

# A view from the board: Ofsted's new Education Inspection Framework

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Sam Henson, Director of Policy and Information  
Nina Sharma, Policy and Information officer



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# Foreword



**Emma Knights OBE**

Chief Executive  
National Governance Association

As no doubt readers are well aware, at the beginning of this school year a new Ofsted Education Inspection Framework was launched following an extensive consultation. Ofsted's decision to put the quality of education at the centre of inspection has been widely welcomed by the governance community, with nine in ten respondents to the School Governance in 2019 survey supporting changes to the proposed new framework.

This report sets out the experiences of governing boards during the first five months of inspection under the new framework. As always, those experiences vary. A clear majority (65%) of a self-selecting survey were satisfied overall with the inspection process. However, this does leave significant room for improvement. The drop in overall satisfaction rates cannot be directly compared with those from our annual governance survey, as this is a much smaller sample and may well be skewed by those who wanted to share unsatisfactory experiences. These early findings do not challenge the framework itself, but we do suggest some changes to the inspection process.

First and foremost, the inspection reports need to be changed so that those who are responsible for ensuring the school's improvement have the information they need to carry out that function well. Parents are a very important audience for Ofsted reports; however, the alternative audience was completely overlooked during the redesign.

This is perplexing given that Ofsted states that one of its three functions is "publishing reports of our findings so they can be used to improve the overall quality of education and training". This could be achieved by adding to the reports currently aimed at parents or by producing a separate report for those with oversight of the school. With a few exceptions, there was praise for the extended feedback meeting for governing boards which Ofsted agreed to after a request by NGA.

Secondly, our analysis of over 800 published reports show that there are now very few substantive mentions of the quality of governance in inspection reports. This has happened despite little change to governance in the framework itself. The inspectorate's commitment to us that governance would feature as much in inspection as it has done in the past has not materialised. The discussions are often rushed and sometimes veer into the operational, which is not the governing board's domain. It is important in terms of improving the system to have acknowledgement when governance is working well: that emphasis of what 'good' looks like from Ofsted is taken seriously. To ensure this happens, governance should return as a mandatory portion of the report. This year NGA, with the support of large numbers of partners across the sector, is running a Visible Governance campaign to increase the understanding and profile of governance. Since its recent launch, the governance community has taken this to its heart: so, it is particularly dispiriting that Ofsted's contribution has been to render governance less visible with the new process. Our findings do not paint a picture of an inspection system which is in total disarray, but one which needs to review and improve the implementation of the new framework. Ofsted is indeed doing that evaluation now, and we are in dialogue with them to ensure that voices of those who govern are heard. We welcome the extension of the transition period from one year to two. The complaints system does need fundamental reform so that it is independent.

There is a contention that schools in disadvantaged communities – and thus the work of their staff – are not adequately acknowledged by inspection results. Our report does not cover this issue, but it is one which we expect Ofsted to take seriously. Schools in those communities require more support that they currently receive; the lives of disadvantaged children and the impact of the stresses on their families is not properly recognised in the school accountability system.

This report gives me an opportunity to once again appeal to the school governance and leadership community. Headteachers and their professional associations speak often of the 'high stakes' nature of accountability, Ofsted inspections and performance tables in particular. Inspection is only one of a dozen dimensions of accountability; governing boards are another of those dimensions and one which is easily overlooked in the discussions. It is almost always a last-minute addendum, a footnote, when good governance is in fact essential to any organisation's success. School leaders, governors and trustees need to play their part in changing that culture. Driven by your mission and values, together you set your own priorities for improving the lives and prospects of children.

Of course, you have to pay deep attention to the inspectorate, but the level of influence it is currently given is unhealthy. It should not be Ofsted that is determining your work, but the knowledge and the experience of the profession, developed by the school leadership and overseen by the governing board. Governors and trustees have a role to play in reducing the heat and the stress currently created by an inspectorate seen to be all-powerful.

We need to help build a confident, knowledgeable, wise cadre of school leaders who look to the governing board first and foremost for their accountability.

# Overview of this study

This study looks at the experiences of and feedback from governors and trustees whose schools have recently undergone an Ofsted inspection to help identify the role governance plays and should play in the inspection process. Ofsted has a powerful sway over schools; what it says is listened to exceptionally closely and its influence over the direction of policy in the school sector is unique. That unprecedented level of influence provides Ofsted with the ability to lead sector wide discussions on what is considered as important. Its messages can have a deep and lasting impact on the education offered to pupils, the livelihoods and wellbeing of school leaders and staff and in setting the agendas and decision-making topics for governing boards across the country. To support these findings and gain insight into how the new Education Inspection Framework (EIF) is engaging with governance on a larger scale, 844 Ofsted inspection reports released between September 2019 and January 2020 have been analysed as part of this work.

