses explained that, due to the 'high-stakes' nature of inspections, it was inevitable that school leaders would do everything they could to ensure that they were prepared.²⁴⁷ The NAHT's written evidence stated:

The inspectorate insists that it makes no formal demand of schools, and that no preparation is required for inspection. But no prudent professional would fail to ensure readiness for such a high stakes event, with potentially career threatening consequences. All staff, in every school, will seek to cover all the bases so that they are prepared for every eventuality during an inspection [...] To suggest that schools can or should simply ignore Ofsted entirely is absurd.²⁴⁸

127. The Department for Education states that it is "continuing to support schools to act and remove unhelpful practice that creates unnecessary workload", pointing to the work it has done on its Workload Reduction Toolkit for schools and the Workload Reduction Taskforce, which was established in September.²⁴⁹ The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, then Minister of State for Schools, told the Committee that workload was a "key issue" for him and highlighted that the Department had reduced workload for teachers by five hours per week on average between 2016 and 2019.²⁵⁰

128. There is broad support for the move away from a data-driven approach to one that is more focused on curriculum in the new Education Inspection Framework. However,

243 NASUWT ([OWS0137](#)); Danny Rhodes ([OWS0047](#)); Mr Andrew David Cox (Teacher of English at Tudor Grange Academy, Solihull) ([OWS0083](#)); Tuplin ([OWS0107](#)); Mrs Anna Ephgrave (Educational Consultant and Author at Creative Cascade UK Ltd) ([OWS0153](#)); Mrs Amanda Thomas (Ex Primary School Teacher at Ex Teacher at Newton Poppleford Primary School, Devon) ([OWS0204](#))

244 Education Select Committee ([OWS0298](#))

245 Ofsted ([OWS0259](#))

246 [Q150](#)

247 XP School Trust ([OWS0027](#)); New Reflexions ([OWS0036](#)); Mrs Gillian Bryant ([OWS0041](#)); Professor Colin Richards ([OWS0045](#)); The Brook Special Primary School ([OWS0214](#)); Norwood Primary School, Southport ([OWS0223](#)); Mr David McPartlin (Headteacher at Flakefleet Primary School) ([OWS0226](#)); Northway Community Primary School ([OWS0235](#)); [Q27](#) [Daniel Kebede]; [Q28](#) [Tom Middlehurst]

248 NAHT ([OWS0098](#))

249 Department for Education ([OWS0233](#)); Department for Education, [New taskforce to tackle teacher workload](#), September 2023

250 [Q195](#)

there appear to be problems with how this has worked in practice, in particular around the impact this has had on the consistency of inspection judgements, and some suggestions that Ofsted is imposing a particular view of curriculum planning on schools.

129. There is also widespread concern that the new framework is less suitable for primary and special schools, particularly smaller schools, who are finding it more difficult to meet its requirements. We appreciate that any change to the framework causes additional work for schools, which should be minimised, but we think there is a case for small adjustments to be made to resolve some of these issues.

130. *Ofsted must publish their planned evaluation of the Education Inspection Framework as soon as possible. In this evaluation, Ofsted should review the implementation of the new framework, in particular looking at the impact it has had on primary schools, special schools and small schools, and consider ways in which it could be adapted to be more supportive of these schools. The inspectorate should clearly set out how it will take into account the context and capacity of individual schools when considering subject leadership. Ofsted should also consider whether sufficient time and emphasis is being placed on quality of teaching.*

131. It is clear that many teachers and school leaders are struggling with workload pressures in their roles, which are exacerbated by perceptions of what Ofsted expects to see in inspections. There are also concerns that the new framework has caused additional workload pressures for teachers, particularly subject leaders, and school leaders. Ofsted has taken steps to address this through its 'myth-busting' work, but the evidence presented to us suggests that this has not been effective or reached all the audiences who need to hear it.

132. *The Department and Ofsted must go further than simply 'myth-busting': they must undertake a programme of research to fully understand the causes of inspection-related workload pressure and assess what changes would be genuinely helpful in reducing this. The new HMCI should prioritise work in this area as part of his "Big Listen" with the sector.*

Disadvantage

133. We heard concerns that Ofsted does not sufficiently take a school's context into account when reporting and making judgements, in particular the numbers of disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. Many written submissions expressed this view, stating that in consequence schools with high numbers of disadvantaged pupils were "unfairly" penalised by Ofsted and that it was "disproportionately difficult" for schools serving disadvantaged communities to receive an outstanding judgement.²⁵¹ A former HMI told us that inspections no longer take a school's context into account, and that the "generic"

251 National Education Union ([OWS0228](#)); Dr. Andrew Poole ([OWS0187](#)); The Free Churches Group of England and Wales ([OWS0264](#)); Professor Gemma Moss (Professor of Literacy at UCL Institute of Education) ([OWS0267](#)); Mr Richard Thorpe ([OWS0013](#)); Mrs Moira Cross (Headteacher at Dordon Primary School) ([OWS0016](#)); Lancasterian Primary School ([OWS0019](#)); Scafton ([OWS0051](#)); Mrs Janet Doherty (Head teacher at Manchester Hospital School) ([OWS0055](#)); Mrs Carmel Davison-Culmer (Teacher at Bishop Young Academy) ([OWS0068](#)); Mrs Anna Ephgrave (Educational Consultant and Author at Creative Cascade UK Ltd) ([OWS0153](#)); Mr Stephen Tierney (Formerly Headteacher & CEO of a MAT at @LeadingLearner Ltd) ([OWS0190](#)); Mr Nick Rozanski ([OWS0191](#)); Ms Meena Kumari Wood (International Consultant, Author and Trainer / former HMI and Principal of Secondary Academy at Self employed) ([OWS0208](#))

report templates do not allow for these factors to be described in the final inspection report.²⁵² We also heard that there were problems with lack of diverse experience among inspectors, which affected the way they inspected schools with high levels of deprivation or ethnic diversity.²⁵³ Dr Bernardita Munoz-Chereau, Lecturer at the UCL Centre for Educational Leadership, highlighted research which had found that “headteachers, teachers and governors thought that inspectors did not have enough qualifications or training to inspect schools in disadvantaged areas.”²⁵⁴ There were also suggestions that other aspects of a school’s context were not sufficiently considered, such as recruitment and retention issues, shortage of non-teaching expertise, and funding problems.²⁵⁵

134. There is some evidence demonstrating links between disadvantage and Ofsted grades: Education Datalab analysis looking at inspections from late 2019 to early 2020 shows that 51% of the most deprived primary schools and 32% of the most deprived secondary schools were judged good or outstanding, compared with 79% and 75% of the least deprived primary and secondary schools respectively.²⁵⁶ Natalie Perera, Chief Executive of the Education Policy Institute (EPI), told us that this pattern is still seen today.²⁵⁷ Daniel Kebede, General Secretary of the NEU, said that a school in an affluent area is three and a half times more likely to be judged outstanding, while a school in a deprived area is five times more likely to be judged ‘requires improvement’.²⁵⁸ However, recently published analysis from Education Datalab shows a small improvement, with the most disadvantaged schools having slightly better inspection outcomes in 2023 compared with 2017.²⁵⁹ Research from the EPI, referred to in more detail in Chapter 3, found that a school’s intake tended to become more disadvantaged after receiving a negative inspection grade; this resulted in a “vicious cycle” making it more difficult for the school to improve.²⁶⁰

135. The new EIF’s focus on the curriculum was aimed at improving this situation by reducing the focus on pupil outcomes: shortly before its launch, Amanda Spielman stated that the new approach would be “fairer to schools in disadvantaged areas” and would “reward schools in challenging circumstances that are raising standards through strong curricula”.²⁶¹ Ofsted’s school inspection framework contains many references to disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND and states that, in order for a school to receive an outstanding grade, pupils must “consistently achieve highly, particularly the most disadvantaged” and pupils with SEND must “achieve exceptionally well.”²⁶² However, Natalie Perera said that the EPI “do not see any evidence” that the 2019 framework is fairer to disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, and that there was now less of a focus on these pupils in practice.²⁶³

