

# School inspection: A view from the board, two years on

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# Introduction

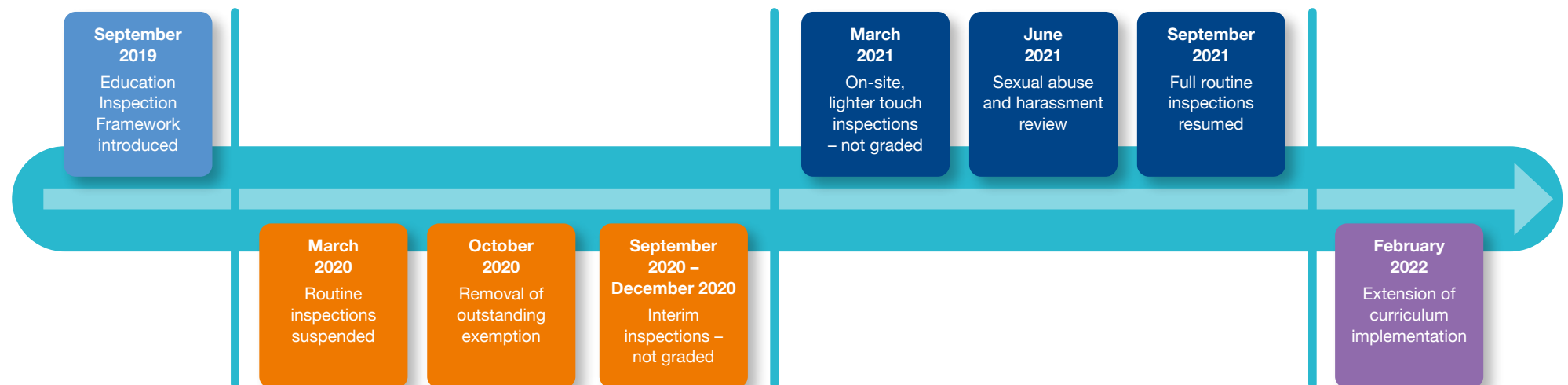
When NGA published its first report on the new Education Inspection Framework (EIF) (Ofsted, 2021) in March 2020, no one expected to enter into a national lockdown shortly after, resulting in schools and colleges across the country partially closing their doors and routine Ofsted inspections being paused for 18 months. Ofsted resumed routine inspections in September 2021, using the EIF (Ofsted, 2021) that had only been in use for six months before the first national lockdown. As inspections returned, NGA wanted to once again take a snapshot of what inspection practice has looked like from the view point of governors and trustees.

## Aims

The findings of this report are focused through the lens of multi academy trust (MAT) and single academy trust (SAT) trustees, maintained school governors, those serving on the local tier in a trust and executive leaders. This study seeks to understand whether:

- schools are inspected in a consistent way under the Education Inspection Framework
- governance is understood and inspected correctly
- the reporting of governance is consistent and achieves the intention of the reports that are published

## A timeline of Ofsted activity since the implementation of the Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2021)



# Key Findings

## Inspecting governance

**Only 36% of governing boards said that the Ofsted inspection helped governance.** Those sitting on governing boards report a mixed response to their experience of an inspection under the EIF. Overall, there was a split view on whether inspection has helped to improve governance with 34% of governing boards telling us that inspection did not help improve governance.

**Inspectors appear to understand the strategic role of school governance; however this is not consistently the case for every inspection.** Fewer respondents in 2022 reported that inspectors did not understand the role of governance in the school and the line of questioning strayed into the operational function of the school.

**Findings indicate that inspectors are able to distinguish between the roles and responsibilities at multi academy trust board level and local governance level.** 83% of respondents governing in a multi academy trust, reported that inspectors spoke with either trustees, academy committee members or both as part of the inspection.

## Inspecting to improve education

**There is an inconsistency between the questions inspectors ask governing boards about the curriculum and the depth the questioning goes to.** Despite the quality of education having the greatest weighting of all the judgement areas, governing boards are not always asked about their role in the curriculum and the depth of these conversations differ from school to school.

**Governors, trustees and school leaders feel that the feedback meeting was valuable to school improvement.**

Of those that did attend the feedback meeting, over half (62%) of respondents reported positively about the feedback meeting and said that the feedback meeting was valuable to their governing board and school leadership.

## Inspection process and reports

**The role and impact of governance continues to be diminished from the reports with 31% of analysed reports not mentioning governance.** Where governance is mentioned in reports, there is a disparity between the extent to which governance is reported on.

**Where schools are graded below 'good', often the published reports do not refer to governance at all and the ways governing boards carry out their core functions.**

**38% of respondents felt that inspectors were not mindful of the impact that COVID-19 may have had on various aspects of the school.** The School Inspection Handbook (Ofsted, 2022) has been updated to acknowledge that inspectors will take the impact of COVID-19 into consideration when making a judgement, but views varied on whether this was actually happening. Reports also vary according to whether they mention the impact that COVID-19 has had on the school.

**Almost a fifth of respondents (19%) stated that their published Ofsted report was not an accurate reflection of what was heard in the feedback meeting.** The feedback meeting is a 'treasure trove' of information for governing boards and leaders to understand strengths and areas of improvement of the school but some respondents however said the published reports told a different story.

## A note on methodology

An online, self-selecting survey gathered the views of 111 chairs, vice chairs, lead executives and governors and trustees. The survey was open for four weeks and promoted through a variety of NGAs platforms which reach NGA members and NGA non-members. The findings of this report are also informed by an analysis of 120 Ofsted reports that were published between September 2021 and December 2021. The reports were chosen at random and are representative of various school types and Ofsted grades.

