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# Evaluation of the Impact of Section 5 Inspections – Strand 3

*Final report for Ofsted  
June 2009*

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

In 2006-7 a research team at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) carried out an independent evaluation of the new Section 5 (s5) inspection process. The key findings from strand 1 and 2<sup>1</sup> of this research revealed that the majority of school leaders were satisfied with the inspection process and agreed with the inspection report recommendations. They considered that the inspection's contribution to school improvement was primarily through the confirmation, prioritisation and clarification of areas of improvement. The inspection process was generally perceived as contributing to school improvement and many schools also reflected that the inspection report had provided an impetus to drive forward progress.

In 2008 Ofsted commissioned the NFER to undertake an additional phase of research to build on the previous evaluations. The main aims of this strand 3 research were to:

- provide a longitudinal perspective on the impact of inspection on school improvement
- explore perspectives related to the impact of s5 inspections upon teachers and support staff and
- establish how schools were preparing for the next round of inspections.

The research was conducted between May 2008 and March 2009 and the methodologies used consisted of qualitative case-study visits to 18 schools (inspected between October 2005 and March 2006) previously visited as part of the original evaluation, and a short one-paged email survey completed by 126 headteachers. The case studies included 96 interviews with members of the senior leadership team, teachers and teaching assistants.

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<sup>1</sup> Findings from strand 2 can be found in: McCrone, T., Rudd, P., Blenkinsop, S. Wade, P. Rutt, S. and Yeshanew, T. (2007). *Evaluation of the impact of Section 5 inspections* (NFER, Slough). This strand of the work included a detailed, large-scale questionnaire survey completed by 1,597 schools that had experienced an s5 inspection. Many of the findings from this survey were statistically significant and support the findings from the smaller scale survey reported in the present (strand 3) study.

## Key Findings

### Lesson observations

- Strand 2 findings revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between constructive oral feedback and overall satisfaction with the inspection process. In line with this, Strand 3 revealed that, in schools where the lesson observation process had been regarded as fair, well-managed and as extensive as possible given limited time, there was a high level of satisfaction from all staff.
- The important constituent of a thorough inspection was generally perceived to be that the judgements were soundly-based, and for this reason it was essential that the number and length of observations were viewed as fair, appropriate and to have a rationale behind their selection. Where, in a minority of cases, concern was expressed by senior managers and teachers at the perceived lack of, or short duration of, observations, this often reflected a view held by the school staff that the inspection team had not fully engaged with classroom practice and therefore their judgements were not necessarily '*soundly-based*'.
- Most teachers expressed a preference for receiving feedback personally from the inspector who undertook the observation, and as soon as possible after the lesson. Where this was thorough and well-managed it elicited a positive reaction. Although there was general acceptance that inspectors were under time pressure, the provision of adequate feedback, consistently applied within and across inspection teams, was a contributory cause for satisfaction with the inspection process.
- Most teaching assistants were satisfied with their role in inspections, because they assumed that inspectors were not directly observing them, but the lesson overall, and the way in which they were used by the teacher. They also expressed a preference, and an expectation, that they should receive feedback from the teacher rather than from the inspector. As was also the case with their teaching colleagues, teaching assistants' main concern was that the teachers they worked with should have adequate observations and that the school should be judged fairly.

## Inspection recommendations

- There was a general view that specific recommendations were more helpful (than more general ones) because they provided greater focus, action was easier to identify and they were felt to be more straightforward to address because they were less open to (mis)interpretation. Furthermore, there was some evidence that very broad recommendations did not instigate direct action.
- Additionally, two or three years after being given, recommendations continued to be viewed as helpful if they assisted with prioritising, supplied focus or provided a point of reference for the school development plan. Consistent with strand 2 findings, on reflection headteachers believed that the recommendations validated senior leaders' judgements on areas for improvement and helped to focus the internal agenda and to move it forward. Recommendations were also perceived to be useful for providing external credibility and, on occasion, for providing leverage with local authorities for obtaining funding and resources.
- Where recommendations were no longer believed to be helpful two or three years after the inspection this was generally because the school reported that they had moved on in the period since the inspection, or the recommendations were sometimes regarded as having been based on a weak cohort and therefore no longer relevant, or they were either perceived to lack the correct focus or did not always take full account of the school circumstances.
- Classroom practitioners and senior leaders reported that recommendations to improve assessment had led to more involvement by all staff, leading to greater consistency across the school in the use of assessment. Such recommendations also led to more staff development, in turn leading to greater understanding and confidence with regard to assessment techniques and, as assessment techniques were reported to have been implemented on a whole-school basis, more sharing of good practice.
- Additionally, there was evidence that the way in which the recommendations were implemented was significant: actions were perceived to be particularly successful when all members of staff shared collective responsibility. The approach taken to implementation by senior leaders was also reported to influence subsequent action. Furthermore, there was a view that the nature of some 'developmental' recommendations was such that action was required on a continuing basis.

## Impact

- Inspection was generally perceived to have achieved a direct positive impact on school improvement in terms of assessment and, to some extent, quality of teaching, and to have contributed to improved attainment. Other school improvements included increased distributed leadership and management, restructured support staff roles, enhanced staff confidence and better relationships with pupils. Although it was acknowledged that inspection may have contributed to some of these areas of improvement and it was recognised that inspection had provided focus and affirmation, it was also widely accepted that many other factors influence school improvement and that it is difficult to attribute progress to any one source.
- In terms of reported indirect impact linked to the s5 recommendations, changes included, as mentioned above, refined management structures, improvements in self-evaluation, curriculum developments and altered staff morale - either boosting or demoralising staff depending on whether the achieved inspection grade matched expectations. Additionally, although the majority felt that the focus on recommendation areas had not led to a lack of attention elsewhere, nevertheless there was some limited evidence that concentrating attention in one area did in some cases lead to a reduction in standards elsewhere.

## The future

- Self-evaluation, two or three years after the first s5 inspections were conducted, was widely perceived to be an ongoing, inclusive '*process*', rather than an '*event*' with all school staff reported as contributing to some extent. Furthermore, there was a generally positive attitude to the value of the Self-Evaluation Form (SEF), even if keeping it updated was perceived to be a burdensome process.
- The vast majority of interviewees reported that they were at least reasonably well-prepared for their next inspection and most described themselves as very well-prepared and referred to updated SEFs and '*evidence trails*' to show improvement. Moreover, many now reported that they had a better idea of what would be expected from them.
- Where there was less confidence reported with regard to future inspection grades, the majority of interviewees cited the school's test and examination results as the reason for their concerns. Other reasons included a view that improvements had not yet had time to become embedded or staffing changes had affected progress. In addition, there was some concern expressed with regard to perceived inconsistency between inspection teams. Furthermore, in schools where the last inspection was regarded as a negative experience by the staff involved, the level of pessimism, with regard to the next inspection, was particularly strong.

## Recommendations

Ofsted may wish to give consideration to the following points:

- **The importance of observations** – classroom practitioners viewed observation, and feedback, as very significant in terms of satisfaction with the whole inspection process. While school staff understood the time restrictions of s5 inspections, Ofsted might consider placing more emphasis on explaining the rationale behind the number of, and length of, observations. In addition, classroom practitioners appreciated inspectors who took the time to fully, and consistently, engage with classroom practice – only then would teachers respect inspectors’ judgements as being fair and ‘*soundly based*’. Teachers also preferred feedback directly from inspectors, while teaching assistants were happy to receive feedback from teachers.
- **The importance of dialogue** – as satisfaction with the inspection process was regarded as integral to schools’ acceptance of the inspection outcome, it was viewed as essential that inspectors were not only consistent (and seen to be consistent), within and across teams, in their approach to observation and feedback, but also in the way that they handled discussions with all school staff. It should be borne in mind that the perceptions outlined in this report are based on some of the first s5 inspections conducted, and that evidence from the five recently conducted re-inspections indicated no concerns with regard to dialogue. Nevertheless, inspection teams should be aware that successful dialogue was regarded by school staff as key to satisfaction with the process and outcome approval.
- **The significance of appropriate recommendations** – recommendations that were more specific, provided focus, were regarded as actionable, were not open to misinterpretation, or provided a clear point of reference were generally regarded as more appropriate recommendations that would hold longitudinal value. Conversely, recommendations that were viewed as less helpful tended to be those that were perceived to be too ‘data driven’. School staff were not against the use of data to ‘drive’ the recommendations, but stressed that the data *should take full account of the school context and circumstances*. Recommendations based only on a weak cohort and therefore no longer relevant, for example, or those that lacked correct focus or did not take full account of the school context, were deemed to be less helpful than those that did take full account of school contextual factors.
- **How to maximise positive impact of recommendations** – positive impact was generally perceived to have been achieved when the recommendations were viewed as appropriate (see above) and therefore actionable. There was substantial evidence that recommendations with regard to assessment, tracking and monitoring were successful because they were developmental in nature and over time, and were inclusive so that there was whole-school ownership. For positive impact to be felt, and for recommendations to further contribute to school improvement, inspection teams may wish to consider further collaboration with schools

in arriving at recommendations and additionally building on, and aligning recommendations with, *'the evidence trails'* demonstrated in SEFs. This recommendation is likely to have particular relevance over the next few years as pupil level well-being indicators are developed alongside traditional attainment data.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

This report presents the findings from the third strand of an evaluation of the impact of Section 5 (s5) inspections, commissioned by Ofsted and conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).

The research builds on and develops data from strands 1 and 2 of this evaluation, which were conducted in 2006 and 2007. The main sources of these data included a survey of all schools inspected between October 2005 and March 2006<sup>2</sup>, statistical modelling of survey responses, case-study visits to 72 schools where interviews were conducted with headteachers, senior managers, governors, parents and pupils and a desk-top review of key case-study school documents and test and examination results.

The new form of inspection for maintained schools in England was introduced, in accordance with the provisions of Section 5 (s5) of the Education Act 2005, in September 2005. The main elements of the new system include: shorter notice of inspection, smaller inspection teams, more frequent inspections, an increased emphasis on the school's own self-evaluation evidence, and shorter reports with fewer, clearer recommendations for improvement.

The key findings from the research conducted in 2006-07 revealed that the great majority of school respondents and interviewees were satisfied with the inspection process and agreed with the inspection report recommendations. They considered that the inspection's contribution to school improvement was primarily through the confirmation, prioritisation and clarification of areas of improvement. The inspection process was generally perceived as contributing to school improvement and many school interviewees also reflected that the inspection report had provided an impetus to drive forward progress.

In addition, school interviewees sometimes expressed a view that the time lapse (less than one school year) was not sufficient to allow them to comment in detail on the progress made in meeting report recommendations, on the long-term impact of inspections, or on the impact on pupil outcomes.

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<sup>2</sup> Findings from strand 2 can be found in: McCrone, T., Rudd, P., Blenkinsop, S. Wade, P. Rutt, S. and Yeshanew, T. (2007). *Evaluation of the impact of Section 5 inspections* (NFER, Slough). This strand of the work included a detailed, large-scale questionnaire survey completed by 1,597 schools that had recently experienced an s5 inspection. The survey had a very good response rate and the findings can be considered to be statistically robust. Many of the findings from this large-scale survey were statistically significant and support the findings from the smaller scale email survey reported in the current (strand 3) study.

## 1.2 Aims and objectives

It was in this context that Ofsted commissioned the NFER to undertake a third phase of research to build on the key features of strands 1 and 2. The three main aims of this follow-up evaluation were to:

- provide a longitudinal perspective on the impact of inspections on school improvement and school effectiveness
- explore perspectives related to the impact of s5 inspections upon teachers, support staff and parents
- find out how schools are preparing for the next round of inspections.

The methodology used for the evaluation is outlined below.

## 1.3 Methodology

Two main methodologies were used to meet the research objectives of the study. Firstly, qualitative case-study interviews were carried out with school staff in 18 schools; these were schools previously visited by NFER researchers as part of strands 1 and 2 of this evaluation. Secondly, a short one-paged email survey was dispatched to headteachers in 554 schools included in earlier strands of the evaluation, either in terms of a large-scale questionnaire survey (strand 2) or the case-study visits (strands 1 and 2).