252 Education Select Committee ([OWS0299](#))

253 Education Select Committee ([OWS0298](#))

254 [Q60](#)

255 Mr Frank Norris (Former Senior HMI, MAT CEO and currently adviser to a number of northern business groups and local authorities at Northern Powerhouse Partnership and Blackpool Education Improvement Board); Ms Julie Price Grimshaw (Education Adviser at Self employed) ([OWS0159](#))

256 Education Datalab, [Do disadvantaged schools tend to be judged by Ofsted more highly for leadership and management than for overall effectiveness?](#), March 2021

257 [Q72](#)

258 [Q1](#)

259 Education Datalab, [How schools’ inspection outcomes changed under Amanda Spielman](#), December 2023

260 Dr Bernardita Munoz-Chereau (Lecturer at UCL-Institute of Education, Center Educational Leadership); Mrs Jo Hutchinson (Director for SEND and Additional Needs at EPI); Professor Melanie Ehren (Professor in the Governance of Schools and Education systems at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands) ([OWS0246](#))

261 Ofsted, [Commentary on curriculum research — phase 3](#), December 2018

262 Ofsted, [School inspection handbook](#), September 2023

263 [Q72](#)

136. We were concerned by the suggestion that Ofsted does not sufficiently take into account the challenges faced by schools with high numbers of disadvantaged pupils or those with SEND. We appreciate that the 2019 inspection framework aimed to improve the situation by moving away from outcome data, but there still remains a clear link between disadvantage and negative Ofsted grades.

137. Ofsted must ensure that inspectors are fully taking a school's size and context into account in reports and judgements, in particular the numbers of pupils from disadvantaged groups and those with SEND, and other relevant factors such as recruitment and retention challenges. It must ensure that these factors are clearly described and visible in the final report. Progress for pupils in receipt of pupil premium should be a key measure on which schools are held accountable, and this should also be clearly set out in the narrative of reports, taking into account where this group is larger or smaller than the average.

Safeguarding

138. In their inspections, Ofsted assess whether schools are effectively complying with requirements on safeguarding, looking at a school's compliance with statutory requirements as well as a broader focus on the "safeguarding culture" in the school. In the final inspection report, a judgement is made as to whether or not a school's safeguarding arrangements are effective. If they are not found to be effective, it is "likely" that the school's leadership and management will be judged as inadequate.²⁶⁴

139. The coroner's report following the inquest into Ruth Perry's death raised concerns about this approach, stating that "the current system allows a school which is inadequate in all areas to receive the same overall label as a school which is good in all areas, but with some safeguarding issues which can be repaired by the time the report is published."²⁶⁵ This was also raised in some written submissions to this inquiry, which expressed concerns that schools could be judged 'inadequate' due to relatively minor issues which could be resolved quickly.²⁶⁶ Amanda Spielman told us that only a "tiny proportion" of schools were judged inadequate solely due to safeguarding, with only 17 schools in England falling into this category since September 2021. She stated that, in those schools, Ofsted "did not find any where it was about paperwork, box-ticking, or forgetting to file this thing with that thing—they all had serious failures."²⁶⁷

140. In June 2023, as part of the changes announced following the death of Ruth Perry, Ofsted announced that schools judged 'inadequate' solely on the grounds of safeguarding would be revisited by inspectors within three months of the inspection report being published, and would see their grade improve if the concerns had been resolved.²⁶⁸ Ofsted confirmed to us that this policy has been in effect since 1 September, and that so far one school had met the criteria and is due to be reinspected.²⁶⁹ Tom Middlehurst highlighted that the Department would still issue an academy order in these cases, arguing that, although the order could be revoked following the reinspection, this still caused "huge

264 Ofsted, [School inspection handbook](#), September 2023

265 Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, [Regulation 28: Report to Prevent Future Deaths](#), December 2023

266 Ms Gillian Sparrow (Consortium Partner at Birmingham Education partnership) ([OWS0004](#)); Mr Stephen Tierney (Formerly Headteacher & CEO of a MAT at @LeadingLearner Ltd) ([OWS0190](#)); Marc Carlucci ([OWS0277](#))

267 [Q165](#)

268 Ofsted, [Changes made to school inspections](#), June 2023

269 Amanda Spielman (His Majesty's Chief Inspector at Ofsted) ([OWS0297](#))

stress on the system” which was “entirely unnecessary”.²⁷⁰ Ofsted also stated that they would “offer schools greater clarity about the threshold for effective versus ineffective safeguarding” in their handbook, blogs, and webinars, and would describe ineffective safeguarding more clearly in inspection reports.²⁷¹

141. We heard many suggestions that safeguarding should be removed from Ofsted inspections and inspected separately and more frequently, possibly by local authorities or an independent body. Written submissions argued that a gap of up to four or five years between safeguarding inspections was too long, and suggested that the regulatory compliance aspects of safeguarding could more quickly and easily be inspected by another body rather than Ofsted.²⁷² Parentkind highlighted research showing that parents thought that safeguarding should be inspected more frequently, with 36% preferring an annual inspection and 29% preferring an inspection every two years.²⁷³ Participants in our roundtable with current and former inspectors agreed with this and argued that the best people to inspect safeguarding are “people that live and breathe safeguarding”, rather than inspectors working for Ofsted, who are required to be experts in many different areas.²⁷⁴

142. Tom Middlehurst said that safeguarding was “so important that we cannot leave it to every four years” and suggested that an “annual, light-touch safeguarding audit” of compliance with safeguarding expectations would be helpful to schools.²⁷⁵ Lord Knight of Weymouth suggested that this should be done separately by a national safeguarding body, saying:

I have received evidence both that the consistency and quality of Ofsted’s expertise around safeguarding leaves a lot to be desired, but equally we have a problem with local authority capacity. Some local authorities are not doing a great job in respect of their safeguarding and schools are receiving conflicting advice from Ofsted and the local authority office around what is the right safeguarding response to an incident. That needs to be sorted out and we do need to raise our game generally across the country around the quality of safeguarding and everyone’s understanding of what that is. Part of that is annual inspection.²⁷⁶

143. Amanda Spielman told us that it was important to make sure that there was a “totally independent eye on the safeguarding arrangements” and argued that creating a separate body would add “a whole extra layer of complexity and cost” for schools to deal with. She also highlighted that safeguarding often had links to other work in schools, such as work on behaviour, and that it would therefore be difficult to remove from inspections entirely.²⁷⁷ This was echoed by the Minister, who told us:

270 [Q23](#)

271 Ofsted, [Changes made to school inspections](#), June 2023

272 SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#)); NASUWT ([OWS0137](#)); Catholic Education Service ([OWS0189](#)); The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) ([OWS0272](#)); Ms Gillian Sparrow (Consortium Partner at Birmingham Education partnership) ([OWS0004](#)); Adrian Lyons ([OWS0042](#)); Mr John Cosgrove ([OWS0143](#)); Mr Stephen Tierney (Formerly Headteacher & CEO of a MAT at @LeadingLearner Ltd) ([OWS0190](#)); Brill Church of England School ([OWS0216](#))

273 Parentkind ([OWS0237](#))

274 Education Select Committee ([OWS0299](#))

275 [Q9](#)

276 [Q101](#)

277 [Qq161–162](#)

Some of these safeguarding issues will be identified when an inspector is looking at the general curriculum and at general teaching. You will have missed all that exposure to the activities of the school if you separate it out to another agency that just looked at safeguarding. I think it is right for Ofsted to conduct this safeguarding part of the school judgment.²⁷⁸

144. Safeguarding is an essential aspect of every school's work. We agree that there is merit in schools being audited more regularly for compliance with safeguarding procedures, especially as we are recommending that some schools be inspected less frequently than is currently the case. However, we still see a role for Ofsted in ensuring that schools are identifying and acting on serious safeguarding concerns and especially making an effective contribution to child protection.