**These survey findings come after two years of schools adapting their curriculum for online lessons in addition to an increase in poor pupil and staff mental health and wellbeing. Challenges within the school system that existed prior to 2020 have been further exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic. As a result, views of inspections may be skewed positively or negatively depending on the impact that COVID-19 has had on the individual school.**

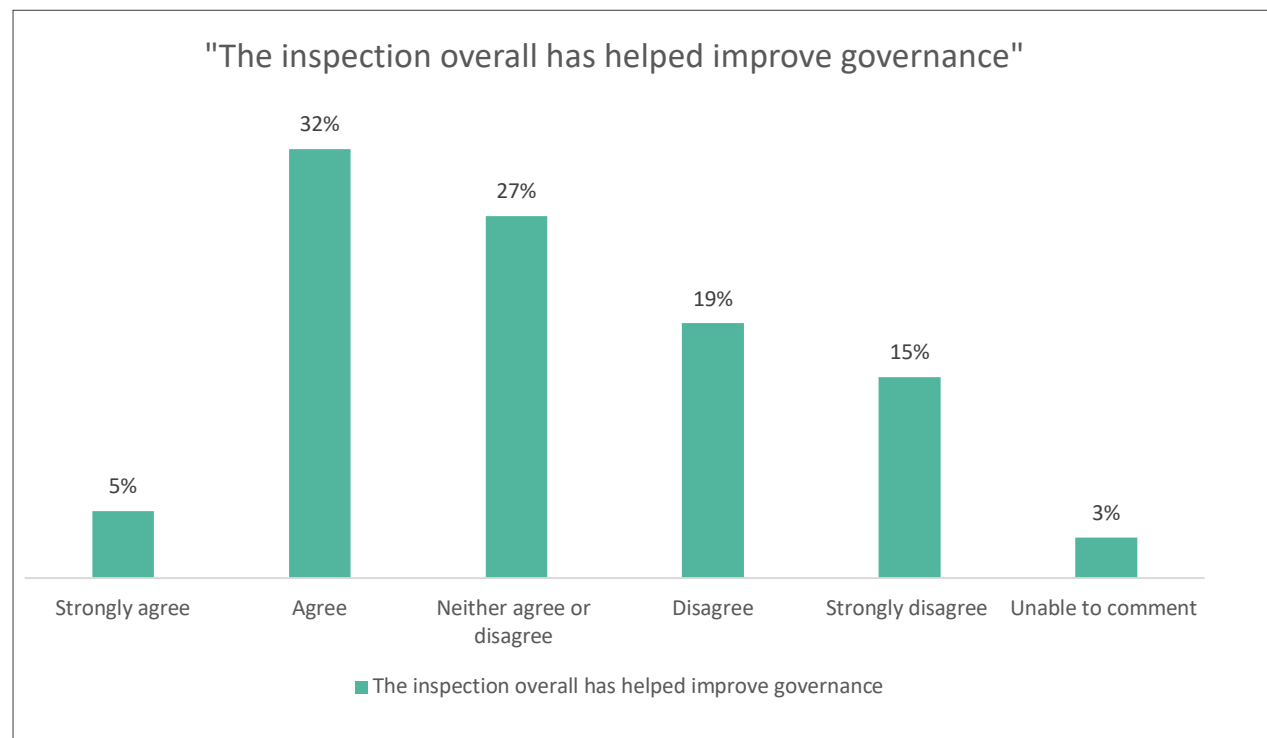
# Inspection and interaction with the governing board

*(Paragraph 140, School Inspection Handbook Ofsted, 2022) The role that governors and trustees play in the school's performance is evaluated as part of the judgement on the effectiveness of leadership and management, and each report will contain a separate paragraph that addresses the governance of the school.*

The meeting between governing boards and inspectors serves as an important opportunity for boards to provide information about the top-level strategic decision making that takes place in schools and the impact that this has on pupils. Inspectors will ensure that meetings are with those who are directly responsible for exercising governance of the school and for overseeing its performance.

The survey asked those on governing boards the extent to which their Ofsted inspection helped to improve governance. Those who felt that the inspection helped governance sat at a slightly higher percentage (37%) compared to the percentage of respondents who did not feel that the inspection overall has helped governance (34%).

Ofsted inspections should provide governing boards and schools leaders with an explanation of the school's strengths and areas of weakness. In doing so, those governing should have a clear understanding of where governing boards can improve and ultimately improve areas of the school.



## The core functions of governance

The inspection handbook states that inspectors will explore how the governing board carries out each of the core functions. For example, the clarity of the school's vision, ethos and strategic direction will have a significant impact on the decisions that leaders make about the curriculum. Inspectors will also consider whether the work of governors in this respect is supporting the school to provide a high-quality education for its pupils.

There was a diverse response to the survey when respondents were asked about the questions that inspectors had queried about the core functions of governance. Concerningly, several respondents said that there were no questions or very little asked about how the governing board carried out each of their core functions. Of 80 respondents, 11% stated that they were not asked any questions about how the core functions were carried out.

This further solidifies our findings from 2020 which identified that there are inconsistencies around how governing boards are asked about their core functions. The 2020 report said that only three per cent of respondents stated that they were not asked questions about how core functions were carried out.

Where inspectors did ask questions about the core functions, there was a lack of consistency in approach. Respondents to the survey provided details about what they were asked in relation to the core functions of governance:

“ How do trustees ensure oversight of the school. What do we know about suitability of curriculum? ”

“He did not actually ask questions about the core functions. Questions were asked about strengths and weaknesses, Safeguarding, Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE), staff well-being, our school name change and how we had handled that, how we knew about the validity of the school's date as there had been no external validation, incidents of bullying and sexual harassment in the school.”

“ How do governors hold the school to account? How do they know what leaders say is accurate? ”

“Very limited – they were very interested in who is responsible for checking the policies on the website”

“Ofsted asked about how we support staff and wellbeing and workload while at the same time expecting us to be driving school improvement (which was mainly around improving teaching and learning). We were asked about special educational need provision, behaviour and our response to some comments on parent view (which we had not seen). We were asked to describe our journey as a school within a federation, our governance structures and committees and what lead governors we had.”