## A note on the methodology

To gather a diverse range of views and experiences, NGA contacted over 800 schools via email providing the chair of governors /trustees with the link to the NGA feedback form.

Since the launch of the EIF, Ofsted released an update on the inspection handbook, some updates of which impacted governing boards of schools (or groups of schools in the case of federations or MATs). This update may cause some differentiation between the responses of the NGA feedback form and inspection reports.



# Key Findings and Recommendations

## Inspecting to improve education

- In total, 65% of respondents stated that they were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the inspection process overall. The grades schools are receiving are accurate compared to their self-rating. 72% of respondents felt that the grade they were awarded accurately reflected their school's position.
- The potential positive impact of inspections under the new framework is hindered by a significant lack of resource. There are numerous reports of inspections becoming increasingly rushed, with inspectors expected to cover a huge amount of work in a short space of time. As a direct result, governance is increasingly side-lined and some inspectors appear to afford it limited or even no value.
- Some schools have been taken by surprise by the new EIF, despite the comprehensive consultation process and significant sector wide attention the new framework development generated. 62% of respondents said curriculum changes were needed or were still ongoing or only partially embedded, 11% said no changes were embedded but there was a detailed plan in place to make the changes.

## Recommendations

1. Ofsted's overall methodology is largely welcomed, but we call on the inspectorate to address the clear pattern emerging that some inspectors appear to be basing the process too heavily on one or two subjects, with a narrow line of questioning and evidence gathering of one subject overly influencing the rest of the inspection.
2. The feedback meeting should continue to meet the aim of informing all those leading and governing schools of how they arrived at their judgment, providing the evidence required to ensure that tackling areas for improvement are identified. It is essential that those responsible for governance gain all the information that they need to be able to effectively hold leaders to account for carrying out improvements.
3. Ofsted should consider extending the attendee list of the inspectors' final team meeting to include either the chair or vice chair so they can observe and take on the feedback currently only provided to executive leaders.

### Inspecting governance

- Even though this was not the intention, the implementation of the new EIF has led to the role of governance being diminished within the inspection process. Just 17% of respondents said the inspection had helped them to a great extent in terms of improving governance. The new EIF has an unexpected disincentive for inspectors to focus on and spend meaningful time on governance. If conclusions on governance effectiveness are being made by inspectors, this is not being communicated to the others outside the inspection process.
- Governing boards are adopting an increased role in the curriculum, largely driven by the new 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.
- There are still some examples of inspectors misunderstanding governance, but inspectors are increasingly understanding of the different nature of governance within MATs – almost 75% of inspectors spoke to both the MAT trustees and those governing locally.
- The role of finance in school inspections is unclear – the third core function is not something that inspectors are pursuing or are currently well equipped to use for the basis of their questioning of boards. Just 2% of the inspection reports discussed the role of governance and financial provisions.

### Recommendations

4. 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.
5. 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.
6. NGA asks for clarity from Ofsted surrounding the expectation on how money being well spent will form part of ongoing inspections and how this is applied in line with the new framework, if at all.
7. Ofsted's decision to no longer use internal data within the inspection process should not be interpreted as governing boards no longer needing to be concerned with internal data. It is essential that inspectors consider how those responsible for governance ensure that the use of internal data is proportionate and does not contribute to workload issues, and how it is used to benefit the learning of pupils.

### Inspection process and reports

- There is huge variability in the way in which governance is referenced in inspection reports – most cases **are simply tokenistic and unhelpful**. The flexibility afforded to inspectors to include governance in reports “if appropriate” has led to a sharp reduction in meaningful references to governance.
- **The inspection reports are brief and too simplistic and seen by some as patronising**. They do not provide the information that those with oversight of the school require to carry out their responsibilities.
- 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.
- **Just 17% of the reports analysed provided a clear link between the curriculum and the role of the governing board**. The role of governance should be particularly prevalent in two areas of the inspection of the quality of education, intent and impact; this is not currently reflected in the reports.
- Most governing boards praised the extended feedback meeting and had arranged for it to be clerked. That change of practice should be embraced by all.

### Recommendations

8. The greater degree of flexibility for inspectors on reporting on governance should be reviewed with a return to the discrete paragraph on the quality of governance.
9. NGA asks for a return to a more informative format which 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 call 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.
10. Inspectors should receive further training to develop understanding and appreciation for governance, with a focus on the role of the core functions and the strategic nature of the governance role.