145. The inquest into the death of Ruth Perry also raised concerns about the policy of judging a school 'inadequate' solely due to safeguarding. We accept that this only applies to a small number of schools and that Ofsted has taken some steps towards mitigating this issue through quicker re-inspections. Conducting more regular safeguarding audits should also help to reduce the number of schools to which this applies. However, it should never be the case that schools in this situation are judged as 'inadequate', and receive an academy order, solely due to minor administrative errors capable of being resolved within a short space of time.

146. *The Department should consult on the best approach to increasing the regularity of safeguarding inspections through a less intensive compliance audit. In doing so, it should look at whether this should be done by local authorities or by a separate, independent body, and make the case for the appropriate resource to be provided. In its routine inspections of schools, Ofsted should continue to inspect how well schools respond to serious safeguarding issues and how effectively children are protected in practice.*

147. *In the interim, Ofsted should review its policy on 'inadequate' judgements due to ineffective safeguarding and ensure that schools are only being judged 'inadequate' in cases where they are fundamentally failing to keep children safe. In cases where the problems are uncomplicated and can be resolved within a short space of time, the Department should not issue an academy order until after the school has been reinspected.*

Inspection of multi-academy trusts

148. Ofsted does not currently have the power to inspect multi-academy trusts (MATs). Since 2018, Ofsted has carried out summary evaluations of MATs with the permission of the Department and the relevant trusts. These do not result in a graded judgement, but explore the quality of education provided in a trust and provide recommendations as to what could be improved.²⁷⁹ Ofsted carried out 12 summary evaluations last year, and it was reported in October that it would not be carrying out any further evaluations before the end of March.²⁸⁰

278 [Q210](#)

279 Ofsted, [Summary evaluations of multi-academy trusts](#), March 2023

280 Ofsted, [The Annual Report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2022/23](#), November 2023; [Revealed: Ofsted MAT checks on hold until next April](#), Times Educational Supplement, 27 October 2023

149. Ofsted has been calling for formal powers to inspect whole MATs in recent years.²⁸¹ It published a report earlier this year into MATs' involvement in inspections, which concluded that "inspection at school level does not hold the trust sufficiently accountable or attribute enough credit to the trust's work."²⁸² The 2023 annual report reiterated this, stating that "Ofsted's inspection system does not now fit how the school sector operates and this can cause frustration for trusts."²⁸³ In his pre-appointment hearing with the Committee in September, the incoming HMCI, Sir Martyn Oliver, said that it was "inevitable [...] that we need to look at how Ofsted can inspect groups", as "the landscape is changing and Ofsted must change with the landscape".²⁸⁴

150. Our predecessor Committees have also been calling for inspections of MATs for many years. In 2013, the Education Committee published a report into school partnerships and cooperation which recommended that Ofsted be provided with powers to inspect academy chains.²⁸⁵ This was reiterated in its 2015 report into academies and free schools.²⁸⁶ In 2017, the Committee published a report into MATs which concluded that "there is a gap in assessing MATs which neither Ofsted nor RSCs [regional schools commissioners] presently fulfil" and recommended that Ofsted should develop the "resources, skills and powers" to conduct inspections of trusts.²⁸⁷

151. Witnesses to this inquiry expressed support for the inspection of MATs, but discussed a number of potential issues to be resolved. Steve Rollett, Deputy Chief Executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, agreed that it was "right and proper" to introduce some form of trust inspection.²⁸⁸ However, he highlighted risks around the lack of expertise on trusts within Ofsted, and potential difficulties recruiting people with the relevant expertise, due to the higher salaries earned by trust executives. He also discussed the lack of evidence about what makes trusts successful, and the risk of adding further regulatory burden to the sector.²⁸⁹ Finally, he highlighted the need to ensure coherence between trust-level and school-level inspections to avoid confusion, particularly for parents, saying:

[Parents] might see that the school down the road has this judgment at school level, but the trust has this judgment, so how do we make those things coherent? Do we have regulatory intervention on the basis of the school and the trust—either/or? Do we continue to have school-level trust inspection? [...] My guess is that it is really hard to say to parents, "You're not going to have a school-level grade or judgment, but school-level report."²⁹⁰

152. Similarly, Sam Henson, Director of Policy and Communications at the National Governance Association (NGA), agreed that the NGA was supportive of MAT inspections. He said that there was a need to "spend some time investing in quite a wide debate" as to what it would look like, and that Ofsted did not currently have the relevant skills and

281 Ofsted, [Ofsted: Let us inspect multi-academy trusts \(MATs\)](#), July 2019; [Fresh calls for MAT inspections after trust gets 3 'inadequates'](#), Schools Week, 13 February 2022

282 Ofsted, [How multi-academy trusts are involved in school inspections](#), April 2023

283 Ofsted, [The Annual Report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2022/23](#), November 2023

284 [Oral evidence taken on 5 September 2023](#), HC 1800, Q21

285 Education Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2013–14, [School Partnerships and Cooperation](#), HC 269

286 Education Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, [Academies and free schools](#), HC 258

287 Education Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2016–17, [Multi-academy trusts](#), HC 204

288 [Q45](#)

289 [Q45](#)

290 [Q45](#)

expertise, particularly on governance and on the financial side.²⁹¹ He also suggested that there was a risk that MAT inspections could result in a “school within the trust being penalised for something that they really have no control over”, or that they could discourage strong trusts from taking over struggling schools.²⁹² Sir Michael Wilshaw, the former HMCI, said that he thought Ofsted had a “duty to make a judgment on how MATs are performing”; Lord Knight of Weymouth agreed that inspection of MATs could be beneficial, but reiterated the problem of Ofsted’s lack of expertise in how MATs work.²⁹³ There are some examples of similar approaches being taken in other countries: for example, since 2017, the Dutch Inspectorate of Education has been inspecting school boards.²⁹⁴

153. The Minister told us that he “would not recommend” inspection of MATs at the moment, because “the system is still evolving”. He argued that there was not yet sufficient understanding of what constituted best practice in a MAT for Ofsted to be able to effectively inspect them. He also highlighted that “the MAT is held to account by the quality of the schools under its trust”, that trusts have regular meetings with Regional Directors, and that they also receive financial oversight from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).²⁹⁵ Juliet Chua, Director General of the Schools Group at the Department for Education, said that MATs are “subject to rigorous accountability requirements” through these mechanisms.²⁹⁶

154. We agree with the incoming HMCI that it is “inevitable” that MATs will be inspected, and we are frustrated that repeated calls for trust inspections from this Committee, its predecessors and others have not yet been acted upon by the Department. We recognise that Ofsted will need to develop their expertise and capacity in this area, and that the interaction of trust and individual school inspections requires further consideration. However, now that MATs are the largest part of the school system, with a key responsibility for school improvement, a process for MAT inspection should be delivered as a matter of urgency.

155. The Department must authorise Ofsted to develop a framework for the inspection of MATs as a matter of urgency and set out a plan for building the appropriate expertise and capacity in this area. Ofsted will need to be appropriately resourced to develop their expertise in this respect and should continue to ensure that all individual schools are assessed on a consistent basis whether or not they are part of a MAT.