“More to say about what we were not asked. We were not asked about the impact of COVID-19 (we had to volunteer the fact that our school was disproportionately affected) or about the remote learning experience. We were not asked about governor visits or how we worked during lockdown, or governor training.”

## Financial performance

NGA's 2020 report highlighted that given the focus from Ofsted on curriculum, as well as the drive from government for schools to increasingly focus on integrated curriculum financial planning, the EIF in theory paves a way for Ofsted to increasingly question boards on how their financial decisions are leading to a strong curriculum offer. Yet the role of finance in school inspections under the EIF has to

date, been inconsistent. This continues to be the case two years on. A small proportion of respondents from the 2022 survey shared that inspectors asked boards about the financial oversight that they provide.

“ What training have you had? How do you ensure spending funding appropriately? ”

“Impact of financial funding on curriculum”

“How do governors monitor school finance?”

Of the reports that were analysed, a small number reported on the school's spending in relation to providing a strong curriculum offer.

## Questions and topics

The findings show a relatively positive picture about the questions that were asked to governing boards, with the line of questioning sticking to the strategic roles and responsibilities of boards. However, we know that this is not always the case. Since the inspection process has resumed, some members have shared that their line of questioning around the curriculum strayed into the operational and left attending governors struggling to respond and provide reasonable responses to these questions.

The findings from 2020 showed that inspectors commonly blurred their line of questioning into the operational. This does not seem to be a common theme in the findings from the 2022 survey. When inspectors meet with members of the governing board, they should seek:

- to identify how the governing board (at local level and trust level) carry out the core functions of governance
- how well the governing board fulfils its statutory duties
- evidence of the impact of those responsible for governance

The findings displayed a reassuring picture that inspectors were focusing their questions appropriately to those on the governing board. In addition to this, there were no comments that indicated that inspectors had confused or blurred the lines between those sitting at trust board level and those sat at local governing committee level. It is encouraging to see that the role of governance in relation to the curriculum was not identified as a significant issue amongst the 111 respondents to the survey.

## Curriculum and governance

The curriculum needs to represent the values, ethos and vision of the school. The 2020 report found that “governing boards are adopting an increased role in the curriculum, largely driven by the framework and deep dive focus, sometimes resulting in a blur between the strategic and the operational. The lines of accountability between the governance and executive tiers are being distorted, with the distinction between governance and operational aspects of the school not being recognised by some inspectors”. The report recommended that “inspectors should ensure the ambitious vision setting and proactive monitoring activities of the governing board is always and consistently considered when making informed judgements on curriculum intent, implementation and impact”.

The 2022 survey findings reveal that out of 84 respondents that answered the question, 60 respondents (71%) reported that they were asked questions about the curriculum. 24 respondents (29%) reported that they were either not asked about the curriculum or asked very little.

There is some inconsistency between inspection practice from school to school with just under a third of respondents sharing that they were not asked questions about the curriculum. The questions that were asked about curriculum varied in their approach. Some related to specific subject areas or specific pupil groups and others related to the curriculum intent and impact.

For example questions such as: “How do we ensure curriculum is ambitious?” and “How do we know all children are stretched?” consider the curriculum offer as a whole and questions such as “How is the Religious Education programme differentiated, and showing progression?” concentrate on specific subjects.

Other examples of questions that inspectors asked included:

“How have governors influenced the intent of the curriculum?”

“[The inspector] Showed interest in our understanding of the 3- year KS4 curriculum and potential loss of choices for pupils. Also asked about flow and depth across all subjects”

“As a governing body, how do you review progress and consistency of the curriculum?”

There is an inconsistent link in the reporting of the curriculum and the role that governing boards have in it. Where governing boards possess knowledge about the curriculum, it allows them to be well equipped to hold their leaders to account and establish whether pupils are achieving. Of the 120 published reports that were analysed, none of the reports made any direct links to the role that the governing board have with the curriculum. The term ‘leaders’ was most commonly used when discussing the curriculum offer.

“During recent years, leaders have ensured that pupils have a depth of knowledge and understanding in English and mathematics”

“Leaders have largely developed a well-sequenced curriculum that builds on pupils’ prior learning. However, in some subjects, curriculum planning is less developed. Leaders have not fully mapped out what pupils need to know and remember”



## Time governing boards spend with inspectors

### 2020 finding:

There is a lack of consistency in how long those governing spend with inspectors, ranging from as little as 15 minutes to an hour and a half.

These meetings are often reported as rushed with inspectors simply not having enough time to take governance seriously.

### 2020 recommendation:

The meeting between those governing and inspectors during the inspection process should be viewed as an opportunity for inspectors to learn about how the core governance functions are being carried out to ensure that the quality of education is good; inspector knowledge should be developed and adequate inspection time allocated.

The 2022 findings show a very similar picture to the 2020 findings in relation to the variation of time that inspectors spend with members of the governing board. Time that inspectors spent with the governing board varied between less than 10 minutes to 75 minutes. Over half of the respondents (53%) reported that they had spent between 30-45 minutes with inspectors for the inspection meeting.