# Background

In January 2019, Ofsted released a proposal of the new framework for inspection: the Education Inspection Framework (EIF). The EIF introduced a renewed focus on the curriculum which would allow school inspections to centre on the substance of education, with a much-reduced emphasis on data which has repeatedly been linked to increased teacher workload.

The Ofsted framework thus transitioned from one focused heavily on attainment data, progress scores and outcomes to one centred on broad and rich learning experiences which provide all learners – particularly the most disadvantaged or those with special educational needs and /or disabilities (SEND) – access to the knowledge and cultural capital they need to fulfil their potential.

Ofsted's launch of the new EIF in September 2019 subsequently brought a fundamental shift to the way schools are inspected. Through the new quality of education judgement, Ofsted centre their judgement on 'what children are being taught; how well it is being taught; and how effectively it is setting them up to succeed at the next stage of their lives' (Ofsted, 2019). The degree to which an education or skills provider delivers a quality of education is now established in inspections through the process of deep dives, workbook scrutiny and speaking to pupils, teachers and other stakeholders that are a part of the school.

NGA, along with others in the education sector, very much welcomed the new framework as a step in the right direction in ensuring that Ofsted's approach focuses on what is most valuable about the quality of the education offer. We have been grateful to Ofsted for maintaining dialogue with us as the new framework was consulted on and implemented. As a part of this dialogue, NGA has been keen to stress the key role governing boards need to play both in ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum and the inspection process

itself. We were encouraged to see the de-intensifying of the focus on performance data; at this time we reported how Ofsted had stated governance remained a hugely important part of the leadership and management judgement. The Deputy Director, Schools for Ofsted wrote a joint blog with NGA Chief Executive Emma Knights that "when inspectors speak to those responsible for governance, they will explore the contribution that governors make to the life of the school, informed by the first-hand evidence they have been gathering" (Knights and Purves, 2019).

## Aim of this study

Following the implementation of the EIF, NGA has sought to assess the extent to which Ofsted is considering governance within the framework and how the new EIF has been interpreted by both those governing and school leaders. This report reflects on the emerging findings derived from inspections conducted between September and December 2019. This report also seeks to identify whether the new framework successfully fulfils Ofsted's role to regulate, inspect and act on issues and celebrate achievements of schools. A few weeks after the EIF went live, NGA released a feedback form seeking the views and experiences of those responsible for governance in schools which had been a part of an Ofsted inspection under the new framework. Respondents were asked a total of 24 questions which varied between closed and open questions to gather a wide range of data and experience.

The feedback form was open for 13 weeks and gathered the responses of 133 governors, trustees and other school executives from schools and groups of schools across England. Only two responses were completed by governors that were part of the same school which means that the survey garnered responses from 132 different schools in total.

The written reports published by inspectors have also changed to coincide with the objectives of the inspection framework. To further support our findings and gain insight into how inspections are being translated into a written format, we undertook a content analysis exercise of 844 Ofsted inspection reports released from September 2019 to January 2020, with a specific focus on how governance is portrayed, if at all. Where key themes were identified, each theme was examined to identify the extent to which links have been made to governance. The collection of views from governing boards and analysis of the written reports that have been published in the autumn term, provide an early evidence base that we hope will inform governing boards and their schools, support the development of central policy and cast a sector wide view of emerging themes and views of governors and trustees nationwide.

NGA will continue to work with Ofsted following the findings of this report to elevate the profile of governance during inspections.

# Governance and the inspection process

This section of the report explores the overall inspection process from the viewpoint of the respondents to our feedback form. The findings are broken down into three strands:

- **Strand one** considers the views of those governing on the inspection process overall
- **Strand two** evaluates the extent to which the inspectors understand and appreciate governance
- **Strand three** looks at the process of capturing governance specific findings and how this is reported

## Strand one: A view from the board – inspecting to improve education

Overall, the rating that schools are receiving as a result of their Ofsted inspection, match closely with their governors/ trustees' self -rating. 72% of respondents felt that the rating they were awarded accurately reflected their school.

All inspections begin with an initial 90-minute phone call which provides leaders with an opportunity to give the inspector context and information about the school, which is then followed by inspectors gathering first-hand evidence when they visit. Subject specific deep-dives, workbook scrutiny and observations set the scene for what the school looks like, which helps inspectors assess how the curriculum is set in addition to the ways that the values of the school are instilled into the school environment. Gathering first-hand evidence is crucial to assessing the quality of education however, it is also important for

inspectors to consider the competence and understanding that governing boards have of their school through their own evidence.