291 [Q49](#)

292 [Q50](#)

293 [Qq86–87](#)

294 The Standing International Conference of Inspectorates, [Inspectorate Profile: The Netherlands](#), accessed 12 December 2023

295 [Qq214–215](#)

296 [Q216](#)

Conclusions and recommendations

Ofsted as an organisation

1. There is general agreement among teachers, school leaders, parents, teaching unions and other organisations on the important role that an independent inspectorate plays, and on the need for strong accountability for schools. However, it is clear that relations between Ofsted and the school sector, teachers, and leaders have become extremely strained and that trust in the inspectorate is worryingly low. There is a perception that Ofsted has become more defensive of its practices in recent years and is unwilling to listen and be open to change. The appointment of the new HMCI provides a crucial opportunity to reset and restore these relations and doing so should be a key priority for the new HMCI in his first year in post. We welcome Sir Martyn Oliver's proposal to conduct a "Big Listen" with the sector and hope that this will lead to tangible changes. (Paragraph 14)
2. Following the tragic death of Ruth Perry, Ofsted has taken some steps to address the concerns raised about the school inspection process. The changes announced are welcome but these announcements, in and of themselves, do not appear to have alleviated concerns and restored Ofsted's relations with the sector. Ofsted must ensure that they are the beginning, not the end, of a process of listening and reforming. Ofsted must also give careful consideration to the coroner's judgement and the Prevention of Future Deaths report issued following the inquest into the death of Ruth Perry. (Paragraph 15)
3. *In his "Big Listen" with the sector, the new HMCI must ensure that he is listening to a wide range of views, including those of teachers, school and trust leaders, governors, parents, and pupils. In doing this, he must ensure that Ofsted is genuinely open to engage and willing to reflect on where it needs to improve.* (Paragraph 16)
4. *The serious nature of a Prevention of Future Deaths report will not be lost on the new HMCI. We expect him to make every effort to address the coroner's report fully. Ofsted should review the seven areas of concern set out in the coroner's report following the inquest into the death of Ruth Perry and put in place changes to ensure that each of these have been addressed as a matter of urgency. They must monitor the impact of the changes they have already put in place and commit to making further changes if these have not been shown to have a meaningful impact. Going forward we expect HMCI to report to this Committee on a six-monthly basis on Ofsted's progress in addressing these significant concerns.* (Paragraph 17)

The inspection process

5. There is broad agreement that inspections are not currently long enough to cover the full framework and give an accurate picture of a school's performance. We accept that, in a context of finite funding, any increase to the length of inspections would require a decrease in their frequency. We are clear that we do not wish to return to the previous exemption for outstanding schools, which stayed in place for too

long. On balance, we recognise that there is a case to be made for a small reduction in the frequency of inspection in order to increase the value, length and depth of inspections. (Paragraph 26)

6. *In the shorter term, the Department should work with Ofsted to enable the inspectorate to reduce the frequency of inspections to approximately five to six years for 'good' and 'outstanding' schools and three to four years for schools judged 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate'. This should be supported by better use of risk assessment to identify schools in most need of inspection. Ofsted should use the additional resource released by this change to enable inspections to be carried out in more depth.* (Paragraph 27)
7. *In the longer term, the Department should support Ofsted in making a strong case to the Treasury for additional funding to carry out more in-depth inspections, without compromising on frequency or the principle that all schools are subject to periodic inspection. Funding for Ofsted should not be seen to be in competition with school funding, and any additional funding for the inspectorate must not result in less funding being made available for schools.* (Paragraph 28)
8. We have heard a range of views as to the appropriate notice period for inspections and accept that this is an issue that is difficult to fully resolve. While we do not believe that there should be a return to the much longer notice periods of the past, the current notice period appears to be causing operational difficulties in many schools, particularly smaller schools, and creating additional stress and anxiety for school leaders. (Paragraph 33)
9. *Ofsted should consider the case for a small increase in the notice period given to schools—we heard suggestions that around five working days would be appropriate. The notice period should remain relatively short in order to limit the pressure on leaders and avoid a situation where schools are spending a long time preparing for inspection, but should be long enough to ensure that waiting for an inspection does not cause undue difficulties in the way schools operate. Ofsted should also consider whether schools could be given a specific term in which to anticipate an inspection.* (Paragraph 34)
10. *Ofsted should consider whether smaller schools could be given a longer notice period or greater flexibility around deferrals to take into account the particular operational challenges they face during inspections.* (Paragraph 35)
11. The short timeframe of inspections does not allow for in-depth engagement with different groups in the inspection process. While we do not believe that Ofsted should introduce feedback meetings with parents following an inspection, there is a case to be made for improving the ways in which the inspectorate engages with different groups, as long as this does not give undue weight to small but vocal groups of parents or pupils. Better engagement outside the inspection process would also be highly valuable and would support Ofsted to better assess which schools are in most urgent need of inspection. We are also concerned at the reduction in focus on school governance in Ofsted reports. (Paragraph 46)
12. *Ofsted should explore ways in which it can improve its engagement with parents, pupils, governors, and trustees before and during the inspection process, ensuring that opportunities are well-communicated and that those with additional needs*

are supported to engage. Our previous recommendation to extend the notice period would also help to address this. In particular, they must ensure that inspectors are fully engaging with governors and trustees during an inspection, and that governance, including the quality and regularity of engagement with parents, is sufficiently covered in the final report. (Paragraph 47)

13. *Ofsted should introduce regular surveys of parents, pupils and staff outside the inspection process and use this information as part of its risk assessment to identify schools most or least in need of inspection. (Paragraph 48)*
14. We are concerned that the lack of relevant phase-specific expertise among inspectors appears to be a widespread problem, particularly in primary schools and in specialist education settings. A high-quality inspection regime must ensure that inspectors have sufficient expertise to be able to accurately assess the quality of provision and offer useful feedback. We welcome the incoming HMCI's call for more school leaders to move into inspection and hope that this will be reflected in recruitment of HMIs with expertise across all types of school. However, the Committee felt that Ofsted had not provided sufficient evidence to reassure that it was prioritising relevant expertise in all inspection teams. (Paragraph 58)
15. *Ofsted should publish data on HMIs' and contracted Ofsted inspectors' expertise regarding phase of education and subject, and the proportion of inspections led by at least one inspector with the relevant phase expertise. (Paragraph 59)*
16. *Ofsted must ensure that they are matching inspectors' expertise with the appropriate phase and subject as much as possible, and ensure that their recruitment processes are targeting particular gaps in expertise. At a minimum, they must ensure that the lead inspector always has expertise in the relevant type of school and, in larger teams, that a majority of members of the team have the relevant expertise. (Paragraph 60)*
17. *We recognise the value and expertise that experienced inspectors can bring, particularly long-serving HMIs. Ofsted should commission an independent assessment of the factors affecting retention of experienced HMIs and take appropriate steps to address the issue. (Paragraph 61)*
18. We have heard that access to training materials gives school leaders working as inspectors a disproportionate advantage over those who do not, and that Ofsted does not make enough data available to qualified researchers. While we accept that Ofsted publishes many other materials to support schools with inspections and that there are some restrictions in publishing personal data, we believe that Ofsted should improve its transparency by publishing as much information as possible. (Paragraph 62)
19. *Ofsted must ensure that it is publishing as much information as possible to maximise the transparency of its work. In particular, it must make more data available to key educational research organisations to allow for high-quality research to be conducted. Ofsted must also publish the training materials which are available to their inspectors, with appropriate caveats where necessary to explain what they are, and are not, intended to be used for. (Paragraph 63)*