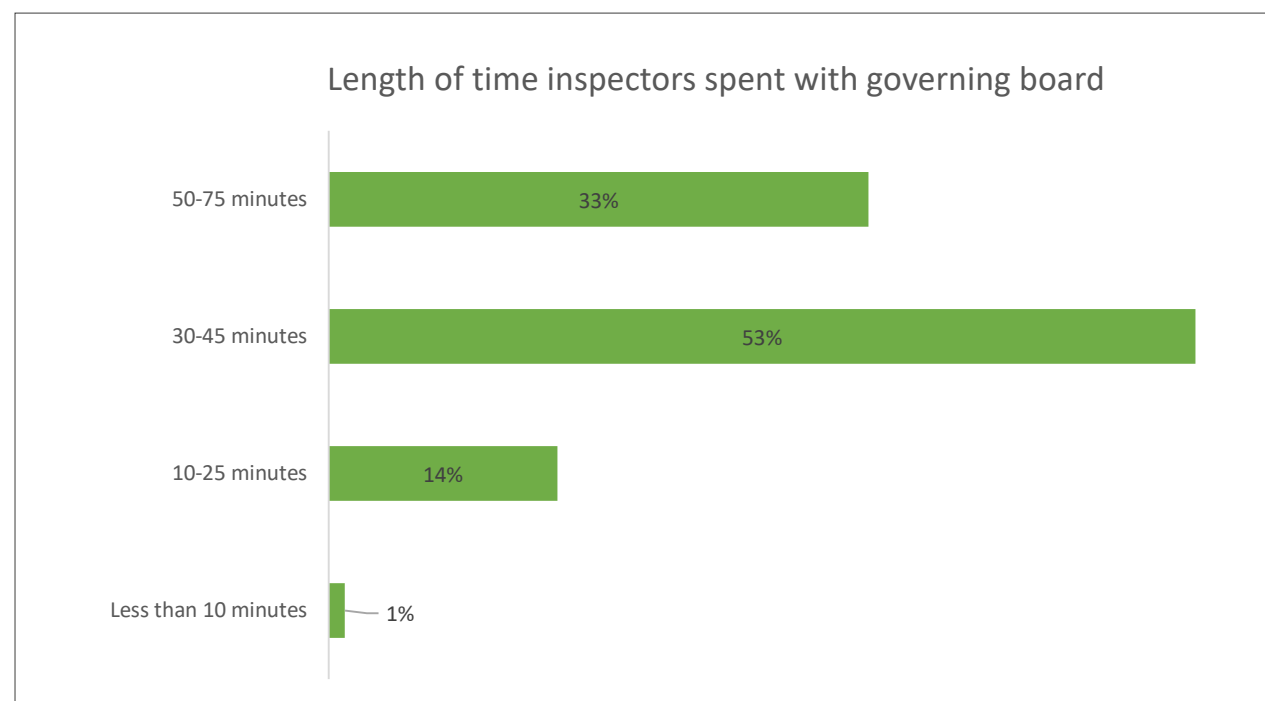
33% of respondents stated that inspectors had spent between 50- 75 minutes and 15% of respondents had spent less than 25 minutes with the inspectors. Despite the variation in time that governing boards and inspectors spent, the findings show that over 86% of inspections include conversations with a reasonable amount of time allocated for governing board to speak with inspectors.

There was a variation of views that respondents shared about the interaction they had with inspectors:

“Very little interaction with LGB in just 30 minutes. The interview was remote so not at all relaxed. The lead inspector had a clear agenda about the curriculum and about our clarity [with regards to] the respective roles of LGB and trustees. I think we managed the questions ok between us.”

“They met with five of us, four in person and one online, for approximately 45 minutes. The inspector was very pleasant, he asked around 10 very standard questions, and gave lots of time for a full answer, with additional time at the end for any other comments. He made notes whilst we spoke but was very engaging and made lots of eye contact. He started with an introductory introduce yourselves type question – asking how our roles had changed over time.”

There was a slight correlation between the length of time that inspectors spent with governing boards and the level of satisfaction that respondents had about the overall inspection. NGA’s view is that these meetings should be at least 30 minutes. The length of discussions should be primarily directed by the information that inspectors wish to know from the governing board following the information that inspectors have collected from deep dives and other conversations across the school.



# Satisfaction and accuracy

Levels of satisfaction varied amongst survey respondents with over half of the respondents (57%) to the survey telling us that they were satisfied with the inspection experience overall, 12% saying they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 31% saying they were not satisfied with the inspection experience. These findings sit broadly in line with the 2020 findings showing that the picture remains to be unchanged and the attitude to inspection experience is varied from school to school.

The conduct of inspectors and their approach to inspecting governance are the main factors that stem from the dissatisfaction of the inspection experience. These findings remain generally unchanged from 2020 and the comments that respondents provided on their experience provide an indication of the experiences that respondents had:

“It was traumatic – they [inspectors] were very quick to make broad generalisations without taking time to find out more. I was grateful to have a second day so I could respond to some of the points they made at the end of day one”

“Most of our governors were at the meeting with the inspector. In truth we were not treated with the level of courtesy that we had the right to expect. We all felt bruised by the experience”

On the other hand, there were a number of comments made about the supportive nature of some inspections.

