



Campaign for State Education

Policy Briefing

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OFSTED's New Inspection Framework

Original Framework

- The 1988 Education Act continued the trend for central government to direct and define what goes on in state schools. It established OFSTED to ensure compliance with central government policies.
- Under the original framework, a substantial weight of evidence came from lesson observation which attempted to sample the child's classroom experience.
- The inspection of a secondary school typically required a team of ten to fifteen inspectors for four or five days and a primary school a team of six for two to four days.
- Inspection teams were provided by one of twenty three private companies and some LEAs. All of them had to tender competitively for each inspection.
- The companies, known as Inspection Providers, assembled teams of effectively self-employed inspectors, who had been trained by one of these companies and then licensed by OFSTED.
- This system enabled many inspectors to gain experience of schools in widely differing circumstances in different parts of the country. Many teachers and schools received constructive criticism from experienced observers and former practitioners. OFSTED built up and to some extent disseminated a substantial database of good practice, subject by subject, based on the hundreds of lesson observations that took place each year.
- Although OFSTED's verdicts tended to be used by many as "objective", the inspection methodology was essentially un-moderated. There was, however, limited monitoring by HMI of the teams provided by the different contractors. Some schools inspected felt that the quality of the inspection team and hence the inspection outcome was variable and a bit of a lottery. The quality of the inspection judgements could very much depend on the attitude of the Registered Inspector who led the inspection team. There was also some resentment that inspections, which could only provide "snapshots", did not reflect the normal life of a school.
- The notice of the inspection (six to ten weeks) required the production of much documentation by the school which was sometimes irrelevant to the school's normal way of working and was frequently ignored by inspection teams.
- Governors were required to provide students and parents with standard OFSTED questionnaires. Parents were also invited to a meeting before the inspection.
- The Governing Body met with inspectors before the inspection and had feedback from them at the end. They had to ensure that an Action Plan addressing the key issues in the report was sent to OFSTED within 40 days of receiving the final report.
- A summary report was sent to all parents.

New Regime

- The country has now been divided into five regions, each being contracted out to a single private company for four years.
- Schools now have two to three days notice of inspection.
- Inspections are conducted by a smaller team and last no longer than two days.
- No documents are required except the Self Evaluation Form (SEF) which has three parts:
 - A - the **self-evaluation**, which covers all aspects of school life including how the school consults and responds to parents, pupils and other stakeholders
 - B - **factual information** about the school including its composition, performance and targets.
 - C - information about **compliance with statutory requirements**.
- The Governors have "have final responsibility for" the SEF" but it is the headteacher who completes it on-line. Once the inspection is announced, the SEF is "frozen" by OFSTED so the brief notice of inspection effectively means that the school must have the SEF complete at all times and up-to-date. There is no separate document for governors.
- The inspectors will have read the SEF before arrival and the inspection will seek determine how accurate it is. Other documents and evidence may be asked for during the inspection.
- There is no pre-inspection meeting between the lead inspector and the school's governors, staff or parents. A meeting between the staff or governors and the lead inspector *may* take place at the start of the inspection "where this is possible".
- Governors are "asked to send a letter to parents and carers informing them of the inspection and inviting them to complete a short questionnaire," but this takes place within the short timeframe of the notice of inspection and the inspection. There is no pupils' questionnaire.
- The key elements of the new process are performance data, the on-line SEF and the previous OFSTED report. Interviews, discussions and some lesson observations will take place. Lesson observation, however, is much reduced compared with the previous framework and will usually not be carried out by subject specialists.
- There is no feedback meeting with the governing body after the inspection although governors may be invited to the feedback to the senior management team.
- Interviews with parents or governors and responses to questionnaires are much less likely given the short notice of inspections. The inspection guidance states, however, that parents and carers may indicate that they would like to speak with inspectors.
- A report, which will be shorter than before, will be sent to the school after the inspection. The school will be identified as 'outstanding', 'good', 'satisfactory' or 'inadequate'.

- There is no requirement for the school to produce and send an Action Plan to OFSTED.
- Schools will be inspected every three years and some may have subject inspections in between.