Each school case study comprised interviews with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, teachers and teaching assistants (TAs). The school visits were conducted between June 2008 and January 2009, and the email survey was administered between June and September 2008.

Case-study and email survey responses were analysed by school phase and inspection grade. In addition, the seniority level of case-study interviewee (that is, senior manager, teacher or support staff) was incorporated into the analytical framework. Where differences by these sub-categories were observed they have been included.

## 1.4 The Sample

The sample for strand 3 of the evaluation consisted of 18 case-study visits and a short email survey sent to 554 primary, secondary and special schools inspected between October 2005 and March 2006 and previously included in strands 1 and 2 of this research.

## Case-study sample

The sample was selected from the 72 schools visited in strand 1 or 2 of the evaluation. The original dataset of all schools inspected between October 2005 and March 2006 was provided by Ofsted and a random representative sample of 72 schools was drawn, stratified on the following criteria:

- school sector - secondary, primary and special
- geographical region – based on nine Government Office Regions (GORs)
- overall inspection grade (grade 1 ‘outstanding’, grade 2 ‘good’, grade 3 ‘satisfactory’, and grade 4 schools ‘notice to improve’).

The strand 3 school sample represented the nine GORs in England, and included ten primary, five secondary and three special schools. In terms of inspection grades, there were three grade 1 ‘outstanding’, five grade 2 ‘good’, nine grade 3 ‘satisfactory’ and one grade 4 ‘notice to improve’ schools.

All interviewees in eleven of the case-study schools were present at the original s5 inspection, in the remaining schools wherever possible interviews were conducted with staff who had experienced the inspection, but in some cases, for example where there was a new headteacher, this was not always possible.

In total 96 school staff were interviewed as follows:

- 29 Senior Leadership Team members including, for example, headteachers, deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers and college directors.
- 44 teachers including, for example, heads of department, subject coordinators and teachers.
- 23 teaching assistants including, for example, support staff and higher level teaching assistants.

## The email survey

A one-paged email survey was sent to 500 schools randomly selected from the original dataset of schools, and to 54 schools visited as case studies in previous strands but not featured as case studies in strand 3. All 554 schools were inspected between October 2005 and March 2006. Two reminders were despatched to headteachers and 126 completed questionnaires were achieved yielding a response rate of 23 per cent. Six schools did not identify their school name.

Responses were received from 91 primary, 20 secondary and 10 special schools (five schools did not reveal their phase). The overall effectiveness grades of the achieved email survey schools were:

Grade	Number of Schools
Outstanding	20
Good	53
Satisfactory	42
Notice to improve	6
Unidentified	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>126</b>

## 1.5 Structure of the report

The following chapters of this report cover aspects of the longitudinal impact of inspection and reflections on the process from school staff. They are organised as follows:

**Chapter 2** reports on staff perceptions on their involvement in the inspection process.

**Chapter 3** examines action and subsequent changes taken as a result of the recommendations, as well as the views on the extent to which the recommendations have been implemented after two or three years.

**Chapter 4** presents the impact that the recommendations have had on school improvement and any other consequences of inspection.

**Chapter 5** considers how schools viewed preparations for future inspections and Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF) grades anticipated.

**Chapter 6** concludes the report and draws together the main findings and the implications for future inspections.

## 2. Involvement in the Inspection Process

Findings from strand 2 of this research revealed that oral feedback from, and dialogue with the inspection team was viewed as a vital part of the inspection process. Strand 3 examined the attitudes of senior staff, teachers and teaching assistants to inspection observations, dialogue and feedback. These reflections are based on inspections that had taken place between two and three years ago, in addition to views on more recent inspections in five schools.

### 2.1 Reflections on staff observations

Staff experiences of observations and their responses to these experiences varied considerably across the 18 case-study schools. However, there were three elements of observations that most concerned staff:

- the number of observations undertaken during an inspection
- the length of observations
- the nature of the feedback process to staff.

There was a general understanding that the different nature of the s5 inspection system meant that there were likely to be fewer observations than under the previous system and that their duration was also more likely to be limited. Consequently, in some schools there was a positive reaction to the **extent of observation** experienced during s5 inspections, with some headteachers in particular expressing the view that the inspection had involved more observations than they had expected, as explained by a primary school headteacher: *'They probably observed about 50 per cent of teachers, which is more than they led us to believe'*. Others commented favourably on the number of observations in a limited timescale, or the diversity of observations. For example, in one secondary school, where there was a high level of satisfaction with the observation process from all staff interviewed, the headteacher said observations had extended to tutor groups and an assembly.

Despite the recognition that the number of observations were now fewer than under the previous system, there was often some measure of disappointment from teachers whose lessons had not been observed, either as reported by senior staff, or commented on by teachers themselves. A headteacher in a secondary school that had been inspected in 2005 and 2008 stated that, *'we did get some staff at this inspection and the last one complaining that they did this outstanding lesson and weren't observed'*. In a primary school, a teacher interviewed said that although the staff knew that *'they [Ofsted] wouldn't be able to see everyone, getting that feedback from someone who isn't on your staff saying you are a good teacher, that's actually quite nice'*. One

headteacher summed up this sense of disappointment about not being observed as follows: *'there is nothing worse than the staff having worked their socks off and then no-one comes to observe them; good staff want to get seen'*.

However, this reported disappointment could be interpreted as a positive sign by senior management, as an assistant headteacher explained: *'it's nice that teachers were upset that they weren't observed; this is because they put so much into it, that they feel confident and they would like to be recognised'*. There was also a realistic attitude from interviewees that in what was now a relatively short inspection period, there had to be limitations on observations and although confident individual teachers may have been disappointed by not being observed, the most important requirement was that judgements were soundly-based.

There were, however, some schools where the numbers of observations carried out were the cause of real concern, rather than just disappointment on the part of staff who had hoped to be observed. For example, in an infant school, the deputy headteacher (the headteacher was new and had not been present) said that there had been *'no observations at all, they just came and sat in an office and talked to the head. It was just a data-handling process'*. This view was supported by a teacher interviewed, who said that the school was never *'allowed to present the full picture'*, and that the inspectors were *'more interested in the numbers than the children'*. In another (primary) school, the headteacher and teachers interviewed reported that the number of observations were very limited as the team spent most of the first day talking to the headteacher and most of the second writing the report. For the headteacher this lack of contact with classes was an issue because: *'I think schools can do a very good sell. Some schools are much better at doing this than others and I don't think you get a very accurate reflection of the school'*.

In addition to the number of observations undertaken, there were some strong reactions to the **length of observations**. In around a third of the case-study schools, concerns were raised about observations that were only for part of a lesson, which was considered insufficient time to gain a rounded picture of a lesson. One primary school teacher commented that it was *'a very small picture to be judged on'* and that her reputation *'rested on half an hour.'* A headteacher from another primary school had attended some observations with an inspector and reflected: *'twenty minutes is difficult'* and added that this might not be sufficient to *'get a clear picture of the lesson as a whole'*. His views were reflected by two of the teachers interviewed at the school, who agreed that a 20 minute observation was only a portion of the lesson and did not allow for a judgement on the entire lesson. By contrast, in the schools where observations had been for an entire lesson, or a substantial part of it, there were favourable comments about soundly-based judgements. For example, in a secondary school where observations had been for at least three-quarters of lessons, the headteacher reported that this was *'ample time to make*

*a judgement*', and one of the teachers commented that she had been observed for an entire lesson, so *'their judgements were firmly-based'*.

There were some schools where shorter periods of observation were accepted as being unavoidable, given the time restraints that inspection teams had. Therefore although short observations were not always considered ideal, if there was some flexibility in the system adopted, it could be viewed as acceptable. A secondary school headteacher described how if inspectors were satisfied with the first part of the lesson and the students' reactions, they only stayed for 15 minutes. In a special school, an assistant headteacher sympathised with the huge task that the single inspector had to undertake and explained that a good balance of observations was achieved by adopting a method in which *'the inspector dipped in and out of a lot of lessons'*. He added: *'I think it was as thorough as it can be over two days'*.

Shorter observation periods did not therefore always lead to dissatisfaction. In fact, in one primary school, the headteacher, referring to observations that had been of segments of lessons, rather than of entire sessions, remarked that this was: *'possibly less threatening for teaching staff – closer to what senior management would do, more informal'*, adding that he thought this was *'an improvement on the old regime, where teachers experienced extended, highly formal observations'*.

The attitude of support staff towards observation was however mostly different to that of teaching staff. For example, there was an expectation that they would be observed in classroom situations where they were supporting a teacher, rather than working with pupils on their own. One TA in a primary school reported her surprise at being observed while she was working on her own with a group of children: *'I didn't think they would watch you when you're doing individual group work outside the classroom. So I was nervous and didn't expect them to do it'*. Most TAs were satisfied with their role in inspections, because they assumed that the observation was not directed at them, but at the lesson overall and the way in which they were used by the teacher. If the inspector spoke to them separately, it was usually *'general questions really about how I was used and how prepared I was for the lesson'*.

On the other hand, TAs appreciated being included in the inspection process as part of an integrated approach and if they were left out completely, they could feel that they had been denied the opportunity to contribute. For example, in a secondary school, two TAs felt that they had no involvement at all in the inspection process, and that support staff had not received any feedback. One TA added that this had also been her experience in two previous schools in the area. Her verdict was that leaving TAs out of the process altogether was short-sighted because: *'If Ofsted really want to know what's happening in a school, they should speak to TAs, because they can give a fair and honest assessment of the school. They work with lots of different teachers and curriculum areas,*

*they can see the hotspots, they know the students, they also know what are the areas of excellence'*

The main concern of TAs was that the teachers they worked with should have adequate observations and that the school should be judged fairly. For example, in one primary school, a TA described how she was interviewed but not observed, and for her this was adequate involvement, but she felt that a lot of experienced teachers had not been observed either and *'from my point of view how you actually teach the children is far more important than the form filling. So that's the most important bit and Ofsted doesn't cater for that really if they observe very few lessons'*

As regards the **nature of the feedback**, most teachers, at all levels, expressed a preference for receiving feedback personally from the inspector who undertook the observation, and as soon as possible after the lesson. It was the absence of this that usually caused the most negative reactions, as a head of department in a secondary school explained: *'Teachers don't get enough feedback. If someone is judging your practice in some way, you'd feel more valued if you got some feedback. It's a courtesy to get this'*. Time restraints sometimes meant that either the inspectors involved left feedback to be given by headteachers (or other senior teachers), or they undertook the feedback in such a rushed manner that it was unsatisfactory for the recipient. One secondary headteacher commented: *'The feedback portion of the observations is quite rushed'*, and added that as he did not get a copy of the scores for teachers, he could not follow up specific cases. One teacher expressed this sense of dissatisfaction over feedback as follows: *'It was at the end of the day and the inspector who observed had to go straight into a meeting, so there wasn't any time for feedback and it was a bit of a formality'*. Furthermore, a teacher from another school commented on how the impersonal nature of feedback not given directly could cause dissatisfaction and even cynicism about the inspectors involved: *'If they see a lesson that they think is not satisfactory, then they should show you how to do it, lead by example. We want to know that people coming to inspect us have got recent classroom experience and that they have been under the same pressure as us'*.

The headteacher of a secondary school, who undertook all the feedback on observations himself, remarked that he understood that the inspectors did not have the time to carry out this task themselves, but that, *'older teachers wanted feedback [from inspectors] as this is what they were used to'*. He added that because feedback from the inspection generally was so important, he would have liked the inspection team to provide *'individual reports for departments, especially since all department heads were spoken to'*.