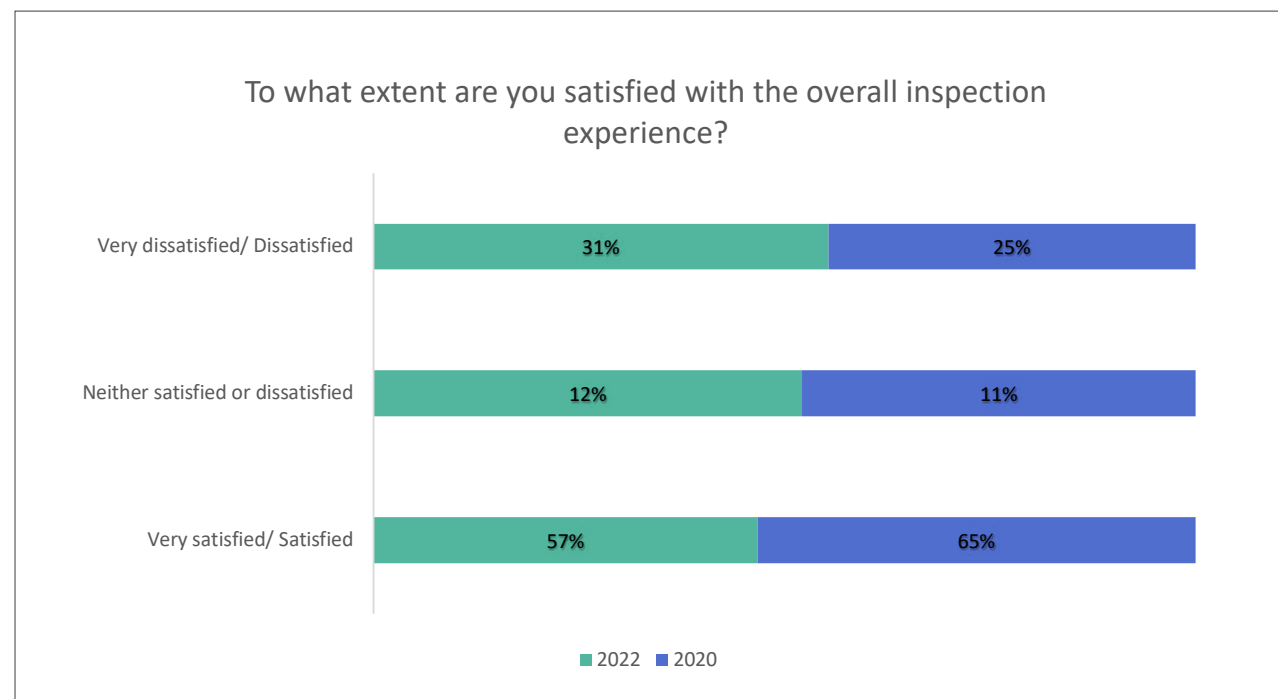
“It was my first experience of an Ofsted inspection and was a positive experience based on my expectations. The lead inspector was challenging but fair and was open with us about challenging us to move from good to outstanding (particularly when questioning governors)”

“The inspection was carried out in a supportive manner, felt like inspector listened and used information gathered during inspection”

“Inspector was very respectful and listened. He was very good”

“It was much more of a two- way process. The team were reasonable and rational, and we had opportunity to work with the team. It was very different to our last experience”

The survey found that 68% of respondents felt that the grade awarded from Ofsted was an accurate reflection of their self- evaluation. Leaving a quarter of respondents (25%) feeling that the grade they were awarded was not accurate and six per cent neither agreeing nor disagreeing that the grade awarded was an accurate reflection of their school. When comparing the findings from 2022 to the findings in 2020, the percentage of respondents reporting that their grade was accurate has decreased.





Respondents were less likely to strongly oppose or strongly support the view that the grade awarded was inaccurate/accurate to their self evaluation. One respondent said that:

“[I] feel it was an accurate reflection of where we are currently – I haven’t selected strongly agree, as felt some aspects of the inspection were making judgements on very limited snapshots of classroom observation, so not 100% reflective. [I’m] also not sure if they took enough recognition of the disruption of COVID-19 on teaching practice and student engagement.”

Other respondents felt that despite schools continuing to operate while COVID-19 continues to impact school operation, inspectors recognised the same strengths and areas of weakness as the governing board did.

“[The inspector was] spot on with all the positives and areas for development were accurate and we knew. No surprises.”

One survey respondent highlighted:

“overall fair and balanced - in a normal context! But this was not a normal context. Inspected two weeks into term and no ability to take into account COVID-19 impact on eg lack of evidence in some subjects – just because we had only two weeks to go on for ‘new’ curriculum policy and pupil work evidence. Little interest shown in any online or other provision.”

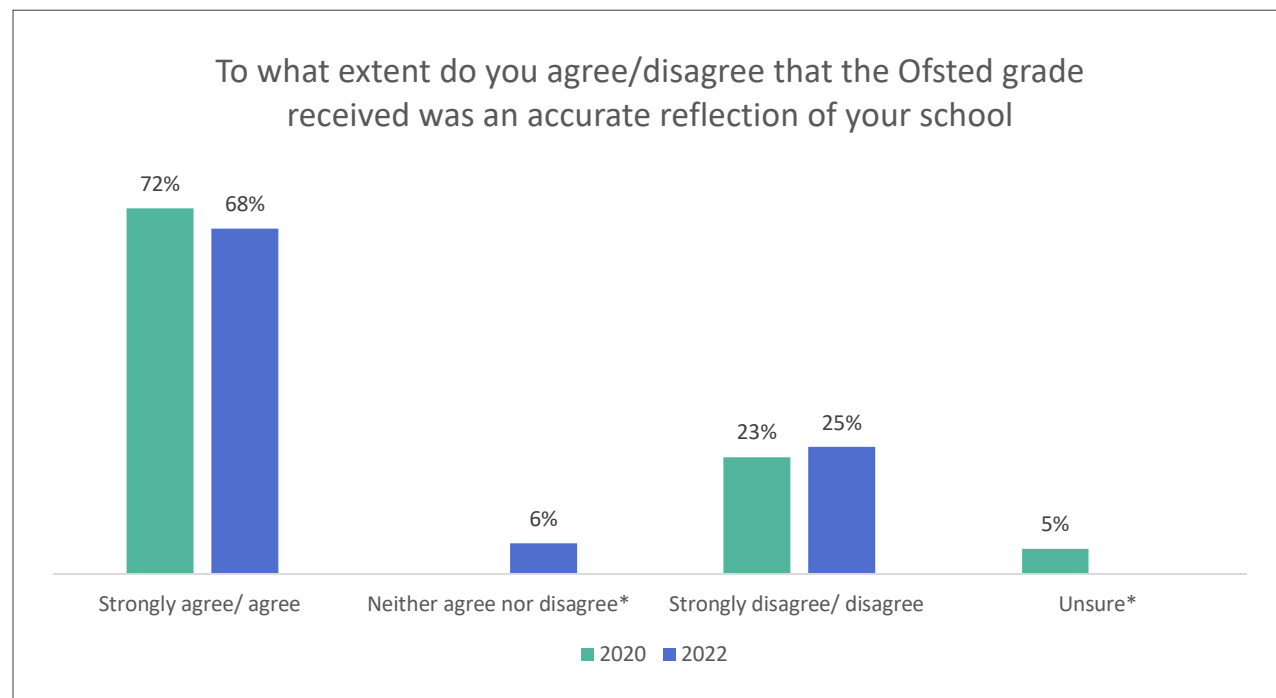
Under half (45%) of respondents felt that inspectors were mindful of the impact that COVID-19 had on their school compared to 38% of respondents feeling that inspectors were not mindful of the impact that COVID-19 had on the school. During the early months of 2021, Ofsted conducted visits to schools which did not result in a grade. Research had found that there was a positive reaction and feeling towards these visits as school leaders felt that there was a partnership approach that was taken and the pressure of

grading eased school leaders. Some respondents to the survey opposed the view that Ofsted inspections should result in grades stating that