Following an inspection

20. There is widespread agreement amongst schools, governing bodies and other organisations that inspection reports are too short and formulaic and do not provide enough useful information, particularly for schools. Targeting the reports at a parent audience means that schools do not always receive an in-depth assessment of their strengths and areas for improvement, and there is conflicting evidence as to whether parents themselves find the reports useful. School leaders find the oral feedback given in meetings more helpful, but this is often not fully reflected in the final published report. (Paragraph 67)
21. *As part of our recommended increase to the length and depth of inspections, we also recommend that Ofsted increase the length and depth of analysis provided in inspection reports to ensure that they are genuinely useful in providing parents and schools with the information they need. This should be developed in consultation with representatives of schools, governing bodies, and parents.* (Paragraph 68)
22. Evidence from groups representing teachers, school leaders, parents and pupils was highly critical of Ofsted's single-word overall judgements. There is much concern that they simplify the complex environment of a school and the many efforts of its leadership and staff into a single headline. We have heard many suggestions as to possible alternatives, including examples from other jurisdictions, which should be further explored to assess the benefits and disadvantages of different approaches. However, we recognise that the grades are closely linked to many Department policies and that any changes will require broader reform of the system. Any reforms must also be mindful of the use made by parents of Ofsted gradings in school choice. (Paragraph 83)
23. *The Department and Ofsted should work together as a priority to develop an alternative to the current single-word overall judgement that better captures the complex nature of a school's performance, and ensure that these changes interact effectively with Department policies. In doing so, they should look at other jurisdictions both within and outside the UK, to assess what has worked well beyond the English context.* (Paragraph 84)
24. *As a first step, Ofsted and Department for Education websites should always show the full list of judgements, not just the overall judgement, and encourage schools to do the same on their websites and published materials.* (Paragraph 85)
25. The 'high-stakes' nature of the current system is clearly causing a significant amount of stress and worry for school leaders. In particular, there is an overwhelming fear among headteachers that they risk losing their job following a less than 'good' judgement, and the Department's guidance is unclear as to whether this is routinely the case. The extension of academy orders to schools with two consecutive judgements of 'requires improvement' has further exacerbated this problem. We are clear that there should be consequences for schools which are performing badly, but that this should be proportionate, and there must be suitable mechanisms available to support leaders. (Paragraph 86)
26. *The Department should assess whether the decision to impose academy orders on schools that have received 'requires improvement' ratings on more than one occasion*

is proportionate. As a first step, it should ensure that Regional Directors are genuinely taking into account the views of local authorities, trusts, and other relevant bodies before taking a decision, and that this consultation process is clearly communicated to schools. The Department should publish guidance setting out the criteria by which Regional Directors come to these decisions. (Paragraph 87)

27. *The Department and Ofsted should review the support mechanisms available to school leaders during and following an inspection and ensure that these are as strong as possible to support the wellbeing of school leaders. Ofsted must publish a clear policy, and train inspectors, on their approach to dealing with distress among school leaders during an inspection, and in what cases inspections can and should be paused or deferred. We note that lessons could be learned from Ofsted's approach to deferring inspections in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, but deferrals alone are not enough to resolve this issue. (Paragraph 88)*
28. We have heard that there is not enough support for schools to improve following a negative inspection judgement, and that the support available does not always arrive as quickly as is needed. We recognise that the role of school improvement no longer sits with Ofsted, and that much of this work is now commissioned by Regional Directors and undertaken by multi-academy trusts. However, the evidence we have received suggests that there is a desire for greater support to help schools improve. (Paragraph 95)
29. It is essential that there is proper scrutiny of the regional system of school improvement. We do not agree with the former Schools Minister's view that it is sufficient to scrutinise Regional Directors solely through parliamentary scrutiny of ministers. (Paragraph 96)
30. *The Department must conduct a full audit of the support available to schools to help them improve, reviewing whether the amount of support is sufficient and what more is needed. In the interim, the Department should ensure that all schools and trusts are aware of the support on offer and develop a 'one-stop shop' to signpost relevant support. It must also ensure that support following a negative inspection judgement is provided as quickly as possible. (Paragraph 97)*
31. *The Department must improve the transparency and accountability of the work of the Regional Directors. At a minimum, it should provide an annual report to Parliament setting out the scope, detail and impact of their work and make Regional Directors available to give evidence to the Committee. (Paragraph 98)*
32. We have received substantial evidence suggesting that Ofsted's complaints process is not seen to be working and amounts to Ofsted "marking their own homework". The changes announced in Ofsted's consultation on the process are welcome, and we particularly welcome the introduction of a telephone number which schools can call to raise concerns during an inspection, but these do not go far enough to address these concerns. In particular, there is tangible frustration that the role of the Independent Complaints Adjudication Service for Ofsted (ICASO) is limited to looking at how Ofsted has handled the complaint, rather than managing the complaint itself, which has not been addressed in the consultation. (Paragraph 108)

33. Schools have also told us that the complaints process is hampered by a lack of access to inspectors' notes and documents that have been used to reach a conclusion. While we understand that there are considerations around confidentiality regarding these documents, schools cannot effectively challenge a judgement if they are unable to access the evidence base used to support this judgement. There is also limited data available as to the proportion of complaints upheld relating to schools and how this has changed over time. This has contributed to a perceived lack of transparency and willingness from Ofsted to listen to and respond to criticism. (Paragraph 109)
34. *The Department for Education and Ofsted should conduct an in-depth review of the complaints process to ensure that there is an efficient and independent process for schools to challenge the findings as well as the conduct of an inspection. In doing so, they should explore the option of setting up an independent body with the powers to investigate inspection judgements through scrutiny of the evidence base.* (Paragraph 110)
35. *Ofsted must allow schools to gain access to the evidence base used to reach a judgement when making a complaint, making redactions to ensure that confidentiality and protection of the identity of individuals is maintained where this is necessary.* (Paragraph 111)
36. *In its annual report and accounts, Ofsted should publish separate complaints data for each sector in their remit, including data on the number and percentage of complaints per inspection, whether these relate to conduct or judgements, and the percentage of complaints for each that have been upheld. The annual report should also set out what improvements Ofsted has made as a result of learning from complaints.* (Paragraph 112)

The scope of inspections

37. There is broad support for the move away from a data-driven approach to one that is more focused on curriculum in the new Education Inspection Framework. However, there appear to be problems with how this has worked in practice, in particular around the impact this has had on the consistency of inspection judgements, and some suggestions that Ofsted is imposing a particular view of curriculum planning on schools. (Paragraph 128)
38. There is also widespread concern that the new framework is less suitable for primary and special schools, particularly smaller schools, who are finding it more difficult to meet its requirements. We appreciate that any change to the framework causes additional work for schools, which should be minimised, but we think there is a case for small adjustments to be made to resolve some of these issues. (Paragraph 129)
39. *Ofsted must publish their planned evaluation of the Education Inspection Framework as soon as possible. In this evaluation, Ofsted should review the implementation of the new framework, in particular looking at the impact it has had on primary schools, special schools and small schools, and consider ways in which it could be adapted to be more supportive of these schools. The inspectorate should clearly set out how it will*

take into account the context and capacity of individual schools when considering subject leadership. Ofsted should also consider whether sufficient time and emphasis is being placed on quality of teaching. (Paragraph 130)

40. It is clear that many teachers and school leaders are struggling with workload pressures in their roles, which are exacerbated by perceptions of what Ofsted expects to see in inspections. There are also concerns that the new framework has caused additional workload pressures for teachers, particularly subject leaders, and school leaders. Ofsted has taken steps to address this through its 'myth-busting' work, but the evidence presented to us suggests that this has not been effective or reached all the audiences who need to hear it. (Paragraph 131)
41. *The Department and Ofsted must go further than simply 'myth-busting': they must undertake a programme of research to fully understand the causes of inspection-related workload pressure and assess what changes would be genuinely helpful in reducing this. The new HMCI should prioritise work in this area as part of his "Big Listen" with the sector. (Paragraph 132)*
42. We were concerned by the suggestion that Ofsted does not sufficiently take into account the challenges faced by schools with high numbers of disadvantaged pupils or those with SEND. We appreciate that the 2019 inspection framework aimed to improve the situation by moving away from outcome data, but there still remains a clear link between disadvantage and negative Ofsted grades. (Paragraph 136)
43. *Ofsted must ensure that inspectors are fully taking a school's size and context into account in reports and judgements, in particular the numbers of pupils from disadvantaged groups and those with SEND, and other relevant factors such as recruitment and retention challenges. It must ensure that these factors are clearly described and visible in the final report. Progress for pupils in receipt of pupil premium should be a key measure on which schools are held accountable, and this should also be clearly set out in the narrative of reports, taking into account where this group is larger or smaller than the average. (Paragraph 137)*
44. Safeguarding is an essential aspect of every school's work. We agree that there is merit in schools being audited more regularly for compliance with safeguarding procedures, especially as we are recommending that some schools be inspected less frequently than is currently the case. However, we still see a role for Ofsted in ensuring that schools are identifying and acting on serious safeguarding concerns and especially making an effective contribution to child protection. (Paragraph 144)
45. The inquest into the death of Ruth Perry also raised concerns about the policy of judging a school 'inadequate' solely due to safeguarding. We accept that this only applies to a small number of schools and that Ofsted has taken some steps towards mitigating this issue through quicker re-inspections. Conducting more regular safeguarding audits should also help to reduce the number of schools to which this applies. However, it should never be the case that schools in this situation are judged as 'inadequate', and receive an academy order, solely due to minor administrative errors capable of being resolved within a short space of time. (Paragraph 145)
46. *The Department should consult on the best approach to increasing the regularity of safeguarding inspections through a less intensive compliance audit. In doing so,*

it should look at whether this should be done by local authorities or by a separate, independent body, and make the case for the appropriate resource to be provided. In its routine inspections of schools, Ofsted should continue to inspect how well schools respond to serious safeguarding issues and how effectively children are protected in practice. (Paragraph 146)