By contrast, there was a very positive reaction in both primary and secondary schools where feedback was seen as thorough and well-managed. For example, one primary school teacher stated that: *'Feedback was productive and fair and I agreed with everything that was said. The opportunity for*

*dialogue was provided – to justify, explain or comment on a situation*'. Her colleague agreed that she too had received *'formal and fair feedback on the lesson'*. The headteacher thought that the high level of satisfaction with the observation process was at least partly explained by the fact that it was a small school, *'so everyone was observed and received feedback'*. However, there were also examples from larger schools, such as a secondary school where the headteacher described the value of having undertaken joint observations with inspectors, who then observed her giving feedback and discussed the process with her afterwards. A department head agreed and said that all her subject teachers were observed and each had individual feedback with the inspector and their line manager, *'which was very helpful'*.

The way in which well-managed feedback could have a positive impact was referred to by one headteacher who described how a teacher who had been graded as 'satisfactory' after her observation had been given the impetus to improve and *'is now always good'*.

The preference for receiving feedback directly from the inspector responsible did not however generally extend to support staff. TAs who had been observed in lessons usually reported that they received feedback from the teacher involved. This was what they expected and they were quite happy with this process. For example, in a primary school where two TAs were interviewed, both had received feedback on an observed lesson from the teacher, which *'was fine and helpful'*, and they were *'satisfied with the whole experience'*. In fact in one school, the TA interviewed expressed surprise that she should have even considered speaking directly to an inspector. In terms of opportunities for dialogue, she explained that although this was available, she did not take advantage of it: *'If we'd wanted to talk to them, they were there, but I didn't really think I had anything to say to them, because I think the inspection is more for the class teachers and management'*. Feedback cascaded from the teacher was therefore generally considered sufficient for them to know how the lesson had been perceived in general by the inspector.

There was also some evidence that consistency of feedback, both in terms of approach and content was viewed as critical to satisfaction by classroom practitioners. For example, in one primary school, the assistant headteacher said that one inspector's attitude was much more negative than the others, one teacher received swift and useful feedback from one inspector, but nothing from another, and other teachers either reported helpful dialogue or a negative experience that had undermined their confidence.

## **2.2 Satisfaction with involvement**

Strand 2 findings revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between constructive oral feedback and overall satisfaction with the inspection process. In line with this, strand 3 revealed that, in schools where the

observation process had been regarded as fair, well-managed and as extensive as possible given limited time, there was a high level of satisfaction from all levels of interviewees. In two schools where there had been a particularly positive view of the observation procedures, there was a strong sense of satisfaction with the entire process, and where there had not been any particular issues with observations, there was a generally sound level of satisfaction.

By contrast, where there had been some disagreement over the observation process, the response was strongly negative overall. For example, in one school, the headteacher had not been in post at the time of the inspection, but reported that there had been serious concern from his predecessor and all the other staff about the absence of any proper observations. The deputy headteacher reported no involvement with the inspection, which she described as *'very impersonal'*. A teacher said that all the staff had been very dissatisfied, there had been at most, two ten-minute observations, *'which are nothing'*, and *'the rest of the time was looking at paperwork in an office'*. The strong feeling of disappointment in the whole process was summed up by a teacher who commented that: *'staff had put a lot of work into the school and they [the inspectors] didn't even come and look round'*.

In another school, as well as dissatisfaction with the number and length of observations, greater concern had been expressed with regard to a dispute about the observation of supply teachers. In two classes, although there had been a request for supply teachers not to be observed, this had happened. The teacher interviewed had been particularly upset by this because the reason her class had a supply teacher was that the inspectors had asked for her to free up her time so they could speak to her. She described feeling very *'let down'*, as she had not been observed, but her class had been with a supply teacher who was *'new to the school and had never taught the group before'*. The TA had been interviewed by the inspection team, but was not involved in any observations, and she commented that there had been *'a lot of experienced teachers around at the time'*, who had not been observed. Even worse from her perspective was the fact that from one observation of a class with a supply teacher was based *'their whole judgement on maths in the school'*. The headteacher described how all the staff *'felt let down by the whole system really'* and the process had been very demoralising.

In a secondary school, where senior management, two teachers and two TAs were interviewed, all expressed strong dissatisfaction with the way in which observations had been conducted and with the subsequent conclusions. The headteacher explained that the observations were perceived to be progressing well until the inspection team saw data which seemed to suggest that achievement *'did not match what they were witnessing in the classroom, so they then tried to downgrade their observations of the lessons'*, which in his view was not *'a very professional process'*. The headteacher reported that this sudden change of attitude had astounded his staff, because the inspectors had

originally given very positive feedback, including a statement that *'they hadn't seen a lesson that was less than good'*. However, subsequently the headteacher perceived that *'they [the inspectors] changed their views to try and fit the data'*, and this view was supported by other staff.

These three examples of strong dissatisfaction were all individual cases and were not reflective of the case studies as a whole, but they do indicate the extent to which the observation process and its results can dominate staff views of inspections and if particularly negative, can cause a sense of disillusion with the whole process.

More loosely linked to the question of satisfaction with involvement in the inspection process was the perception of what **rationale lay behind the process of observations**. Most interviewees were not asked specifically about this<sup>3</sup>, but from those who were and from general comments, it seems that the overall perception was that there was no obvious rationale. It was assumed in general by staff that if there were particular school phases or departments that according to the SEF, required some focus, the staff in these areas would be observed more than others, and if there was no specific focus, there would be a roughly even distribution, depending on the size of the inspection team.

Unusually, in a secondary school where the headteacher was asked about the rationale, he was able to give a very definitive view, based on the experience of their most recent inspection, in November 2008. The headteacher explained that the amount of observation was necessarily limited, but the senior leadership team was asked to score staff and the inspectors checked these scores, so *'they [Ofsted] are there to check that we know what we are doing'*. The deputy headteacher agreed that observations were an important part of the overall inspection process and that: *'Inspections are really a test of the management team to see if we know our staff and it works as a management tool. They take the temperature of the school and ask if the SEF and management have got it right and that seems to be the ideal way of doing it'*. The inspection team had agreed with the observation scores that the senior management had recorded and the school had received a *'good with a number of outstanding features'* grade – their hoped for outcome.

Another suggested rationale was from a primary school where the observations had clearly been focused on Years 2 and 6 – this was considered a reasonable focus by the two teachers interviewed (who were observed), although the headteacher said that other staff were disappointed by the *'lack of lesson observation'*.

On the other hand, staff in some schools saw no rationale; for example in a primary school where there had been no major disagreements during the inspection, there was some puzzlement over the idea of a rationale behind

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<sup>3</sup> A small number of case-study schools had a question on perceived rationale included in the interview schedule after discussion with the steering group.

observations. Teachers and TAs said that they were not certain of any rationale, other than, as one teacher explained, '*year group range and spread of subjects, to make sure it was giving a broad picture*'. The headteacher commented that he was not aware of any rationale, adding that one staff member had been observed five times.

The only conclusion that can be drawn from views on rationale is that generally it does not appear to be explained to schools, but if there is a clear understanding of the observation process by staff, it probably helps them to accept any limitations that may result from it.

Overall therefore, with regard to staff perceptions of their involvement in inspections, a great deal depended on their individual experience, and this could vary even within the same school. In the majority of schools the prevailing view was that the observation system worked as well as could be expected within its limitations. The number and duration of observations were reported to vary considerably, and senior managers and teachers perceived to be of most importance that inspection judgements were soundly-based, and for this reason it was essential that the number and length of observations were viewed as fair and appropriate.

Senior managers and staff generally accepted that with the s5 inspection system, extensive observations were no longer possible, although teachers who were well-prepared and unconcerned about observations were often disappointed that they were not observed.

Except where there was obvious targeting of observations related to SEF grades or particular weaknesses, there appeared to be little understanding of any rationale behind the observation system. Better explanation of this could be an area where improvement in communication between inspection teams and school staff may help to address issues that some staff had about what they saw as the arbitrary nature of observations.

Support staff generally seemed to expect to be observed working with teacher colleagues, rather than on their own, and were content with feedback from a teacher, rather than directly from the inspector. Where there was dissatisfaction from TAs, it was in schools where there was a generally negative reaction, so that the lack of satisfaction was related more to concerns about their school having been misjudged, or their teacher colleagues not having been observed adequately, rather than personal issues with inspection.

## 3. Inspection Recommendations

This chapter focuses on the inspection recommendations that were made in the s5 inspection report. It draws on the views of senior leaders, teachers and support staff (for the 18 case-study schools) and headteachers (for the email survey). The chapter examines the longitudinal impact of these recommendations in terms of how helpful they were perceived to be, both at the time that they were made and currently. It also looks at how – and to what extent – actions have been implemented in response to the inspection recommendations.

### 3.1 Perceived helpfulness of recommendations

There was a general view amongst case-study school interviewees that specific recommendations were more helpful because they provided greater focus. The evidence suggests that specific suggestions on how to improve were felt to be easier to address because they were less open to (mis)interpretation, as explained by a student support officer in a secondary school given a ‘good’ grade: *‘the specific recommendations are definitely more helpful, because you know what to concentrate on. The general recommendations can be misconstrued’*.

Additionally some interviewees observed that lack of specificity was not helpful: *‘I still think some recommendations from Ofsted can be somewhat vague’* (head of science in a secondary school given a ‘satisfactory’ grade) and a headteacher in another school (a secondary school, given notice to improve) commented that one of the s5 recommendations from their inspection report showed a lack of awareness and was too bland: *‘[the recommendation] was not very helpful because it is totally disassociated from the situation we’re in.’*

Half of all survey respondents and about two-thirds of case-study school interviewees reported that the recommendations continued to be helpful. They said the recommendations remained priorities for their school, supplied focus and provided a point of reference for the school development plan. One headteacher from a survey school, for example, said that the recommendations were currently helpful *‘in reporting to governors, in preparing for the next inspection and in deciding areas of focus.’* Another survey school headteacher commented *‘within all changes to curriculum, plans, lesson observations, etc, the recommendations still serve as a focus to ensure improved practice.’*

When senior leaders in case-study schools were asked about the extent to which they had found the s5 recommendations helpful on reflection, they highlighted three main ways:

- Within the school (and consistent with strand 2 findings), the **recommendations validated senior leaders' judgements** on areas for improvement. Many senior leaders felt encouraged that the recommendations confirmed what they already knew. As one deputy head explained: *'if you know your school, you know the recommendations for your school ...the most useful part is the preparation rather than the actual inspection [because] the understanding of your school through the self evaluation tool is the most powerful aspect of Ofsted.'* Recommendations also sometimes served as a *'wake up call'* and provided a forum for discussion with staff. They helped to focus the internal agenda and to move it forward. For example, a headteacher of a special school said that they were able to *'significantly elaborate on [the recommendation], when you deconstruct it as a target it opens up a whole new set of issues.'*
- Externally, senior leaders said that **recommendations were helpful in giving credibility** to the school and in providing leverage with local authorities (LAs) for funding and resources.
- In terms of accountability and the need to meet government targets, **recommendations were also perceived to be helpful in directing efforts:** *'if there wasn't such high-stakes accountability, then maybe we wouldn't be doing the things we're doing.'* However, a headteacher of a primary school given a 'satisfactory' grade also felt that too much emphasis was placed on exam results irrespective of how good the school was in other areas: *'the climate is that we're judged by our results.'*

There was, however, some feeling amongst senior leaders that recommendations were less helpful because inspectors had not provided a new perspective or highlighted new areas for improvement. In these cases, there was a perception that recommendations referred to areas that had, in fact already been identified and were in the process of being addressed. This was reflected by the view that *'the inspection did not help us to improve any more than we would have done anyway.'* (Headteacher in a primary school graded 'satisfactory').