“It is too much of a blanket measure – ‘good’ in one school is very different to a ‘good’ in another school. We need to remove the grades and let the narrative tell the story.”

There was an overall positive view of how accurate the published reports were in relation to what governing boards heard in the feedback meeting. 54% of respondents reported that they agreed that the published report

was an accurate reflection of what was heard in the feedback meeting. However, concerningly, almost a fifth of respondents stated that what they heard in the feedback meetings were not accurately reported in the published report. The remaining 27% had no view or were unable to comment on whether the published report was an accurate reflection to what was heard in the feedback meeting. Ofsted has repeatedly emphasised the value of the feedback meetings for governing boards and school leaders and have indicated that the feedback meeting is where governing boards and school leaders should expect to take away the most information for school improvement.



\* 2022 respondents were offered ‘neither agree nor disagree’ option and 2020 respondents were provided with an ‘unsure’ option for this question

# Feedback and reporting

Over 60% of respondents (62%) felt that the feedback meeting was valuable to the governing board and other school leaders. 16% of respondents reported the opposite and said that they did not think that the feedback meeting was valuable to the governing board and other school leaders.

The 2020 findings showed that 76% of respondents were satisfied with the feedback meeting showing a 14- percentage point decrease in the level of satisfaction with the feedback meetings. Ofsted have continued to reiterate the value of feedback meetings for school leaders and the meaningful opportunity it provides for boards to learn from the experience. The finding that 16% didn't find it helpful is a concern.

Concerningly, seven per cent of respondents had reported that they did not attend the feedback meeting as they were not invited. These included those who were in roles such as vice-chair, other governor and trustee. The 2022 figures show a 5- percentage point increase in those not being invited to attend the feedback meeting compared to the findings in 2020. This increase may in part be explained by the impact of COVID-19 on the school on the day of the feedback. The School Inspection Handbook (Ofsted, 2022) stipulates that as many governors and or trustees should be able to attend the feedback meeting despite an increasing number of governors reporting that they were not invited to attend the feedback meeting.

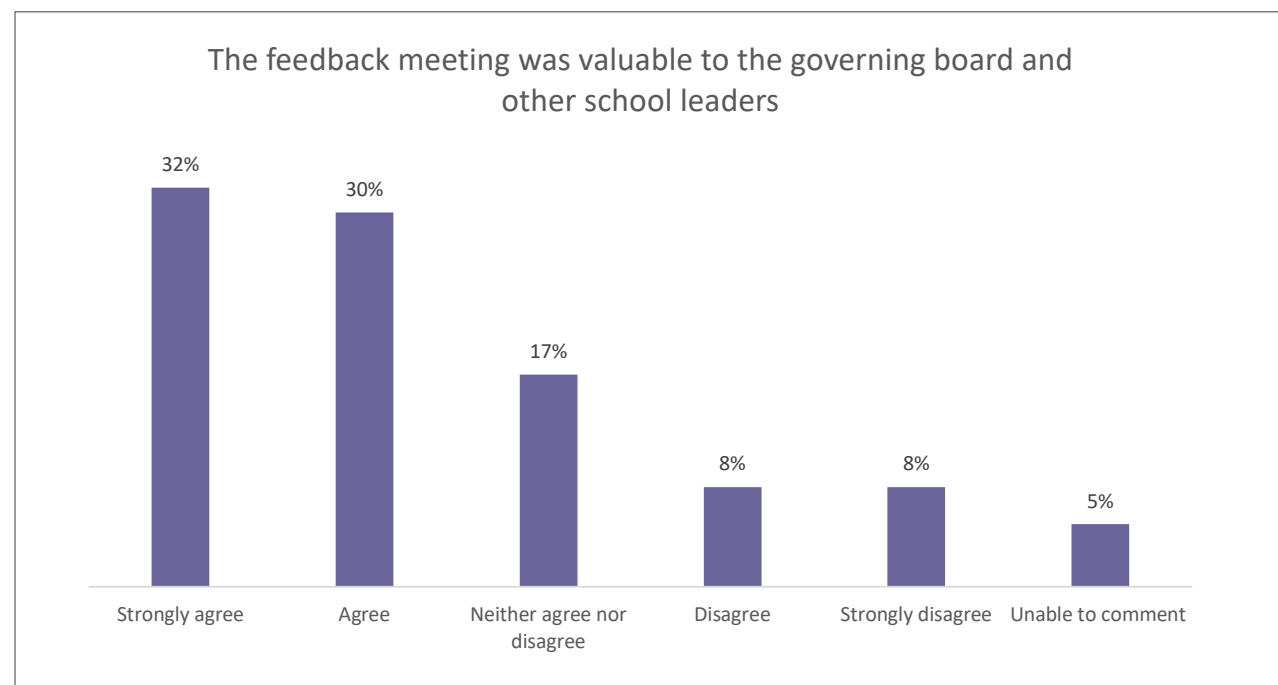
NGA's 2020 report reported concerns that the published inspection reports did not go into a level of detail sufficient enough for governing boards and school leaders to know their strengths and areas of improvements. In response to this, Ofsted emphasised the importance of the feedback meeting for school leaders as the feedback would provide

all of the information that leaders would need to know to integrate the areas of improvement into the school improvement plan.