What CASE Thinks

- The reduced resources committed to the new "light touch" regime has put cost-cutting before reliability.
- The new system aims to force schools into a permanent state of compliance. Inspections are part of a disciplinary process which schools can easily fail. The consequences of failure are serious.
- The absence of any proposals for moderation between inspectors and companies raises serious questions about the independence and objectivity of inspections.
- The shift to reviewing paperwork at the expense of observing live lessons is worrying. Underlying quality assurance is the assumption that anything that people in organisations do can be measured and set down on paper and anything that cannot be handled in this way has no validity. As Hargreaves and Hopkins warned some time ago:
"It will be very easy for inspection, or any other accountability system, to stunt institutional growth by undermining the processes of planning, which involves delicate human relationships, by focusing heavily on the written plan, which looks robust and open to interrogation."
- The imposition on schools of a standardised reporting system facilitates the inspection but will not necessarily be helpful. Defining generalised outcomes for students that are both acceptable (i.e. sensitive to individual student contexts) and inspectable is difficult, if not impossible. The reduction in live observation makes inaccurate judgements more likely.
- The SEF assumes not only that the "quality" of a school depends on its systems and processes but that the evidence for this must exist in auditable form for OFSTED to recognise it. This will cause problems in situations where a school's best knowledge may not be recorded formally, but is collectively held by the tutors, heads of year and classroom teachers etc. based on many meetings and discussions. The temptation, nevertheless, to create paperwork simply to meet the requirements of the SEF will be very real.
- As the new system will not inspect subject teaching as such, the knowledge of how subjects are being taught across the country will become vaguer.
- What little lesson observation there is is used to "track" whole school issues rather than to monitor the effectiveness of subject teaching. The new guidance suggests that thirty minute lesson observation should be appropriate but it also advises that "ten minute visits across a range of lessons might be helpful to track particular issues." It remains to be seen whether, with the passage of time, inspectors become de-skilled in judging lessons because they have less experience with which to benchmark their judgements. As for judging the quality of subject teaching in terms of accurate transmission of ideas, inspectors for much of the time will be out of their depth because they will be out of their specialism.
- There are significant concerns about the lack of input from parents, students and governors, whose involvement has become far less certain. Technically, governors are responsible for the content of the SEF but there is nothing beyond contingent goodwill to guarantee governor

involvement. For the role of such key stakeholders in education to be played down in this way without any attempt to justify the change must appear cynical. One of the positive aspects of the old OFSTED was the opportunity for parents to give their views about a school to an external body which had some power to act.

- The strongest correlation of a school's performance data, i.e. examination outcomes at GCSE and National Curriculum Tests, is with attainment levels when children first attend secondary school. In turn, this correlates strongly with social class. This means that schools deemed to require Special Measures are likely to have intakes with high proportions of children with socially disadvantaged families. The new system's emphasis will put these schools at much greater risk of being "failed". The first casualties are already coming in. During the autumn term of 2005, 85 schools were put into Special Measures compared with just 42 failed under the old system over corresponding period the previous year.
- It is prudent to look at the new OFSTED Framework in the wider context of government's education policy. Schools in Special Measures will be given a year to improve (with no specified criteria for this) before facing closure and being turned into academies or trust schools. CASE is concerned that OFSTED inspections have been tailored to support a political agenda of taking schools out of local authority control and particularly to help the government hit its target of at least 200 academies by 2010.

What you can do

- Governing Bodies have an important role - they need to ensure that there is proper consultation before the SEF is completed and that it is regularly on their agenda and kept up to date. They need to ask to see the inspectors and be present at the feedback.
- If you are a parent, has your school consulted you, what feedback have you received and what have they done about what parents have said?
- If you learn that your school is to be inspected ask to meet the inspectors and ask for feedback after the inspection. The timescale will make it difficult to organise with others to do this but doing so as a group will strengthen your case.

If you have difficulty, contact the **Regional Inspection Service Provider** for your region:-

Tribal plc: West Midlands and South of England.

Cambridge Education: East Midlands.

Nord Anglia: North of England.

CfBT: North of England Region B - Cheshire, Warrington, Greater Merseyside, Greater Manchester, North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire.

Prospects: London (North, West, Central, East and South), Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire & Isle of Wight, Surrey.

Additional Information:

Guidance for OFSTED Inspectors:

<http://www.OFSTED.gov.uk/schools/index.cfm>.

Self Evaluation Form:

<http://www.OFSTED.gov.uk/schools/sef.cfm>

Any feedback on this document will be gratefully received. CASE has been campaigning on education issues for over 40 years and relies on membership to fund its activities.

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