Most senior leaders also felt that the recommendations were no longer helpful two or three years after inspection because the school had moved on in the period since the inspection. This was expressed by one deputy headteacher (in a primary school given a 'good' grade) as follows: *'it's important to bear in mind that the priorities given to you by Ofsted are the priorities for that moment in time and six months down the line a good leadership team will respond to the priorities of the school as they stand at the moment.'*

Approximately one quarter of survey respondents also said that the recommendations were no longer currently helpful, either because they originally represented areas already familiar to the school or because the school had moved on to new areas of school improvement. As one headteacher put it, *'we have moved on and are now working on areas we have identified from our own analysis.'*

A minority of interviewees felt that, on reflection over time, recommendations were not at all helpful for their school. Broadly, this was because:

- Subject-specific recommendations (such as to improve standards in writing) were often felt to be due to, for example, a weak cohort and therefore no longer relevant.
- Inspectors did not always take account of the school circumstances. For example, one school was inspected four weeks after re-structuring, expanding and moving into new buildings. One teacher therefore observed, in relation to a s5 recommendation about assessment: *‘up to that time we had only had Years 7 and 8 and the way you use assessment is different in the exam years and that was the beginning of our first ever year 9; we’d never had GCSE and we’d never had A Level so it was again a difficult time to be assessed on how you’re using assessment; we’d had no official assessments.’*
- Occasionally, it was felt that the recommendations lacked the correct focus. In one large secondary school, for example, results had continued to fall and it was felt that the LA had provided a better diagnosis than the Ofsted inspectors.

Teachers and TAs echoed the views of senior leaders but were generally more positive about the perceived current helpfulness of recommendations. For example, one TA in a primary school said that the recommendations provided *‘things we could act on and identify with’*. Another teacher referred to the huge amount of work that had been required initially to implement the recommendation but felt that the results were very helpful and that this effort was therefore justified.

## 3.2 Action taken in relation to recommendations

Strand 2 of the evaluation showed that the greatest perceived impact of s5 recommendations was in assessment, monitoring and tracking, followed by teaching and learning. The evidence from case-study schools re-visited in 2008 confirmed that these were areas in which schools had taken extensive action.

Recommendations relating to **assessment** feature frequently amongst the case-study schools visited for strand 3 of the evaluation. These recommendations broadly related to improving the use of data, better tracking of individuals and groups and more involvement of learners in their own assessment through assessment for learning.

The case studies showed that the longitudinal impacts of these types of recommendations were positive across nearly all of the schools visited. Both

classroom practitioners and senior leaders reported that these recommendations have led to:

- more consistency across the school in the use of assessment
- greater understanding of assessment techniques
- more communication and sharing of good practice across the school.

Actions taken to implement s5 recommendations relating to assessment had led to **more involvement by all staff** leading to greater **consistency** in the use of data. Comments included: *‘there was no consistency across the school before this, so the recommendation was useful in helping us to focus’* (head of Years 5 and 6). Similarly, a secondary school Headteacher commented that staff were more coherent in target-setting and interim reporting as a result of the recommendation and that assessment and monitoring was now *‘vastly better’*. Interviewees also said that s5 recommendations had led to more regular assessment. One teaching assistant remarked, for example, that this had helped her in her job because more regular assessment made tracking much easier. A student support officer in another school commented that assessment was more regular and easier for parents and pupils to access.

Another consequence of s5 recommendations relating to assessment had been a focus on **staff development**, leading to greater **understanding and confidence in the use of assessment techniques**. For example, one primary school teacher observed, *‘we’ve had the tracker for a very long time but now we are really using it so we know what level a child comes up on and what we need to do.’* Interviewees in more than half of the case-study schools said that the provision of staff training was an important consequence of their s5 assessment recommendation.

Interviewees in almost all of the case-study schools with s5 recommendations relating to assessment reported that they had implemented these recommendations on a **whole school basis**. For example, one secondary school had a recommendation to *‘improve the quality of teaching and assessment so that it is consistently good’*. The actions taken to implement this included introducing a model of professional development at the whole school level, targeting groups of staff and individuals. Staff were encouraged to reflect on their own practice. An English teacher in this school commented that this meant there had been continuous training in assessment for learning and **sharing of good practice**. The headteacher in another primary school described how the s5 recommendation had triggered a change in culture within his school *‘we have had to [...] try and get everyone involved with it [...] The culture is now more that, we’re all in it together.’*

Involving learners more in their own assessment and getting them more engaged was also a characteristic response of several case-study schools.

Assessment for learning had been used to inform a different approach to planning learning. For example, an s5 inspection report recommendation to a primary school (given a 'good' grade) was that the school 'make better use of assessment information to track pupils and plan next steps in pupils' learning'. The actions taken in response to this recommendation included piloting an intensive schools programme on pupil tracking. Both teachers and teaching assistants commented favourably on the results. The head of literacy commented that: *'all the children get individual feedback and they respond well to this because they are managing their own development. It is formative assessment and it's all closely monitored'*.

There was evidence that actions taken to implement s5 recommendations were particularly successful when **all members of staff shared responsibility** for carrying them out. Staff at all levels were positive about whole school initiatives, which were perceived to have been effective in bringing about longer-term change.

For example, one of the s5 recommendations given to a primary school was to 'involve pupils more in identifying what they need to learn next'. Each member of staff took one aspect (such as creating more resourceful learners), action-researched it and then fed back to the rest of the staff. Staff chose their own areas so that they would have ownership of their contribution. Comments from teachers acknowledged the pertinence of this recommendation: *'We needed to get the pupils more involved and engaged and the vibrant projects scheme is now part and parcel of what we do now'* (senior teacher and SENCO coordinator), while TAs confirmed that they found this recommendation very helpful: *'There are four groups – resilient, reflective, reciprocal and resourceful – and all the pupils would be able to tell which they are now'*.

In contrast, one special school had not taken action on any of its s5 recommendations. This was felt to be because of complacency on the part of senior leaders (the school was graded 'good') and frustration was expressed by teaching staff: *'The Ofsted recommendations were right but there was no one here to put them into place...The children here were missing out really'* (data manager and ICT teacher).

This special school has since had a new headteacher who took immediate action. *'I read the Ofsted report and I looked at the recommendations that they made and looked at the post Ofsted plan and it was quite apparent that these had not been addressed and that necessitated me to call a local authority inspection. Their findings were that if we were Ofsted tomorrow, at best we would get notice to improve at worst we would get special measures.'* She felt that the Ofsted inspection had been too 'light touch' (one inspector in the school for one day). *'Had the inspection been more effective then the report*

*wouldn't have been so positive and the local authority review in 2008 wouldn't have come as such a surprise.'*

Recommendations on **teaching and learning** varied in their nature. A small number of s5 recommendations were fairly specific, such as improving English as an additional language (EAL) provision or reversing underachievement in the 6<sup>th</sup> form. Many s5 recommendations related to raising standards, improving teaching and learning or improving attainment. Some of these related to specific subjects and/or phases (for example, improving standards in English at Key stage 3). Almost half of the primary schools visited in this strand of the evaluation had a recommendation about raising standards in writing. A few s5 recommendations were very broad, such as 'further improve the quality of teaching'.

The types of actions that schools had taken reflected the different nature of these recommendations to some extent. In a school with very broad recommendation relating to improving the quality of teaching, (and endorsing the view that specific recommendations were more helpful, expressed in 3.1 above) teachers who were interviewed were unable to think of direct actions that had occurred as a result of this recommendation. Senior leaders in this school (a secondary school given a 'satisfactory' grade) felt, however, that it had been addressed through performance management and internal observations.

Actions relating to more specific recommendations were easier to identify. These were often linked to **staff development** and **increased resources** from the LA. This could sometimes take some time to obtain, such as in the case of a school that was working to improve EAL provision. Although the school felt the initial response from the LA was unsatisfactory, senior leaders reported that they were happy with subsequent actions. These included having an LA specialist coming into the school on a weekly basis to work with children and to develop staff skills.

Several other case-study schools also addressed s5 recommendations on teaching and learning through staff development and redeployment. For example, one school tackled their s5 recommendation to 'ensure teachers provide consistently challenging work' by developing the role of inclusion manager and redeploying teaching assistants to support gifted and talented children.

Case study findings also show that the role played by senior leaders in deciding how to approach recommendations was of great importance. Schools given similar s5 recommendations could take quite different approaches. To illustrate this, two primary schools had s5 recommendations relating to raising standards in writing. One school implemented action immediately after the inspection while the second school took more time to implement action.

In the first school (given a ‘satisfactory’ grade), there had been a significant focus on writing in the year after inspection, whereas now *‘it is more a cross-curricular focus with extended writing once a week’*. The second school (given a ‘good’ grade) commented that they took some time to work out the skills needed to implement their recommendation but now have a range of actions in place, supported by a comprehensive staff development programme. *‘We’ve had writers in to inspire the children, special writing weeks and we’ve ordered lots of new books. Dancewrite has made their hand writing better, their spelling has improved and they are more fluent. It’s all had a big effect and the children are very proud of their work’* (head of literacy). The TAs were also very enthusiastic, observing that standards had risen: *‘you can see this from the books – you just have to look at them now compared with 3 years ago.’*

### **3.3 Extent recommendations implemented**

All of the case-study schools, with one exception, reported that they had addressed all of the recommendations from their s5 inspection report. Most schools felt that they had made good progress and, depending on the nature of the recommendation, had either fully implemented it or were continuing to address it.

Where schools expressed reservations about a particular recommendation or disagreed with it, this was reflected to some degree in the way they had addressed it. For example, the headteacher in one infant school was uncomfortable with a recommendation on using information to ensure that pupils made ‘good’ rather than ‘satisfactory’ progress. He felt that this was not appropriate for very young children: *‘I don’t want targets on walls, I think it’s really frightening that you get little children of this age saying ‘I hate numeracy, I hate literacy’ whereas I think they shouldn’t even know what it is, they should be doing things in class and developing. So we’ll probably fall down badly on that [recommendation]’*.

Of the few (five per cent) of survey school leaders who said they had not taken action on a recommendation, this was because they had prioritised their actions, concentrating on what they felt to be the most appropriate and relevant recommendations first.

Senior leaders in many of the case-study schools, and one-fifth of the survey schools, expressed the view that the nature of some recommendations was such that action was required on a continuing basis. This distinction between ‘developmental’ recommendations, which by their nature are ongoing, and other (often more specific) recommendations emerged strongly from case study evidence in the longitudinal strand of the evaluation.

Just over half of survey respondents reported that they had fully implemented their s5 recommendations and almost all remaining respondents said that they were implemented to a degree. Recommendations that were viewed as fully implemented were often about use of data, tracking and other areas such as improving attendance. These types of more specific recommendations were often viewed as having been fully implemented from a longitudinal perspective.

Many of the recommendations in s5 inspection reports were, however, perceived to be ongoing ‘developmental’ recommendations. These recommendations could, for example, refer to both assessment or teaching and learning. One deputy headteacher for curriculum and learning explained: *‘the quality of teaching and learning is an ongoing project and always will be.’* Another senior leader commented: *‘That is the nature of the job, we can never say we have met our objectives.’*

The challenges presented by different recommendations were summed up by senior leaders in one school. They felt they had implemented their four s5 recommendations as follows:

- the first recommendation related to raising standards in writing: *‘this has to be constantly monitored’*
- the second recommendation related to improving teachers’ use of ongoing assessment: *‘is always on-going – they’re always coming up with different ideas’*
- the third recommendation related to making better use of information: *‘implemented and we are more focussed but there may be some unevenness about it which may, or may not, be possible to sort out’*
- the fourth recommendation related to security; this was superseded by a move to a new building.

In summary, there was a general view that specific recommendations were more helpful (than more general ones) because they provided greater focus, action was easier to identify and they were felt to be more straightforward to address because they were less open to (mis)interpretation. Furthermore, there was some evidence that very broad recommendations did not instigate direct action. Additionally, recommendations continued to be viewed as helpful by senior managers, teachers and teaching assistants as they helped with prioritising, supplied focus and provided a point of reference for the school development plan. Consistent with strand 2 findings, on reflection headteachers believed that the recommendations validated senior leaders’ judgements on areas for improvement and helped to focus the internal agenda and to move it forward. Additionally, recommendations were useful for providing external credibility, and, on occasion for providing leverage with LAs for funding and resources. In terms of accountability and the need to meet

government targets, recommendations were also perceived to be helpful in directing efforts.