As the Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2021) came into effect, the published inspection reports have changed substantially. The changes were centred around a clear and simple approach for parents to be able to understand. In the previous framework, The Common Inspection Framework, governance was allocated a paragraph within the published reports. However, under the current framework, inspectors have the flexibility

to comment on governance, 'if appropriate'. This has unsurprisingly caused significant inconsistency between the reports that get published, particularly when looking between the variation of grades.

The analysis of the reports in 2020 found that the inspection reports were often too simplistic and patronising. The 2022 reports show that the level of detail and the areas of detail differ between each report, which is to be expected. However, most reports do not provide sufficient information that those with oversight of the school require to carry out their responsibilities.



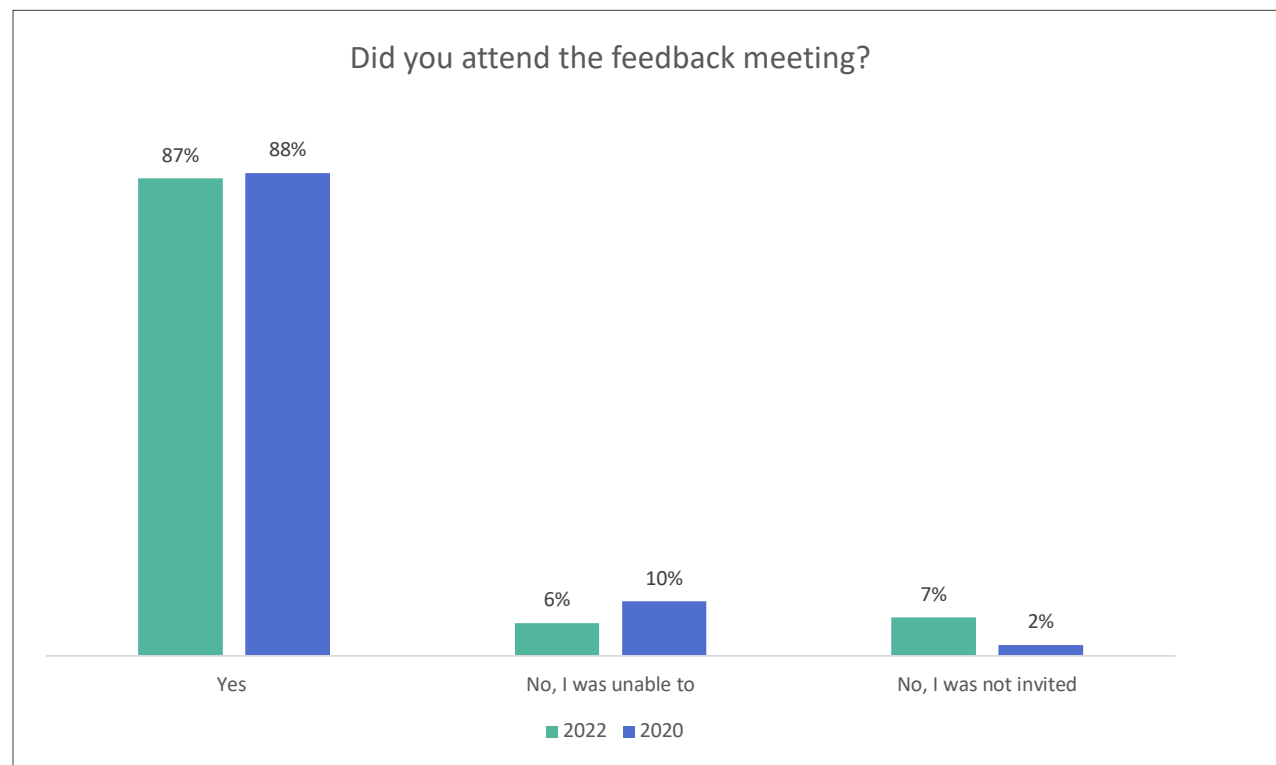
The 2020 report made a recommendation to Ofsted asking for a return to a more informative format which in addition to the information for parents, specifically includes information targeted at those responsible for school improvement. Specific findings should be included for all four key judgements: quality of education, personal development, behaviours and attitudes and leadership and management. If Ofsted insist on retaining the new report format for parents, NGA have called for a further report authored for those beyond the meeting room which summarises the inspection findings in a way deemed helpful for school leaders, staff and those governing. Nothing has changed to alter NGA's view that this is needed.

The analysis of the published reports found a common theme throughout. Where schools were found to be requiring improvement, a number of reports did not mention the role of governance within that school. A school being graded as 'requires improvement' finds itself being closely monitored by Ofsted as inspectors had felt that one of or several judgement areas were ineffective. In this case, it is crucial that the published reports set out how governing boards, alongside schools leaders can aim to improve areas of weakness, but this is not currently happening.

Findings from the report analysis shows that one third of published reports do not mention governance in any capacity. Governing boards are the guardians of the school's values and ethos, acting as a supportive challenger to ensure that pupils are able to thrive and succeed in life. The governing boards strategic decisions drives the school's operations and should be equally recognised in the reports published. Where Ofsted reports are highlighting the role of governance, parents can gain an understanding of the school structure and the ways in which the governing board support their school. NGA will continue conversations with Ofsted to consider the requirement for a paragraph on the school's governance. While the School Inspection Handbook (Ofsted, 2022) continues to stipulate that a paragraph on governance can be included

'where appropriate', NGA strongly advise that the feedback meetings are clerked so that the governing board has all the information they need to work on areas of improvement and uphold areas of strength.