47. *In the interim, Ofsted should review its policy on 'inadequate' judgements due to ineffective safeguarding and ensure that schools are only being judged 'inadequate' in cases where they are fundamentally failing to keep children safe. In cases where the problems are uncomplicated and can be resolved within a short space of time, the Department should not issue an academy order until after the school has been reinspected. (Paragraph 147)*
48. We agree with the incoming HMCI that it is "inevitable" that MATs will be inspected, and we are frustrated that repeated calls for trust inspections from this Committee, its predecessors and others have not yet been acted upon by the Department. We recognise that Ofsted will need to develop their expertise and capacity in this area, and that the interaction of trust and individual school inspections requires further consideration. However, now that MATs are the largest part of the school system, with a key responsibility for school improvement, a process for MAT inspection should be delivered as a matter of urgency. (Paragraph 154)
49. *The Department must authorise Ofsted to develop a framework for the inspection of MATs as a matter of urgency and set out a plan for building the appropriate expertise and capacity in this area. Ofsted will need to be appropriately resourced to develop their expertise in this respect and should continue to ensure that all individual schools are assessed on a consistent basis whether or not they are part of a MAT. (Paragraph 155)*

Formal minutes

Tuesday 16 January 2024

Members present:

Robin Walker, in the Chair

Caroline Ansell

Flick Drummond

Nick Fletcher

Andrew Lewer

Ian Mearns

Ofsted's work with schools

Draft Report (*Ofsted's work with schools*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Summary agreed to.

Paragraphs 1 to 155 agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the First Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134.)

Adjournment

Adjourned till Tuesday 30 January 2024 at 9.30 am.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 17 October 2023

Tom Middlehurst, Assessment and Inspection Specialist, Association of School and College Leaders; **Daniel Kebede**, General Secretary, National Education Union; **Ian Hartwright**, Head of Policy, National Association of Head Teachers [Q1–33](#)

Sam Henson, Director of Policy and Communications, National Governance Association; **Jason Elsom**, Chief Executive, Parentkind; **Charlotte Rainer**, Coalition Lead, Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition; **Steve Rollett**, Deputy Chief Executive, Confederation of School Trusts [Q34–53](#)

Tuesday 24 October 2023

Natalie Perera, Chief Executive, Education Policy Institute; **Dr Sam Sims**, Lecturer, UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities; **Dr Bernardita Munoz Chereau**, Lecturer, UCL Centre for Educational Leadership; **Carole Willis**, Chief Executive, National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) [Q54–75](#)

Sir Michael Wilshaw, Former HMCI; **The Rt Hon. the Lord Knight of Weymouth**, Former Schools Minister and Chair, Beyond Ofsted inquiry [Q76–114](#)

Wednesday 8 November 2023

Amanda Spielman, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Children's Services, Ofsted [Q115–170](#)

Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for Schools, Department for Education; **Juliet Chua**, Director General for Schools, Department for Education [Q171–217](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

OWS numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Alder Brook ([OWS0126](#))
- 2 Allan, Mr James ([OWS0115](#))
- 3 Allsopp, Mr Wayne (Business Development Manager, New College Leicester) ([OWS0197](#))
- 4 Anonymised ([OWS0215](#))
- 5 Anonymised ([OWS0162](#))
- 6 Anonymised ([OWS0050](#))
- 7 Anonymised ([OWS0012](#))
- 8 Anonymised ([OWS0294](#))
- 9 Anonymised ([OWS0292](#))
- 10 Anonymised ([OWS0241](#))
- 11 Anonymised ([OWS0238](#))
- 12 Anonymised ([OWS0203](#))
- 13 Anonymised ([OWS0182](#))
- 14 Anonymised ([OWS0150](#))
- 15 Anonymised ([OWS0149](#))
- 16 Anonymised ([OWS0147](#))
- 17 Anonymised ([OWS0136](#))
- 18 Anonymised ([OWS0131](#))
- 19 Anonymised ([OWS0127](#))
- 20 Anonymised ([OWS0121](#))
- 21 Anonymised ([OWS0100](#))
- 22 Anonymised ([OWS0091](#))
- 23 Anonymised ([OWS0086](#))
- 24 Anonymised ([OWS0084](#))
- 25 Anonymised ([OWS0075](#))
- 26 Anonymised ([OWS0072](#))
- 27 Anonymised ([OWS0056](#))
- 28 Anonymised ([OWS0054](#))
- 29 Anonymised ([OWS0053](#))
- 30 Anonymised ([OWS0037](#))
- 31 Anonymised ([OWS0011](#))
- 32 Anonymised ([OWS0034](#))
- 33 Anonymised ([OWS0175](#))

- 34 Association for Citizenship Teaching ([OWS0258](#))
- 35 BACP ([OWS0185](#))
- 36 Bald, Mr John (Former Registered Inspector, Independent) ([OWS0171](#))
- 37 Bailey, Mrs Sam (Executive Principal, Wellspring Academy Trust) ([OWS0210](#))
- 38 Barnardos ([OWS0220](#))
- 39 Barnett-Ward, Mr Edmund (Director, The Affable Design Company) ([OWS0279](#))
- 40 Barr, Mr Jon ([OWS0085](#))
- 41 Le Bas, Peter (Retired LA Education Manager, Private Individual) ([OWS0152](#))
- 42 Bedlow, Ms Lisa (Former executive head teacher, Caversham and New Bridge Nursery Schools) ([OWS0104](#))
- 43 Bellamy, Mr ([OWS0282](#))
- 44 Big Education ([OWS0094](#))
- 45 Birdham CE Primary School ([OWS0145](#))
- 46 Bokhove, Professor Christian (Professor in Mathematics Education, University of Southampton); Jerrim, Professor John (Professor of Education and Social Statistics, UCL); and Sims, Dr Samuel (Lecturer, UCL) ([OWS0184](#))
- 47 Booth, Edmund (Foundation governor, Bishop Wood Junior School Tring); Ivory, Di (Parent governor, Bishop Wood Junior School Tring); Ayling, Liz (Foundation governor, Bishop Wood Junior School Tring); Miller, Gerry (Foundation governor and chair of governors, Bishop Wood Junior School Tring); Bellis, Rev Huw (Ex officio governor as Tring Team Parish rector, Bishop Wood Junior School Tring); Chappell, Pippa (Foundation governor, Bishop Wood Junior School Tring); Earnshaw, Chris (Parent governor, Bishop Wood Junior School Tring); Stanley, Gary (Ex officio governor as head teacher, Bishop Wood Junior School Tring); Hall, Jon (Ex officio associate governor as deputy head teacher, Bishop Wood Junior School Tring); and Reynolds, Jon (Foundation governor, Bishop Wood Junior School Tring) ([OWS0232](#))
- 48 Brill Church of England School ([OWS0216](#))
- 49 Bryant, Mrs Gillian ([OWS0041](#))
- 50 Bury, Mr and Mrs ([OWS0231](#))
- 51 Byrne, Mr Chris (Independent educational consultant, Personalised School Improvement) ([OWS0025](#))
- 52 CLEAPSS ([OWS0169](#))
- 53 Capper, Mrs Jenifer (Proprietor Silver Stars Day Nursery, Early Years Setting) ([OWS0188](#))
- 54 Carlucci, Marc ([OWS0277](#))
- 55 Carter ([OWS0164](#))
- 56 Catholic Education Service ([OWS0189](#))
- 57 Cheshire East Secondary Headteachers Association; and The Macclesfield Academy ([OWS0256](#))
- 58 Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition; and Schools Wellbeing Partnership ([OWS0247](#))
- 59 Churchill Academy & Sixth Form ([OWS0155](#))
- 60 Clare, Mr Charlie ([OWS0200](#))