Where recommendations were viewed as less helpful this was generally perceived to be because inspectors had not provided a new perspective or highlighted new areas for improvement. Furthermore, where recommendations were no longer believed to be helpful two or three years after inspection this was generally additionally because the school had moved on in the period since the inspection.

However some other reasons why recommendations were not always viewed as helpful after two or three years were because recommendations were sometimes regarded as having been based on a weak cohort and therefore no longer relevant or the recommendations were devalued because they were either perceived to lack the correct focus or did not always take full account of the school circumstances.

Strand 2 of the evaluation showed that the greatest impact of 55 recommendations was in the area of assessment, monitoring and tracking. Strand 3 revealed that action instigated in this area has led to positive longitudinal impact across nearly all of the schools visited. Both classroom practitioners and senior leaders reported that recommendations to improve assessment have led to more involvement by all staff leading to greater consistency across the school in the use of assessment, more staff development leading to greater understanding and confidence with regard to assessment techniques and, as assessment techniques were reported to have been implemented on a whole-school basis, more sharing of good practice.

Additionally, there was evidence that the way in which the recommendations were implemented was significant: actions were perceived to be particularly successful when all members of staff shared collective responsibility and the approach taken to implementation by senior leaders was also reported to influence subsequent action. Furthermore there was a view that the nature of some recommendations was such that action was required on a continuing basis. This distinction between ‘developmental’ recommendations, which by their nature are ongoing, and other (often more specific) recommendations emerged strongly from case-study evidence in the longitudinal strand of the evaluation.

## 4. Impact

This chapter examines the longitudinal impact of the s5 inspection on quality of teaching, the responsibility of managers and the role of support staff as well as more generally on school improvement. Additionally other, indirect consequences of inspection are considered. The previous strands of this evaluation, conducted up to a year after inspection, identified that the majority of interviewees and respondents considered that the inspection had contributed to school improvement mainly by confirming, prioritising and clarifying areas for improvement, rather than highlighting new areas. However reliable self evaluation, it was regarded as useful to have judgements confirmed by an external and objective body.

### 4.1 Impact on quality of teaching, responsibility of managers and role of support staff

In strand 3 of the evaluation interviewees were specifically asked the extent to which the quality of teaching, the responsibility of managers and the role of support staff had changed as a result of the last inspection.

#### Impact on quality of teaching

Some staff (mostly senior leaders and teachers) in half of the case-study schools felt that the inspection had achieved a positive impact on the quality of teaching. SLT and teachers in a secondary and a few primary schools attributed this improvement to enhanced methods of assessment resulting from inspection recommendations, as a primary teacher explained: *'Doing all the ongoing assessment has made a huge difference to how people teach'*. Overall this perceived improvement was reported consistently within schools, although in one school a headteacher and a teacher felt there was discernible improvement whereas colleagues believed there was evidence to the contrary.

The confirmation and validation of high-quality teaching encouraged further good practice and more emphasis on teaching practice in two highly-graded schools, while senior leaders and teachers in another school believed that the inspection recommendations had hastened the process of improving teacher quality. Teachers in one more school thought that the inspection had increased their awareness of what *'made good teaching'*.

Staff in nearly half the schools (and several staff in some schools where colleagues felt improved teaching **was** a result of inspection) believed that although there was evidence of enhanced teaching, it could **not necessarily** be

attributed to the s5 inspection. Other suggested reasons for improved teaching included:

- better planning
- more resources
- LA inspection
- school improvement group
- enhanced quality monitoring procedures
- more experienced teachers
- new teachers
- more reflective practice
- national directives
- existing school improvement system

In one school, although the quality of teaching was believed to have improved, this was offset by fundamental understaffing so the overall effect was not fully realised. Furthermore, a number of classroom practitioners (including several TAs) in a third of the case-study schools believed there had been no change in the quality of teaching, subsequent to the inspection recommendations, mainly because the quality was already high as expressed by one TA: *'as far as I am concerned the teachers have always been excellent'*.

### **Impact on the responsibility of managers**

A number of teachers or members of the senior leadership team (SLT) in a few schools believed that the inspection recommendations had directly achieved a positive impact on the responsibility of managers within schools. Restructuring and more distribution of leadership were the reported foci of change, as described by one headteacher of a large secondary school who introduced a college system as a direct response to comments in the Ofsted report: *'...this change in culture in the staffing structure has enabled the school to deliver...a more distributed leadership model'*.

Staff in the remaining majority of schools believed that there had either been no discernible change in the responsibility of managers due to inspection, or changes could not be directly attributed to inspection, but to other stimuli such as a new headteacher as described by one TA: *'I think the responsibility of managers has changed as a result of [the headteacher] getting into role and developing that role'*, or the growth in pupil numbers, or plans outlined prior to inspection.

Although there were a considerable number of references to more devolved management, it is suggested that this is influenced by a national agenda as observed by one primary literacy coordinator who pointed out that although

two teachers in her school had been given teaching and learning responsibility (TLR), all schools had been required to devolve responsibilities to staff with TLR by December 2008, so responsibility of school managers was currently influenced by this directive.

### Impact on the role of support staff

There was a view expressed by SLT and classroom practitioners in several schools that the role of the support staff had changed as a direct result of the inspection. For example in one primary school, given a 'satisfactory' grade, the headteacher observed that the s5 inspection report noted that their TAs were spending too much time working with lower-ability pupils. This has subsequently changed and the TAs have received additional training on working with targeted groups of pupils of all abilities in relation to maths and guided reading, *'inspection probably had the greatest impact in this area'*. This view was endorsed by a teacher in the school who commented: *'It was made very clear to us [by the inspectors] that when you are doing mental maths you [should] give a group to the teaching assistant....so it becomes more like team teaching...we had thought that maybe we weren't using the support fully [before the inspection]'*.

In the majority of the remaining schools there was a general observation that the role of support staff has changed, but that this is largely due to the wider workforce reform as observed by one secondary headteacher: *'Workforce remodelling has made a difference in that we now have an exams officer, the business manager now has a team of four, the information technology staff have increased and so have the administrative team'*. Similarly a primary teacher also believed that the inspection had not influenced the role of the support staff in his school but that: *'workforce remodelling has changed the role of teaching assistants'*.

## 4.2 Impact at school and departmental level

As well as observations on changes to specific areas as a result of inspection reported in Section 4.1 above, survey and case-study headteachers and classroom practitioners were asked to reflect on the impact, at school and departmental level, that the recommendations achieved.

### Impact at school level

Consistent with observations made in strand 2 of this research, headteachers in strand 3 reported that it was in the area of **assessment** that most benefit had been felt at school level. Approximately one quarter of survey and one third of case-study headteachers (in primary, secondary and special schools) observed that impact, prompted by s5 recommendations, on assessment, tracking and

target-setting had been experienced. For example, a headteacher in a special school given an ‘outstanding’ grade observed:

*The school acted upon the recommendation to work closely with another similar school to compare data collection and assessment systems, and through this we developed systems for the partner school and refined and developed our own systems.*

There was some evidence that these enhanced tracking and assessment systems contributed, at least in part, to a greater understanding of individual pupils. For example, one primary headteacher noted that the recommendation ‘make a clear distinction between specific groups of pupils so that progress is tracked effectively’ supported staff to have ‘*appropriate expectations of individual pupils and groups of pupils*’. While another primary headteacher reported ‘*having better systems in place for pupil tracking*’ and ‘*pupil progress meetings which identify those pupils who could achieve more*’.

Approximately one-fifth of headteachers in both survey and case-study schools believed that specific impact, in terms of **improved attainment and standards**, was achieved as a result of the s5 recommendations as illustrated by the following observations by survey respondents: ‘*we achieved raised pupil attainment and achievement by on average 10 per cent in the three core subjects*’ and ‘*we achieved significant improvement overall and, specifically, in raising achievement at KS4*’. One case-study headteacher explained that the recommendation to ‘improve standards in English at key stage 3’ had resulted in an overall improvement in English. He explained ‘*standards overall in English have improved. Key stage 2 to 4 were the best value added we have ever had in English. Results were in line with the top 25 per cent of schools. Clearly there have been improvements in standards*’.

As reported both in strand 2 findings and in Section 4.1 above, enhanced teaching and learning was observed, on reflection, to have resulted from inspection recommendations by 17 per cent of survey respondents and a couple of case-study interviewees as illustrated by the following comments:

*There has been a large impact on the quality of teaching and learning in science resulting in improved standards over the last three years.*

*The quality of teaching and learning has moved on to the point now where staff are quite happily signed up to a manifesto of ‘how do we get to outstanding?’ [Staff received guidance regarding what ‘outstanding’ teaching looked like from other members of staff in school.]*

Other areas of impact achieved in terms of recommendations, observed by survey respondents included:

- Changes to the curriculum, such as the provision of a more creative curriculum, or the incorporation of more work related learning, ICT and multi-cultural education, as well as general improvements to the curriculum – 17 per cent.
- Development of staff training, for example continual professional development of middle leadership, review meetings for governors to improve the effectiveness of the governing body and monitoring visits for subject coordinators – 17 per cent.
- Revised focus to move the school forward by, for example, facilitating the focus on future development to help prioritise areas on which to concentrate and greater focus on the criteria for moving to ‘outstanding’ – 15 per cent.
- Improved policy and strategy documentation, such as recording the impact of interventions, reviewing of the self-evaluation process to provide more evidence and clear links to outcomes and actions and putting into place structures and systems which lend to more effective and efficient operation and strategic planning – 12 per cent.

Case-study interviewees were given the opportunity to expand and explain their attitudes, on reflection, towards school impact achieved in terms of the recommendations, and although it was clear that the majority reported positive impact as discussed above, a few pointed out one or two caveats.

It was observed that some of the inspection recommendations were areas previously highlighted by the school, so impact could not necessarily be attributed to inspection. One headteacher noted that test scores had exceeded those of any previous year, and that teachers’ assessments supported suggestions of improvement, but that it was difficult to say if the impact was a result of the Ofsted inspection as the actions were mainly taken to address the previously- recognised dip in results. While another headteacher observed that it was fortunate that the areas of recommendations by Ofsted were the same as the school had already identified.

Another headteacher explained that the school’s achievements should be attributed to the school, and that *‘although Ofsted make you think in a certain way...and I suppose that’s not a bad thing...and you inevitably have to add rigour to the day-to-day work ... I wouldn’t say that [the improvement in results] was because of the Ofsted inspection – it’s because of good leadership and planning and training and monitoring and evaluation.’*

### **Impact at departmental level**

The majority of case-study interviewees, including senior leaders, classroom practitioners and support staff felt that, on reflection after a couple of years, their department or subject area had benefitted from the inspection. For example, one TA observed that the pupils had benefitted due to improved tracking and assessment, while a teacher in another school commented that

pupils at key stage 2 no longer ‘got lost’ due to enhanced assessment for learning and tracking systems. There were also general comments noting that the department had experienced a ‘*morale boost*’ (see also Section 4.4) and one department member reported more LA involvement.

However staff in a few schools reported little or no benefit of inspection to their departments after a couple of years, mainly because they perceived the changes would have happened regardless of inspection, although one classroom practitioner said they had felt no benefit because they could not fully carry out the recommendations as they did not have the equipment and staff to do so.

### 4.3 Impact on school improvement

In strand 3 headteachers were asked whether there had continued to be progress in school improvement since inspection. The majority believed that school improvement had continued to progress especially (and echoing findings outlined in Sections 4.1 and 4.2 above) in terms of enhanced quality of teaching and learning and improved monitoring, assessment and planning. Other ways that school improvement was perceived to have progressed included through:

- leadership and management: one headteacher observed that: ‘*The leadership role has been developed, middle managers are more responsible and accountable*’
- improved staff confidence
- improved relationships with pupils and
- expansion of school provision.