“ In the end the feedback was quite formulaic – the boxes had been ticked. They do not make recommendations to outstanding schools. ”



“ I found the feedback rather 'boring'. The lead inspector was on his own and seemed to be reading to a script. It took him quite a while to get to the point. The Inspection had moments of tension and I just think he was being cautious. The final report was hardly something to celebrate – again it was very formulaic and dry which is not what a school needs when it has shown itself to be outstanding. There was a lack of humanity in its format. ”

# Safeguarding

## Safeguarding

In 2021, Ofsted was asked by the government to undertake a rapid review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges (Ofsted, 2021b). The published report established some alarming findings from speaking directly to pupils across the country. The published report, review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges, (Ofsted, 2021b), further reinforced the need for Ofsted inspection practice to hone in on the safeguarding of schools.

NGA were invited to attend the training that inspectors received on sexual abuse and harassment following the review and are grateful to Ofsted for extending the invite. The training provided inspectors with insight into how they can effectively assess whether schools monitor and record safeguarding incidents that occur inside and outside of school.

Feedback from NGA's survey indicated that the training and review had influenced the practice of inspectors.

*“Questions were focussed on safeguarding and education only”*

**“** Safeguarding, our knowledge of Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE) its impact, awareness of recent changes and additions such as sexual health and peer to peer abuse. **”**

*“He questioned us on safeguarding including asking us about recent updates on Keeping Children Safe.”*

Those responsible for governance hold a statutory duty to ensure all pupils are safeguarded so therefore, it is important that inspectors are talking to boards about safeguarding provisions as part of their role. Many published reports linked the effectiveness of the governing board to the safeguarding provisions in place. However, this was not consistently reported on. Where there were references to governance and safeguarding, the level of detail differed between reports:

*“Leaders and governors keep careful oversight of all safeguarding arrangements.”*

*“Safeguarding is high priority across the school. Everyone is encouraged to be vigilant and report all concerns if they should arise. Leaders make sure that staff, including governors, receive relevant training so they can carry out their roles effectively”*

**“** Governors have read Ofsted's 'Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges. Several governors have attended training about this research evidence and guidance to schools. Leaders undertook an audit to identify staff training needs and raise awareness. **”**

*“Leaders have ensured that all staff and governors fully understand the risks that pupils may face within the local area and online.”*

Although it is up to the lead inspector to decide what is reported on in the published reports, NGA think it is important for parents to receive a measured and consistent

understanding of what safeguarding looks like in each school. In doing so, parents and other stakeholders reading the reports can gain a clear understanding of how safeguarding is handled and the improvements, if any, could be addressed.



# Multi academy trusts

The findings from the 2022 survey show a positive picture around the inspection of schools in trusts. Findings indicated that there was a clear understanding around the role that boards at different levels can play depending on individual schemes of delegation. 35 out of the 111 respondents governed in schools that were part of a multi academy trust.

83% of those respondents reported that inspectors spoke with either trustees, academy committee members or both as part of the inspection process.

The School Inspection Handbook (Ofsted, 2022) acknowledges that inspectors should establish who is responsible for leadership and governance and in doing so, inspectors should establish what the governance structure of the school or academy is, with reference to the range of functions delegated to local governing bodies or other committees.

However, findings from the survey show that this is not always being done in practice. Some respondents reported that inspectors only spoke to the trustees or the LGB and did not consider where the responsibilities fell within the school structure.

“ Inspectors only spoke to the LGB. Inspectors appeared to ignore the scheme of delegation and did not pursue any discussion with the MAT executive or Trust board despite responsibilities for areas of concern falling with them. ”

The findings show a slightly inconsistent picture in whether inspectors are talking to those that sit at different levels of a trust. It is important that inspectors are aware of where the responsibilities sit within a MAT and this should be established from the outset, during the initial phone call between the lead inspector and the headteacher of the school.

Inspectors talking to the right people during inspections enables accountability at the right level. Where opportunities are missed to identify where the accountability lies within a trust, there is potential for weaknesses to exist across the trust.

The published reports vary in how schools are linked to being part of a multi academy trusts. Reports do not place much focus on whether the school is part of a trust, and rightly so, however reports should seek to highlight the methods that are used to ensure that there are clear lines of communication between the trust and school level.



# Conclusion

The findings from the survey and the report analysis build on the data from NGA's research conducted in 2020. Hearing and understanding the views of those on governing boards about their Ofsted experience places an important spotlight on the practice of inspections and the role that Ofsted have in the education system. Conducting this research has provided NGA with a steer on the information that is shared with Ofsted in addition to supporting Ofsted develop their practice through the Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2021).

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

Comparative findings between 2020 and 2022 show that there have been slight improvements in inspection practice in two key areas that were flagged as a concern. Firstly, inspectors appear to be aware of the diverse school structures that exist in our school system. Inspectors are more likely to consider the scheme of delegation in multi academy trust settings and have valuable discussions at the right level. Secondly, inspectors appear to understand the strategic role that governing boards have in schools.

The role of governance continues to carry less weight in the inspection process and becomes somewhat lost. Ofsted have stated that the published reports aim to inform parents and

provide a picture on what it is like to be part of the school. However, the removal of the paragraph on governance in the reports means that not all parents are aware of the governance structure and the role of the governing board in the school. The strategic role of the governing board sets the direction of the learning and skills pupils possess but the findings from the survey and report analysis reveal that instead of raising the profile of governance, it is pushed to the side-lines.

As a final reflection, the findings show that inspectors are not actively engaging with governors or trustees to a degree that satisfies the main aims and objectives of the school's inspectorate. Increased positive engagement with those governing will help enable inspectors to obtain relevant information that affect and impact the decision making of the school. Ofsted should ensure that as governance is a critical aspect of leadership which should be positively adding value to the school or trust's success or failure, this is both explored fully and recognised throughout the inspection process.

We call on Ofsted to consider our recommendations to help improve the inspection experience for all involved and we hope that reporting on these findings build on Ofsted's work in the future. NGA look forward to continue working with Ofsted and sharing the views of those sitting on a governing board. Thank you to all respondents that dedicated their time to sharing their experience of an Ofsted inspection.

## References and resources

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