While Ofsted's overall methodology is largely welcomed, a clear pattern emerging from our feedback form showed that some inspectors appear to be basing the inspection process heavily on just a couple of subjects. Consequently, the downfall of one subject can overly influence the rest of the inspection. It is right and proper that where a curriculum is not strong enough, inspectors should be raising the relevant questions, however, some inspections took place very early in the autumn term under the implementation of the new framework. Despite a number of reassurances from Ofsted that schools would not be punished through early exposure to the framework, several of our respondent's rigorously debate this point.

While this doesn't reflect the views of the majority, there was considerable concern from some respondents regarding the time frame of their inspection in relation to the implementation of a brand-new framework. With schools that receive their inspection at a later date, those involved in the school have the benefit of understanding the inspection process through the views of those inspected before them, and the ability to generate a greater specific evidence base in relation to workbook scrutiny and subject specific deep dives. In recognising that the development of an effective curriculum takes time, Ofsted have said that they "wanted to be fair to schools, and give them enough time to craft

“ My view, and that of the staff I spoke to, is that the inspection was far more focussed on the quality of the child's experience in school. ”

their curriculum plans “ and have since extended the transition period for schools to develop or improve their curriculum until July 2021. The extended transition period enables schools to fully implement their curriculum to which, inspectors can see genuine action taken from a plan that school leaders have created when the school is being inspected.

“ After just six days back we were expected to have everything embedded ...that left staff and governors demoralised and demotivated.”

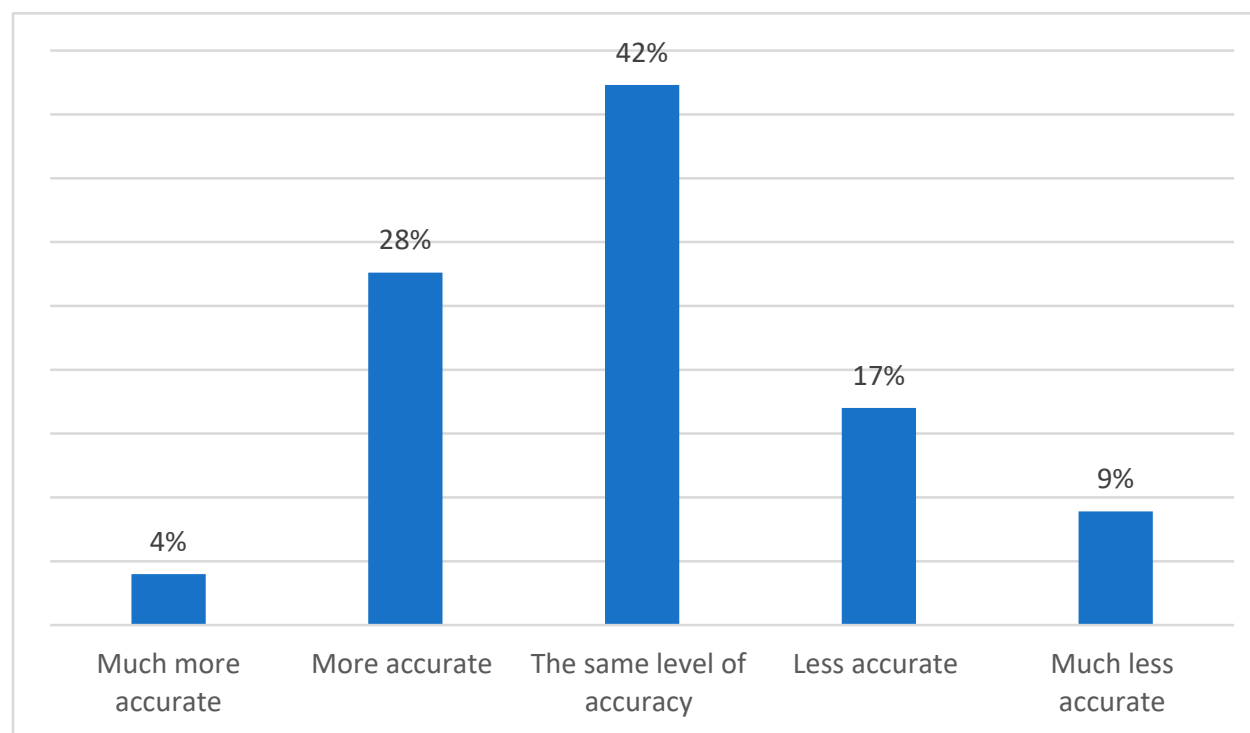
Our findings show that despite the consultation process and significant sector wide attention of the new framework development, it has still taken some schools by surprise. 23% of respondents felt that the rating they had received did not accurately reflect their school and 5% of respondents were unsure. A number of these felt they were ill-advised or unprepared due to the speed at which the new framework was implemented considering the significant change in direction of the new EIF. In NGA's Schools Governance in 2019 survey, 89% of those surveyed, supported the new Ofsted inspection framework in its proposed form. 42% of respondents had already done work in preparation for the framework while 47% were planning to do work in preparation. Only one in 10 said they were not planning to do or had not done any preparation (NGA, 2019a).