Interestingly a headteacher in a school graded ‘outstanding’ commented that ‘*most of the changes undergone have built on what was found in the previous inspection, year on year developments*’. He outlined a significant number of ways in which his school had progressed in terms of school improvement since the last inspection, such as:

- gaining Specialist Arts Status
- expanding after-school provision
- developing the infrastructure of the school
- increasing numbers on the student role
- broadening the range of pupils
- developing the school grounds and
- increasing staff (but not teacher) numbers.

A few headteachers pointed out that while progress had been made, it could not be attributed to Ofsted and several others believed that no progress had been made in terms of school improvement since the last inspection.

Where progress had been experienced the majority of headteachers felt that the inspection had added value to that progress mainly, as observed in strand 2, in terms of confirming and validating recommendation areas. One headteacher reported that: *'it was useful to have external verification of our views on key recommendation areas'*, while another found the inspection helpful *'as it reaffirms what you know'*. Additionally it was observed to provide confidence, *'the inspection validated where we were and allowed us to move forward confidently'* and rigour *'I suppose as a leader you can use it [by saying] 'right Ofsted are coming in' – it helps having that rigour'*.

Furthermore, having an inspection was perceived to provide focus: for example, in terms of concentrating on recommendation areas. In one school, for example, the headteacher believed the recommendations definitely added value and focus as the school *'was resistant to change'* and the staff argued that poor results were *'just a blip'*. The headteacher found it helpful that Ofsted said *'there is a problem... but that the school had the confidence and the ability to address it'*.

A couple of schools were undecided as to whether the inspection had added value as, for example one headteacher observed *'I think we would have got there anyway to be honest'*. Interviewees in these schools remained convinced that the inspection recommendations had not helped progress school improvement as *'the report did not tell us anything new'* and *'the areas were already in the development plan and would have been a priority for our school regardless of whether they had been recommended'*. In a minority of cases, there was also a suggestion that where recommendations were viewed as vague, or where interviewees were unhappy with the way in which the inspection was conducted then the inspection overall was viewed as having sustained less impact. A further school attributed progress more to a new headteacher rather than Ofsted.

#### **4.4 Other consequences of inspection**

In strand 3 interviewees were asked about the wider implications experienced as a consequence of inspection. The following sections outline these reflections from the longitudinal viewpoint.

##### **Indirect changes as a result of inspection**

Survey and case-study responses revealed changes, not directly linked to the 5 recommendations, as a result of inspection. These included:

- stronger management structure
- improvements in self-evaluation
- curriculum developments
- changed staff morale

Although, as observed in Section 4.1 above, inspection recommendations were not regarded as having resulted in direct, significant adjustments in management structures, nevertheless in some cases it had caused some change, for example engendering more distributed leadership. Interestingly when asked about indirect consequences of inspections, many school staff reflected that the main area in which changes were observed was in the workforce, both with respect to school management structures and to the deployment of support staff.

Several case-study schools reviewed their management structure following inspection and expanded the SLT. For example, the headteacher of a secondary school given a ‘good’ grade decided to review management as a result of comments in the s5 inspection report on the quality of middle management. As a result, the SLT became very large, but the headteacher commented: ‘

*This is immensely powerful, as it now means that on a weekly basis college directors and myself get together and can review standards and issues around the school and that goes straight back to staff every morning in the morning briefings, subject leaders are being held accountable and there is a more rigorous and accountable system, in the old system there was a monthly meeting with the head of house. This was a major change signalled by the [Ofsted] report.*

Another secondary headteacher also referred to his decision to appoint directors of key stages as a result of feedback from Ofsted. This move towards **stronger leadership** with clear responsibilities is echoed in several other schools.

Just under quarter of survey respondents (24 per cent) reported **improvements in self-evaluation and monitoring procedures**, as well as better use of data: for example, the use of ‘classroom monitor software’ and greater use of evaluative tools to judge the whole school. Several case-study schools also mention a greater focus on data and more rigorous quality assurance: *‘Just that we are so much more knowledgeable about our data, there are so many people are involved. Like we’ve now noticed that our value added isn’t very good in maths so that has become a big area.’*

Other changes were in **curriculum developments**. One secondary school (given notice to improve) had widened the curriculum at key stages 4 and 5

and developed links with other schools and 6<sup>th</sup> form colleges. Another case-study school (given an ‘outstanding’ grade) said that the inspection report contributed to their successful specialist status bids. Other schools had introduced a range of activities, such as in ICT, maths and music, although this was not necessarily as a consequence of inspection. Almost a quarter of survey respondents (21 per cent) also reported curriculum developments, and developments in ICT in particular, as a consequence of inspection.

Finally, schools reported that the inspection had an **impact on staff morale**. The evidence suggests that this is related to the extent to which the inspection team was able to establish a relationship of trust and confidence with senior leaders and staff. Two case-study primary schools (both given a ‘satisfactory’ grade) felt that the inspection had been a frustrating and an unsatisfactory experience. They felt let down by what they saw as the inspectors’ overly impersonal approach (*‘they’re interested in numbers, but unfortunately children.... aren’t numbers’*) and felt that the process lacked transparency and fairness. This had been very demoralising for staff.

By contrast, other schools found that the inspection strengthened staff confidence and increased staff motivation. For example, one headteacher from the survey said: *‘We have been able to reflect and celebrate those areas where it was decided that we were outstanding and to apply that attitude elsewhere’*. In a special school (also graded ‘satisfactory’), the recent re-inspection had been a very positive experience not least because staff felt that the inspection team had taken a sensitive approach to the school environment. The headteacher in particular felt that the inspectors listened closely to her, working with her and other staff to test and validate her judgement.

### **Impact on non-recommendation areas**

On the whole, interviewees in approximately two-thirds of schools believed that the process of paying attention to inspection recommendations in one area had not led to any issues in other areas, largely because it was felt that schools were already aware of other potential weaknesses. Through in-school processes many senior leadership interviewees said that they were attentive to all areas as expressed by one primary headteacher: *‘Nothing has slipped and we know what to look for – we have the self-evaluation form, the school development plan and performance management’*.

However, headteachers in two schools believed that the process of addressing recommendations had sometimes highlighted hitherto unknown associated problems as described by one headteacher who pointed out that as reading had improved *‘the relative weakness of writing had become more apparent’*. A secondary headteacher offered another more complex scenario to illustrate his point, as described below:

In this large secondary school, no concern was expressed with regard to languages in the inspection, but subsequently in addressing the issues of teaching and learning, as outlined in the inspection recommendations, it became evident that there were issues in the languages department, by revealing that *'some staff had no idea about what good teaching was or how to develop good teaching.. these staff had to go'*. There were also other similar issues in maths and science, *'poor teaching suddenly began to stand out from what was increasingly good teaching'*.

In addition behaviour management was another area which emerged subsequent to the inspection recommendations. New staff were perceived to have been trained to deal with behaviour management issues and highlighted the link between behaviour and teaching: *'Behaviour is now better than it was at the last inspection, students are becoming more engaged in teaching and learning and in the life of the school'*.

Additionally, headteachers in two further schools (one graded 'satisfactory' the other 'notice to improve') observed that in their schools the focus on recommendation areas had led to a direct fall in standards elsewhere. In one school the attention on English had led to a perceived fall in standards in mathematics, while in the other school, a focus on the sixth form was believed to have contributed to a drop in key stage 3 results, and to financial constraints on the rest of the school.

### **Wider impact**

Staff in the majority of schools felt that there had been further consequences of the inspection beyond those directly linked to the recommendations. This was expressed most often in terms of the affect on staff and school morale.

There was evidence from a few schools that when a grade was below expectations it demotivated staff. In addition the use of the word 'satisfactory' was questioned, for example one TA said: *'nowadays 'satisfactory' means 'not good enough' and it puts a downer on everything, you have to be careful about using the word 'satisfactory' as it sort of means 'not quite there'*. While in another school both senior managers and TAs expressed their disappointment, not only with the grade received but also with the manner of the inspection:

*Apart from taking a long time to pick up the pieces and move forward it left a lot of the staff very demoralised so that took a long time to get the staff motivated and moving forward again because they felt quite let down by how they were inspected and felt the process was quite unfair (headteacher).*

*It left people feeling very dissatisfied because everybody had tried really hard and we felt if we were only 'satisfactory' as a school there*

*were a heck of a lot more unsatisfactory schools. So I don't think it did anyone's confidence any good (TA).*

Conversely when a school was happy with the grade received it served to motivate staff and raise morale according to staff in a few schools:

*The other thing this recent inspection has done is bring the staff together in a way that has not happened before during my time here (headteacher)*

*When the report is good it gives a bit of a boost of morale and more motivation (deputy headteacher)*

In two cases this boost was also perceived to have contributed to making the school more popular, as well as contributing to other causes, as one TA described: *'Gaining the outstanding grade has probably made the school more popular and we do have more pupils on the role. It also probably contributed to us gaining the Specialist Arts status'.*

In addition some classroom practitioners observed that preparation for the inspection took the emphasis away from teaching and *'every day activities'*. In contrast a couple of other teachers commented that recommendations carried out in one department had subsequently benefitted other areas in the school. Approximately one third of schools reported no other consequences of inspection.

In summary, inspection was generally perceived to have achieved a school-wide positive impact on assessment and to have contributed to improved attainment and standards and, to some extent, individual departments endorsed these views. Additionally, there was some evidence that the inspection recommendations had contributed to improved quality of teaching alongside other input and initiatives. Similarly, recommendations were perceived to have aided restructuring and redistribution of leadership and support staff roles but, on the whole, changes could not be attributed directly to inspection as initiatives such as workforce remodelling were responsible for significant reform.

In terms of progress in school improvement since inspection, main reported areas included enhanced quality of teaching and learning and improved monitoring, assessment and planning. Other improvements included advanced leadership and management, enhanced staff confidence, better relationships with pupils and expansion of school provision. Although it was acknowledged that inspection may have contributed to some of these areas of improvement and it was recognised that inspection had provided focus and affirmation, it was also widely accepted that many other factors influence school improvement and it is difficult to attribute progress to any one source.

In terms of reported indirect impact linked to the s5 recommendations, changes included refined management structure, improvements in self-evaluation, curriculum developments and altered staff morale - either boosting or demoralising staff depending on whether the achieved inspection grade matched expectations. Additionally although the majority felt that the focus on recommendation areas had not led to a lack of attention elsewhere, nevertheless there was some limited evidence that concentrating attention in one area can lead to a reduction in standards elsewhere.

## 5. The Future

This chapter considers the process by which school staff updated their Self-Evaluation Forms (SEFs) and the extent to which schools had revised the grades on their SEFs since their last inspection. It also examines school preparations for, and expectations of, their next inspection. In the few schools that had recently been re-inspected, we have been able to ask interviewees their views on how the outcomes matched their expectations.

Strand 2 of this research revealed that although the majority of interviewees reported that completing the SEF had been a time-consuming process, there was a strong view that the SEF had been effective as a means of identifying school strengths and weaknesses. By the time of the strand 3 study, school perceptions of the effectiveness and usefulness of the SEF were even more positive. The SEF framework had contributed to an improvement in the process of school self-evaluation and the SEF was regarded as providing a focus for the inspection.

### 5.1 Updating the SEF

Headteacher interviewees in all the case-study schools reported that their SEFs had been updated since their last inspection (except where schools had only recently been re-inspected). Many commented that this was an on-going process, with constant additions and changes as the school developed. In some schools, time was set aside for a major annual revision, but ‘*tweaking*’ also took place when necessary. There were frequent comments about the intertwining of the process of SEF revision with the School Development Plan and School Improvement Plan, and references to the support received from School Improvement Partners in particular, and sometimes from LA advisers.