- 61 Clare, Mrs Jane ([OWS0172](#))
- 62 Coleman, Mr Chris ([OWS0173](#))
- 63 Collingwood, Mrs Siobhan (Education Consultant and Executive member of the NEU, Different Doors Consultancy) ([OWS0110](#))
- 64 Confederation of School Trusts ([OWS0257](#))
- 65 Cosgrove, Mr John ([OWS0143](#))
- 66 Cox, Mr Andrew David (Teacher of English, Tudor Grange Academy, Solihull) ([OWS0083](#))
- 67 Cramp, Sylvia ([OWS0102](#))
- 68 Crilly, Dr Tessa (Vice Chair of Governors, Hitherfield Primary School) ([OWS0196](#))
- 69 Cross, Mrs Moira (Headteacher, Dordon Primary School) ([OWS0016](#))
- 70 Currie, Mr Graeme ([OWS0158](#))
- 71 Cushing, Dr Ian; Snell, Professor Julia ([OWS0240](#))
- 72 Darlington Primary Forum ([OWS0161](#))
- 73 Davison-Culmer, Mrs Carmel (Teacher, Bishop Young Academy) ([OWS0068](#))
- 74 Department for Education ([OWS0233](#))
- 75 Doherty, Mrs Janet (Head teacher, Manchester Hospital School) ([OWS0055](#))
- 76 Donegan, Mr Kelvin ([OWS0043](#))
- 77 Drury, Elaine ([OWS0119](#))
- 78 Kirkbride, Peter ([OWS0186](#))
- 79 EDSK think tank ([OWS0211](#))
- 80 Education Select Committee ([OWS0298](#))
- 81 Education Select Committee ([OWS0299](#))
- 82 Education Support ([OWS0245](#))
- 83 Ephgrave, Mrs Anna (Educational Consultant and Author, Creative Cascade UK Ltd) ([OWS0153](#))
- 84 Fair Education Alliance Youth Steering Group ([OWS0261](#))
- 85 Fellowes, Mrs Julie ([OWS0268](#))
- 86 Fishel, Max ([OWS0134](#))
- 87 Fletcher, Mr (Policy Contributor, Fabian Society Education Policy Group) ([OWS0146](#))
- 88 Francis, Vyveanne ([OWS0218](#))
- 89 Freedman, Mr Dan ([OWS0014](#))
- 90 Gordon, Mr Alan ([OWS0038](#))
- 91 Greany, Professor Toby (University of Nottingham) ([OWS0290](#))
- 92 Greater Manchester Hazards Centre ([OWS0280](#))
- 93 Greenaway, Mrs Sophie (Headteacher, Thameside Primary School) ([OWS0006](#))
- 94 Greene ([OWS0069](#))
- 95 Griffith, Miss Sarah (Head Teacher, Brierley Forest Primary and Nursery School) ([OWS0140](#))

- 96 Hagan, Ms Carmel O' (Retired teacher and Education Adviser, Formerly Head of MFL in London schools, LA MFL Adviser, PGCE Lecturer at the University of Roehampton, Head of the Secondary team at CILT – the National Centre for Languages and Research, and External Examiner for MFL PGCE courses at Kings College, London and Goldsmith's University) ([OWS0260](#))
- 97 Hart, Ms Frances ([OWS0071](#))
- 98 Hawke, Sarah ([OWS0032](#))
- 99 Hill ([OWS0044](#))
- 100 Hill, Mr Paul ([OWS0048](#))
- 101 Hudson, Mr John ([OWS0160](#))
- 102 Humanists UK ([OWS0285](#))
- 103 Huntington, Mr Trevor ([OWS0052](#))
- 104 Hussain, Dr Iftikhar (Lecturer, University of Sussex) ([OWS0151](#))
- 105 Jefferson, David ([OWS0144](#))
- 106 Jones, Sarah ([OWS0009](#))
- 107 Joyce, George ([OWS0092](#))
- 108 Keeble, Miss Elizabeth ([OWS0180](#))
- 109 Knapp, Mr Tim ([OWS0222](#))
- 110 Kyriacou, Emeritus Professor Chris ([OWS0125](#))
- 111 Lancaster and Morecambe Primary HT CLuster ([OWS0170](#))
- 112 Lancasterian Primary School ([OWS0019](#))
- 113 Leedham, Mr William ([OWS0096](#))
- 114 Berry, Mr Andrew; Leek, Ms Rebecca ([OWS0249](#))
- 115 Light, Mr Chris ([OWS0023](#))
- 116 Lilly, Mrs Julie ([OWS0166](#))
- 117 London Diocesan Board for Schools ([OWS0242](#))
- 118 London South East Academy Trust ([OWS0251](#))
- 119 Ludford, Jonathan ([OWS0081](#))
- 120 Lyons, Adrian ([OWS0042](#))
- 121 O'Reilly, MBE, Mrs Elizabeth (Chair of Governors, Greenway Primary & Nursery School) ([OWS0129](#))
- 122 Hannay, Mrs Lynn ([OWS0057](#))
- 123 Halesowen Teaching & Learning Community ([OWS0195](#))
- 124 Masterson, Mrs Linda ([OWS0026](#))
- 125 Mauldeth Road Primary School ([OWS0063](#))
- 126 McPartlin, Mr David ([OWS0226](#))
- 127 Minde, Mr Douglas ([OWS0040](#))
- 128 Moodie, Chris ([OWS0163](#))
- 129 Moss, Professor Gemma (Professor of Literacy, UCL Institute of Education) ([OWS0267](#))

- 130 Mountstevens, Mr Jonathan ([OWS0033](#))
- 131 Munoz-Chereau, Dr Bernardita; Hutchinson, Mrs Jo; and Ehren, Professor Melanie ([OWS0246](#))
- 132 Muslim Teachers' Association ([OWS0275](#))
- 133 NAHT ([OWS0098](#))
- 134 NASUWT ([OWS0137](#))
- 135 NASEN ([OWS0236](#))
- 136 National Association of Small Schools ([OWS0192](#))
- 137 National Director of SIAMS – Church of England ([OWS0062](#))
- 138 National Education Union ([OWS0228](#))
- 139 National Foundation for Educational Research ([OWS0227](#))
- 140 National Governance Association ([OWS0193](#))
- 141 National Network of Parent Carer Forums ([OWS0157](#))
- 142 National Youth Agency ([OWS0239](#))
- 143 Neale, Mrs Vicky ([OWS0141](#))
- 144 D'Netto, Mrs Clare ([OWS0066](#))
- 145 New Reflexions ([OWS0036](#))
- 146 Newby, Professor Michael ([OWS0093](#))
- 147 Norris, Mr Frank; Grimshaw, Ms Julie Price ([OWS0159](#))
- 148 Northway Community Primary School ([OWS0235](#))
- 149 Norwood Primary School, Southport ([OWS0223](#))
- 150 Nottingham Institute of Education, Nottingham Trent University ([OWS0120](#))
- 151 Nuffield Foundation ([OWS0284](#))
- 152 O'Brien, Ms Tracey ([OWS0001](#))
- 153 Ofsted ([OWS0259](#))
- 154 Organise ([OWS0221](#))
- 155 Outcomes First Group ([OWS0262](#))
- 156 PRUsAP ([OWS0105](#))
- 157 Parentkind ([OWS0237](#))
- 158 Parkinson, Mr Lee ([OWS0007](#))
- 159 Parkinson, Terry ([OWS0265](#))
- 160 Payne, Mrs Suzanne (Chair, Sefton Association of Primary Headteachers) ([OWS0183](#))
- 161 Pensby primary school ([OWS0138](#))
- 162 Perryman, Professor Jane (Professor of Sociology of Education, UCL Institute of Education); and Bradbury, Professor Alice (Professor of Sociology of Education, UCL Institute of Education) ([OWS0206](#))
- 163 Place2Be ([OWS0234](#))
- 164 Poole, Dr Andrew ([OWS0187](#))
- 165 Posner, Professor C M ([OWS0114](#))

- 166 Queen Emma Primary School ([OWS0118](#))
- 167 Rawson, Mrs Helen ([OWS0087](#))
- 168 Red Rose School, Lytham St Annes ([OWS0289](#))
- 169 Rhodes, Danny ([OWS0047](#))
- 170 Richards, Professor Colin ([OWS0045](#))
- 171 Roger de Clare C. of E. First School and Nursery ([OWS0178](#))
- 172 Ross, John ([OWS0099](#))
- 173 Royal Latin School Buckingham ([OWS0253](#))
- 174 Rozanski, Mr Nick ([OWS0191](#))
- 175 Rutherford, Mr Geoff ([OWS0176](#))
- 176 SSAT (The Schools, Students and Teachers Network) ([OWS0095](#))
- 177 Sallis, Mrs Pauline ([OWS0082](#))
- 178 University of Exeter School of Education ([OWS0207](#))
- 179 Schools North East ([OWS0244](#))
- 180 Scott, David ([OWS0076](#))
- 181 Scrafton ([OWS0051](#))
- 182 Sharples, Dr Robert ([OWS0287](#))
- 183 Sims ([OWS0142](#))
- 184 Sparrow, Ms Gillian ([OWS0004](#))
- 185 Speech and Language UK ([OWS0254](#))
- 186 Spielman, Amanda (His Majesty's Chief Inspector, Ofsted) ([OWS0297](#))
- 187 St John Bosco Catholic Primary School ([OWS0067](#))
- 188 States of Mind ([OWS0296](#))
- 189 Stephens, Dr John ([OWS0181](#))
- 190 Still, Ms Kate ([OWS0112](#))
- 191 Strange, Mrs Emma ([OWS0017](#))
- 192 Stringall, Ms Jane ([OWS0213](#))
- 193 Surrey's Primary Phase Council ([OWS0194](#))
- 194 Tagtiv8 Ltd ([OWS0064](#))
- 195 Talbot, Mr Pete ([OWS0049](#))
- 196 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) ([OWS0272](#))
- 197 The Bell Foundation ([OWS0271](#))
- 198 The Brook Special Primary School ([OWS0214](#))
- 199 The Federation of St Paul and St. Martin of Porres, St Martin of Porres Catholic Primary School, St. Paul's Catholic Primary School ([OWS0022](#))
- 200 The Free Churches Group of England and Wales ([OWS0264](#))
- 201 The Governing Board of the Federation of Hampstead Norreys Church of England Primary School and The Ilsleys Primary School ([OWS0128](#))
- 202 The Ignite Federation ([OWS0101](#))

- 203 The New Broadwalk PRU ([OWS0199](#))
- 204 The Oaks Childcare Clubs CIC ([OWS0255](#))
- 205 The Surrey Specialist School Phase Council ([OWS0202](#))
- 206 The Wapping and Shadwell Secondary Education Trust ([OWS0106](#))
- 207 Thomas, Mrs Amanda ([OWS0204](#))
- 208 Thompson, Dr Miles; Pawson, Dr Chris ([OWS0286](#))
- 209 Thomson, Mrs Carole ([OWS0167](#))
- 210 Thorpe, Mr Richard ([OWS0013](#))
- 211 Tierney, Mr Stephen ([OWS0190](#))
- 212 Tilian Partnership ([OWS0165](#))
- 213 Tiltman, Mr Peter (Head of School, Lancaster University School of Mathematics) ([OWS0148](#))
- 214 Townsend, Alice ([OWS0039](#))
- 215 Tuplin ([OWS0107](#))
- 216 Tweedmouth Prior Park First School ([OWS0269](#))
- 217 Twyford, Dr John (Retired Teacher Educator, School of Education, Exeter) ([OWS0070](#))
- 218 Walters, Mr Michael ([OWS0198](#))
- 219 Warner, Mrs Lindsay ([OWS0028](#))
- 220 Waters, Professor Sarah ([OWS0065](#))
- 221 Welch, Graham ([OWS0088](#))
- 222 West Berkshire County Council ([OWS0201](#))
- 223 Weymouth, Lord Knight of ([OWS0291](#))
- 224 Whitaker, Mr David ([OWS0219](#))
- 225 Whitney, Mr Luke ([OWS0205](#))
- 226 Wilkinson, Miss Emma ([OWS0217](#))
- 227 Wilson, Mr Mark ([OWS0174](#))
- 228 Wilson, Mr Brian ([OWS0078](#))
- 229 Wilson, Mrs Sharon ([OWS0029](#))
- 230 Wood , Ms Meena Kumari ([OWS0208](#))
- 231 Wood, Fiona ([OWS0079](#))
- 232 XP School Trust ([OWS0027](#))
- 233 Young Enterprise ([OWS0135](#))
- 234 Young, Mrs Pamela Ruth (Retired Primary School Special Needs Teacher ([OWS0139](#)))
- 235 Youth Sport Trust ([OWS0122](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

Session 2023–24

Number	Title	Reference
1st Special Report	Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils: Government response to the Committee's Seventh Report	HC 368

Session 2022–23

Number	Title	Reference
1st Report	Not just another brick in the wall: why prisoners need an education to climb the ladder of opportunity	HC 56
2nd Report	Educational poverty: how children in residential care have been let down and what to do about it	HC 57
3rd Report	The future of post-16 qualifications	HC 55
4th Report	Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance	HC 54
5th Report	Support for childcare and the early years	HC 969
6th Report	Appointment of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills	HC 1800
7th Report	Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils	HC 970
1st Special	Is the Catch-up Programme fit for purpose?: Government response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2021–22	HC 273
2nd Special	Not just another brick in the wall: why prisoners need an education to climb the ladder of opportunity: Government response to the Committee's First Report	HC 645
3rd Special	Educational poverty: how children in residential care have been let down and what to do about it: Government response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 854
4th Special	The future of post-16 qualifications: Government response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2022–23	HC 1673
5th Special	Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance: Government response to the Committee's Fourth Report	HC 1848
6th Special	Support for childcare and the early years: Government response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 1902

Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st Report	The forgotten: how White working-class pupils have been let down, and how to change it	HC 85
2nd Report	Appointment of the Chief Regulator of Ofqual	HC 512
3rd Report	Strengthening Home Education	HC 84
4th Report	Is the Catch-up Programme fit for purpose?	HC 940
1st Special Report	Strengthening Home Education: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 823

Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st Report	Getting the grades they've earned: Covid-19: the cancellation of exams and 'calculated' grades	HC 617
2nd Report	Appointment of the Children's Commissioner for England	HC 1030
3rd Report	A plan for an adult skills and lifelong learning revolution	HC 278
4th Report	Appointment of the Chair of the Office for Students	HC 1143
1st Special Report	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2019	HC 668
2nd Special Report	Getting the grades they've earned: COVID-19: the cancellation of exams and 'calculated' grades: Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 812
3rd Special Report	A plan for an adult skills and lifelong learning revolution: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 1310