The most common method for updating the SEF appears to have been that the lead was taken by the headteacher and senior leadership team, often with the assistance of governors (one headteacher found the support of a governor who was an ex-inspector particularly valuable). The extent to which other staff were involved varied, but in secondary schools, heads of department usually also had a role, often by producing departmental SEFs which ‘*fed in*’ to the school SEF. Teachers and support staff were not usually involved in writing the SEF, but were able to contribute through the information they provided to department heads or phase and subject leaders, as well as in discussions on the SEF that were held at staff meetings. The headteacher of a primary school explained the value of these wider contributions: ‘*The SEF is not an event but a process and often stems from different events, such as staff meetings, training days, people going on courses and coming back with new ideas*’. The

teachers and TAs supported this view, describing how they felt *'informed and consulted'*, so that *'everybody has some indirect impact in some way'*.

TAs were the school staff most likely to report that they had no involvement with SEF grading, but then they did not appear to consider that this was part of their role and did not raise concerns about it. Two TAs in a secondary school made it clear that they had no regrets about lack of direct involvement in this area of school life: *'There's a danger of overloading TAs and we don't want to have to bear the responsibility for management decisions'*. They had the *'opportunity to say what we want'* to their head of department and they were content with this. The responsibility for constructing the SEF and keeping it up-to-date was sometimes seen as quite onerous by those who were expected to have direct involvement, as this new head of department in a secondary school explained: *'I'm very new to this and need more training. I find the wide categories tricky; what is the difference between 'good' and 'satisfactory'?''*

The evidence from the case-study schools was that they all took the responsibility for keeping the SEF updated and accurate very seriously and that generally, it had become a more inclusive process, in terms of all staff being consulted about their views. In some schools, separate groups had been established to use their specialist knowledge for particular sections of the SEF, as this secondary headteacher described: *'There's a curriculum and assessment group that deals with the standards section, as well as all the department SEFs feeding in'*. In primary schools there was a particular emphasis on specialist input from the Foundation Stage. There was only one school where the headteacher felt that the responsibility for the SEF was predominantly hers – *'it still sits with me'*, but even here the two teachers interviewed thought that they were more involved now – *'all teaching staff are involved and it's important to get all staff to collect evidence and to consult'*.

There was a generally positive attitude to the value of the SEF, even if keeping it updated was perceived to be a burdensome process. Two heads of department in a secondary school reflected on the relationship between the SEF, their own departmental development plans and the School Development Plan. One of them described this as *'a well-structured system which is dynamic and constantly updating'*. The other (who had recently become a member of the senior management team) said that now she contributed more to the school SEF, it had helped her *'reflect on her own department as well as the school as a whole'*, and reinforced the fact that the *'SEF is important and not just paperwork'*. In a special school, the headteacher commented on the successful result of having devoted time and effort to the SEF: *'Until the end of last year [2007] we were paying lipservice to the SEF, we were doing it because we had to, but it was a pain. Then the local authority review said we must make it a leading focus. We worked really hard, we filled it with evidence, everyone was putting things in our SEF. I was very proud of it and*

*the inspectors were very impressed with it*'. Other staff at the school agreed that the effort to provide evidence for improvement had been worthwhile and they had been very pleased with their inspection grade moving up from 'satisfactory' to 'good' in a recent inspection in June 2008. In fact, there was only one school where the headteacher had a negative view of the SEF updating process: *'Updating the SEF is frustrating as it doesn't help to develop the school plan – it's not helpful as a development tool'*. Other staff at this primary school agreed that the prospect of an imminent inspection was stressful and they were anxious about it because the previous inspection had been a disappointing experience, but they did not comment on the SEF specifically.

## **5.2 Preparation for the next inspection, predicted grades and expectations**

### **Preparedness**

All the case-study, and the vast majority of the survey schools, reported that they were at least reasonably well-prepared for their next inspection and many were expecting this to happen at any time. Most described themselves as very well-prepared and referred to updated SEFs and *'evidence trails'* to show improvement. One headteacher declared that *'the SEF is completed and ready, it's a tighter ship and we are more clearly defined with where we are going'*, consequently, *'I wouldn't worry if I got the phone call today'*. Other schools displayed a similar confidence about their state of readiness. For example a headteacher described how they had just sent their SEF to the School Improvement Partner for comments, so *'if the call came, there would be only a few minor things to change'*. This view was supported by other staff, with one teacher commenting, *'I think it would be "I need to tweak that", rather than, "my God, we haven't got that in place", because the school is prepared and we've been preparing from the last one'*.

Headteachers and other staff in several schools considered that they were better prepared than for their previous inspection, sometimes because they now had a better idea of what would be expected from them. A department head in a secondary school explained that: *'We're more organised in terms of correct documentation and evidence, tracking systems have improved, students are more aware of where they are in terms of grades and staff awareness has improved'*.

Staff in some schools qualified their statements about preparedness by adding that *'you can never be prepared enough'*. One headteacher explained further that major preparations were accomplished - the departmental SEFs had been completed, the school SEF would be finalised in the next few weeks and a teaching and learning review had been completed. A department head agreed that all was in place, but *'I don't think you ever feel completely prepared,*

*because as much as it is there to help you, you are under scrutiny and it is a stressful experience*'. In another school, the hesitancy about preparedness related more to the level of uncertainty over what the inspection team might be like: *'Schemes of work are in place and everything is up-to-date, however, we're aware that there are differences in perspective between inspection teams and we can't assume that the next one will form as favourable a view of the school'*. In a few schools, interviewees referred to particular circumstances which had affected their preparations, such as the time needed to adjust to a new building, the effect of large-scale staff changes, or the need for more time to allow improvements to become embedded. Much therefore depended on the actual timing of the inspection, but even so, their general level of preparedness was not a cause for concern.

However, there did seem to be a general perception among interviewees that preparations had generally been long-term and were part of the way in which the school operated. One headteacher pointed out that preparation for inspection involves *'things we would be doing anyway – looking at the data, deciding on priorities, making sure the SEF is up-to-date. Ofsted should see a school as it is, not after lots of preparation'*.

It was interesting therefore, to see the extent to which the five schools re-inspected recently had found their preparations adequate. All of them reported positively, including the two that had been surprised by their inspections coming earlier than expected. One headteacher admitted that the SEF had to be uploaded onto their website at the last minute, *'but school processes and systems had been put in place during the last three years to address the issues raised in the 2005 inspection'*. A colleague agreed that the school was ready, *'because you can't get ready in only three days. The systems and data are in place, behaviour policies and target groups in place'*. Similarly, in another school that was rather taken by surprise, the inspection took place *'in the run-up to Christmas, so nothing special was done to prepare'*, but *'the usual cycle of performance management was going on earlier in the term, so lessons had been observed, feedback given and targets were being set for teachers'*. The remaining three schools had addressed their recommendations as far as they had been able and had been fully prepared, including, one school reported, having tackled the *'community cohesion angle'*, so they had been *'calmly confident'*, in the words of the headteacher.

All five recently re-inspected case-study schools had received the grades that they expected and all had been satisfied with the inspection, including the school that had been *'dreading'* their next inspection, after a previous very negative experience.

### **Grade revisions and expectations**

Updating the SEF included re-examining the grades awarded and amongst the 18 case-study schools, there were nine where the SEF grades were reported as

not having changed, eight where the grades had been revised upwards and one where the overall school grade had been revised down. Amongst the survey schools, 72 reported unchanged SEF grades, 52 reported improved SEF grades and two schools had downgraded (one school had not returned data on this question).

Downgrading was unusual and in the case-study school (a special school) that was in the process of revising the overall SEF grade from 'good' to 'satisfactory', the circumstances were also unusual. Although the school had been graded '2' in the inspection of 2006, which had matched the SEF grades, this was reported to have resulted from the previous headteacher's removal of the children with behavioural difficulties at the time of the inspection. This had given a distorted impression of the nature of the school population and the teaching and learning challenges. In addition the school faced staffing difficulties and an LA inspection in April 2008, which had been critical of progress, had prompted the grade revision. It had also left the staff deeply pessimistic about the next inspection.

Of the two survey schools that had decided to revise their grades downwards, one had done so because of a major school reorganisation, a new senior leadership team and concerns about the new requirements on community cohesion. The other reported that, as standard assessment test results depended on a particular cohort and '*data drives everything*', it was unrealistic to have more than a 'satisfactory' grade.

Amongst the survey schools that had either revised their SEF grades upwards, or not changed them, there was a fairly even mixture of confidence and lack of confidence about their expectations of the next inspection (where sufficient details were available). The schools where staff were more confident had been reassured by their School Improvement Partners that their SEF gradings were accurate, or made comments such as:

*There have been positive changes and better results.*

*We have improved in all areas.*

*We are clearer about roles and expectations and have a new headteacher.*

*We have a more collegiate leadership and a more secure evidence base.*

Where there was less confidence, this was sometimes because of a view that improvements had not yet had time to become embedded, or that staffing changes had affected progress, but the majority cited attainment results as the reason for their concerns, as illustrated below:

*I expect to have the achievement and standards grade reduced because we had a dip in GSCE results last year.*

*I feel we are in an improved position from our last inspection, but this is not reflected in last year's CVA.*

*I am disappointed that our grades cannot be raised (graded 3 in last inspection). As hard as we work to improve, results mean we can never be more than satisfactory.*

*We expect a grade 4 category (graded 3 at last inspection), despite excellent work in the school – all they will look at is standards.*

In addition there was some concern expressed with regard to perceived inconsistency between inspection teams:

*It's very dependent on exam results and the goal posts keep moving on the significance of CVA. There's also still considerable inconsistency between inspections.*

*It depends how much the inspectors focus on standards rather than achievements and it's very dependent on which inspectors we get, because of wide variations.*

Case-study data offered more insight into reasons why school staff were less confident about their next inspections. In some schools, there was concern that either not enough progress had been made, or that progress would not yet be recognised. For example, in a school where the SEF had been upgraded to a '2', the assistant headteacher explained that he was not confident '*that the Ofsted grades will also be revised upwards because the 2008 outcomes won't be validated in time. Great strides have been achieved, but it won't be acknowledged formally because it takes over six months after publication to receive validated results*'. In a primary school the interviewees all thought that there had been considerable progress since the last inspection (when they were graded '3'), but, as one of the teachers commented, '*I'm not sure if we've made enough progress in all areas*', a view supported by the headteacher, who reflected, '*we can't address everything at once, we have to be selective*'. He added that although progress warranted some revision of grades, the impact of changes would not be apparent ahead of the next inspection and '*key stage 2 results are going to be on a par with previous years*'.

Interviewees in five schools referred to an emphasis on results and attainment as the reason for low expectations and in some cases this caused a sense of perceived injustice, as described by this teacher from a primary school: '*What we got from Ofsted was that it is all standards-based. It doesn't matter what you do, you can't get 'goods' unless you get way over the floor targets and to say that we are satisfactory is just wrong*'.

In another primary school, all the staff interviewed thought that they had moved on from the 'satisfactory' grade awarded in 2006; all their recommendations had been addressed and there had been considerable progress in teaching and learning. According to the headteacher, staff development programmes had improved '*knowledge, skills and understanding*', and their pupils had been encouraged '*to think more, to challenge more, to be more of a problem-solver and more in control of their own learning*'. As a result, the SEF grades had been moved up to 'good' with some 'outstanding' features, and the deputy headteacher wanted '*the hard work that people have put in, and the work that the children have produced to be recognised*'. Nevertheless, expectations were not high and this was partly because of concerns that an inspector who '*is not fully aware of the Foundation Stage could produce a report that can reflect badly if they don't understand the practice*'. Additionally, there was a perception from all staff that '*the results achieved by the children are the over-arching determinant of grades given*' and because everything was '*tied to key stage 2 results, so many other achievements in the life of the school can be misrepresented by this focus on results*'.

In schools where the last inspection was regarded as a negative experience by the staff involved, the level of pessimism was particularly strong. For example, the staff in a school where there had been very little interaction with the inspection team and a perceived focus on looking only at data, the (new) headteacher said that staff were '*dreading*' the next inspection and a teacher described staff as feeling '*worried, anxious and frightened*' about it. There was a consensus among the staff that the school should be awarded a 'good' grade, but this was unlikely unless the inspection team was very different to the previous one. One teacher commented: '*If they were to come on the old format, [same as the last inspection] why bother – all they want is to fill in the numbers on a bit of paper. If I was to have the children bound and gagged they wouldn't know*'. The headteacher considered that if the next inspection team were '*cold*', then the school would be graded 'satisfactory' again, but '*if the team is interested in delving deeper and looking at the context and atmosphere of the school, then we will get a 'good', and I would say we are a good school*'. The staff agreed that their negative views of inspection were based on the experience of their own school, which was an individual example, but it had left them with a very jaded view of the inspection system and a perception that judgements were unreliable. A teacher reported that at the last inspection, she had been told by the lead inspector that the school could only be given a 'satisfactory' grade because they had only done two other inspections and '*they didn't know what 'good' looked like yet*'.

By contrast, the four case-study schools that were optimistic about their next inspection, based this on the expectation that they would be judged fairly. One secondary school had found their previous inspection disappointing, but the headteacher thought that they had all the necessary evidence to support what

was said in the SEF, the school '*had changed and developed a great deal*' and the quality of teaching was now definitely good. He and the staff interviewed therefore believed the school would be graded as 'good' next time. In the other school that hoped to move up a grade from 'satisfactory' to 'good', the headteacher said she felt that '*realistically this is where the school is*'. Their key stage 2 results had all improved and she and the staff thought the school's progress would be recognised as long as '*they take into account all the work done to move the school forward and also take the time to actually observe the teachers*'. Two other schools had been graded 'good' and were confident about retaining this grading with some more 'outstanding' features – their SEFs were well-prepared, they had supporting evidence, recommendations had been addressed and everything was in place for the forthcoming inspection.

There were five schools that had been recently re-inspected – all received the grades they were expecting and hoped for and all were positive about their most recent inspections. Two had been judged 'outstanding' previously and were so again, one had retained its 'good' grade, but with a number of 'outstanding' features, one had improved from 'satisfactory' to 'good' and one had moved up from a grade '4' to '3'.

Staff in this last school explained that prior to the most recent inspection, they had been uncertain what to expect and were very nervous, as they had been unhappy with their previous experience (there had been a formal complaint by the school governors and the LA). The headteacher described how staff were confident that they had the systems in place to stand up to scrutiny, but '*were fearful of a similarly incompetent team because the improvements had not yet borne through in terms of outcomes*'. However, their fears were misplaced because '*the second team were prepared to listen, which the first team weren't, they were prepared to go out of their way to secure evidence for findings, had a professional approach to questioning and so the process was far more positive*'. As a result, the second inspection had gone a long way towards restoring faith in the inspection and grading process, and although awarded a grade '3', they knew this was the 'ceiling' at that point, but were now working towards a grade '2'.

It is difficult to draw any definite conclusions from the experience of these five schools, except to say that the positive response to the inspection and the matching of grades to expectations was in marked contrast to some of the views expressed about previous inspections. Even the strongly-held perception that inspection grades were often too dependent on data and did not consider the wider context of a school was challenged by the experience of the last school referred to, where the headteacher pointed out:

*Between the two inspections there was very little measurable improvement. However, if you dug below the surface, which the second*

*inspection team did, they saw that significant improvements were taking place, even though there weren't any outcomes at that stage. They were confident enough in their own professionalism to say that there were improvements taking place even though there was no hard evidence. And come the results a few months later, that evidence manifested itself.*

In conclusion, the majority of schools (both case-study and survey) had updated their SEFs and this appeared to have become a more widely inclusive process. Most schools thought that they were well-prepared for their next inspection in terms of providing evidence for improvements and addressing any issues that had been highlighted. Where there was confidence in progress, SEF grades had been raised and this was the case in a substantial number of schools, but expectations of forthcoming inspections were often far less optimistic and where this was further examined in the case-study schools, the reasons were a concern that progress would not yet be sufficiently evident, or a perceived over emphasis on attainment data. However, those case-study schools that had undergone recent inspections had all been positive about the experience and had received the grades that they had hoped for and considered realistic.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 6.1 Conclusions

#### Lesson observations

Strand 2 findings revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between constructive oral feedback and overall satisfaction with the inspection process. In line with this, strand 3 revealed that, in schools where the lesson observation process had been regarded as fair, well-managed and as extensive as possible given limited time, there was a high level of satisfaction from all staff. By contrast, where there had been some disagreement, the response to the inspection process was strongly negative overall.

On the whole senior managers and classroom practitioners appreciated, understood and supported the scaled-down observations in the s5 inspection. At the same time, the important constituent of a thorough inspection was generally perceived to be that the judgements were soundly-based, and for this reason it was essential that the number and length of observations were viewed as fair, appropriate and to have a rationale behind their selection. Where, in a minority of cases, concern was expressed by senior managers and teachers at the perceived lack, or short duration, of observations, this often reflected a view held by the school staff that the inspection team had not fully engaged with classroom practice and therefore their judgements were not necessarily '*soundly-based*'.

Most teachers expressed a preference for receiving feedback personally from the inspector who undertook the observation, and as soon as possible after the lesson. Good dialogue, which was thorough, well-managed and conducted in a professional and personable way, elicited a positive reaction. Although there was general acceptance that inspectors were under time pressure, the provision of adequate feedback, consistently applied within and across inspection teams, was a contributory cause for satisfaction with the inspection process.

Most teaching assistants were satisfied with their role in inspections, because they assumed that inspectors were not directly observing them, but the lesson overall, and the way in which they were utilised by the teacher. They also expressed a preference, and an expectation, that they should receive feedback from the teacher rather than from the inspector. As was also the case with their teaching colleagues, TAs' main concern was that the teachers they worked with should have adequate observations and that the school should be judged fairly.

## Inspection recommendations

There was a general view that specific recommendations were more helpful (than more general ones) because they provided greater focus, action was easier to identify and they were felt to be more straightforward to address because they were less open to (mis)interpretation. Furthermore, there was some evidence that very broad recommendations did not instigate direct action. Additionally, two or three years after being given, recommendations continued to be viewed as helpful by senior managers, teachers and TAs if they assisted with prioritising, supplied focus or provided a point of reference for the school development plan. Consistent with strand 2 findings, on reflection headteachers believed that the recommendations validated senior leaders' judgements on areas for improvement and helped to focus the internal agenda and to move it forward. Recommendations were also perceived to be useful for providing external credibility and, on occasion, for providing leverage with local authorities for obtaining funding and resources.

Where recommendations were viewed as less helpful this was generally perceived to be because inspectors had not provided a new perspective or highlighted new areas for improvement. Furthermore, where recommendations were no longer believed to be helpful two or three years after the inspection this was generally because the school reported that they had moved on in the period since the inspection, or the recommendations were sometimes regarded as having been based on a weak cohort and therefore no longer relevant, or they were either perceived to lack the correct focus or did not always take full account of the school circumstances.

Strand 2 of the evaluation showed that the greatest impacts of s5 recommendations were in the areas of assessment, monitoring and tracking. Strand 3 revealed that actions instigated in these areas have led to positive longitudinal impacts across nearly all of the schools visited. Both classroom practitioners and senior leaders reported that recommendations to improve assessment had led to more involvement by all staff, leading to greater consistency across the school in the use of assessment. Such recommendations also led to more staff development, in turn leading to greater understanding and confidence with regard to assessment techniques and, as assessment techniques were reported to have been implemented on a whole-school basis, more sharing of good practice.

Additionally, there was evidence that the way in which the recommendations were implemented was significant: actions were perceived to be particularly successful when all members of staff shared collective responsibility. The approach taken to implementation by senior leaders was also reported to influence subsequent action. Furthermore, there was a view that the nature of some 'developmental' recommendations was such that action was required on a continuing basis.

## Impact

Inspection was generally perceived to have achieved a direct positive impact on school improvement in terms of assessment and, to a lesser extent, quality of teaching, and to have contributed to improved attainment. Other school improvements included increased distributed leadership and management, restructured support staff roles, enhanced staff confidence and better relationships with pupils. Although it was acknowledged that inspection may have contributed to some of these areas of improvement and it was recognised that inspection had provided focus and affirmation, it was also widely accepted that many other factors influence school improvement and that it is difficult to attribute progress to any one source.

In terms of reported indirect impact linked to the s5 recommendations, changes included, as mentioned above, refined management structures, improvements in self-evaluation, curriculum developments and altered staff morale - either boosting or demoralising staff depending on whether the achieved inspection grade matched expectations. Additionally, although the majority felt that the focus on recommendation areas had not led to a lack of attention elsewhere, nevertheless there was some limited evidence that concentrating attention in one area did in some cases lead to a reduction in standards elsewhere.

## The future

Self-evaluation, two or three years after the first s5 inspections were conducted, was widely perceived to be an ongoing, inclusive '*process*', rather than an '*event*' with all school staff reported as contributing to some extent. Furthermore, there was a generally positive attitude to the value of the SEF, even if keeping it updated was perceived to be a burdensome process.

The vast majority of interviewees reported that they were at least reasonably well-prepared for their next inspection and most described themselves as very well-prepared and referred to updated SEFs and '*evidence trails*' to show improvement. Moreover, many now reported that they had a better idea of what would be expected from them.

Where there was less confidence reported with regard to future inspection grades, the majority of interviewees cited the test and examination results as the reason for their concerns. Other reasons included a view that improvements had not yet had time to become embedded or staffing changes had affected progress. In addition, there was some concern expressed with regard to perceived inconsistency between inspection teams. Furthermore, in schools where the last inspection was regarded as a negative experience by the staff involved, the level of pessimism, with regard to the next inspection, was particularly strong.

## 6.2 Recommendations

Ofsted may wish to give consideration to the following points:

- **The importance of observations** – classroom practitioners viewed observation, and feedback, as very significant in terms of satisfaction with the whole inspection process. While school staff understood the time restrictions of s5 inspections, Ofsted might consider placing more emphasis on explaining the rationale behind the number of, and length of, observations. In addition, classroom practitioners appreciated inspectors who took the time to fully, and consistently, engage with classroom practice – only then would teachers respect inspectors’ judgements as being fair and ‘*soundly based*’. Teachers also preferred feedback directly from inspectors, while teaching assistants were happy to receive feedback from teachers.
- **The importance of dialogue** – as satisfaction with the inspection process was regarded as integral to schools’ acceptance of the inspection outcome, it was viewed as essential that inspectors were not only consistent (and seen to be consistent), within and across teams, in their approach to observation and feedback, but also in the way they handled discussions with all school staff. It should be borne in mind that the perceptions outlined in this report are based on some of the first s5 inspections conducted, and that evidence from the five recently conducted re-inspections indicated no concerns with regard to dialogue. Nevertheless, inspection teams should be aware that successful dialogue was regarded by school staff as key to satisfaction with the process and outcome approval.
- **The significance of appropriate recommendations** – recommendations that were more specific, provided focus, were regarded as actionable, were not open to misinterpretation or provided a clear point of reference were generally regarded as more appropriate recommendations that would hold longitudinal value. Conversely, recommendations that were viewed as less helpful tended to be those that were perceived to be too ‘data driven’. School staff were not against the use of data to ‘drive’ the recommendations, but stressed that the data *should take full account of the school context and circumstances*. Recommendations based only on a weak cohort and therefore no longer relevant, for example, or those that lacked correct focus or did not take full account of the school context, were deemed to be less helpful than those that did take full account of school contextual factors.
- **How to maximise positive impact of recommendations** – positive impact was generally perceived to have been achieved when the recommendations were viewed as appropriate (see above) and therefore actionable. There was substantial evidence that recommendations with regard to assessment, tracking and monitoring were successful because they were developmental in nature and over time, and were inclusive so that there was whole-school ownership. For positive impact to be felt, and for recommendations to contribute further to school improvement, inspection teams may wish to consider further collaboration with schools in arriving at recommendations and additionally building on, and aligning recommendations with, ‘*the evidence trails*’

demonstrated in SEFs. This recommendation is likely to have particular relevance as pupil-level well being indicators are developed alongside existing inspection grades and attainment data.



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