“ Be aware that inspectors are not settled into the new framework yet and that whilst our first day was as advertised under the new framework the second saw a return to dashing in and out of as many lessons as possible after a day of “deep dives” into four specific subject areas.”

Participants were also asked about the level of accuracy of their awarded rating under the new framework compared to the rating in their previous inspection. Overall, the results paint a pleasing picture (figure 1) whereby, 42% stated that they felt the rating had the same level of accuracy. Over a quarter (28%) felt the rating under the new framework was more accurate, 4% stated much more accurate, 17% stated that it was less accurate and 9% stated much less accurate.

Figure 1

Showing the perceived level of accuracy that the judgements under the new framework has in comparison to the previous framework.



This matches with findings from the School Governance in 2018 survey, which found that 78% of governors/trustees, agreed or strongly agreed that their most recent Ofsted report gave a fair and accurate picture of their school(s) (NGA, 2018).

One area of dissatisfaction stems from the conduct of the inspectors which some claim resulted in a negative impact on both staff and pupils. This similar finding was

mirrored by NAHT in their 'A Change for the Better: Ofsted's new inspection framework' report which stated that they were "disappointed at the number and range of conduct issues that have been reported to us" (NAHT, 2020).

A large number of respondents focused on the "rushed" nature of the inspection overall, particularly noting the impact this had on governance playing any part, but also and perhaps surprisingly, the deep dive nature of the inspection also meant that some sections of school staff felt the inspection process had no bearing on their own departments, and so could not be viewed as a school-wide judgement. Some respondents reported that "most evidence was pupil discussion where we are aware of very leading questions" and respondents also voiced concern over the impact of the intense nature of inspector's interaction with pupils

Respondents with a positive experience ranged from it being a much "more humane experience" and a "rewarding experience" where governors were allowed to highlight their ethos and vision, to the process being "a comforting experience to have your views backed up by an independent and expert review", with another stating "inspectors knew their stuff" and were led by a very experienced person. Interestingly a couple of respondents stated they directly benefited under the new framework, when they could not get to a 'good' judgement under the previous regime "they were prepared to listen and see what we were doing to tackle our pupils needs... they looked at the school holistically, and not just data".

## Strand two: Inspectors understanding and appreciating governance

The vast majority (74%) of respondents to the NGA feedback forms were chairs of the board, whether that was chair of a trustee board or a chair of a single school, with a further 7% being vice chairs, and 8% other governors/trustees. 6% of respondents were headteachers and other executives.

One area where we placed our attention was the inspector's understanding of different governance structures, especially in an academy trust context, where there are a myriad of models. Previous experience and feedback taught us that there has been inconsistency in terms of the level of inspectors understanding of how the models of governance work in the differing contexts. This has been evidenced in the past inspection reports, with academy committees being listed as the accountable body instead of trustee boards. From the participants who governed in a MAT context, it was encouraging to see that almost 75% of inspectors spoke to both the MAT trustees and those governing in a local context in the academy committee setting. This suggests that inspectors increasingly understand the multiple tiers of governance within MATs and the importance of engaging with both to get as full a picture as possible.

Despite this, the overall picture provided through the feedback form responses suggests that the level of governance understanding, or appreciation and respect for governance from the inspectors is inconsistent overall. Just 36% of inspectors asked to see the school's strategy and

questioned those governing directly on this. This is explored in greater depth in Section B, looking at how inspectors engaged with the role of the core functions of governance and how this information was relayed in the inspection reports.

All participants in the feedback form stated that they had meetings with inspectors, with the majority having had their meeting on the morning of day two of the inspection. The meeting lasted between 15 minutes and an hour and a half; the majority of respondents stated that their meeting lasted 30 minutes. Yet some who attended their initial meeting reported that inspectors seemed to have already decided on the rating that they were going to give and therefore, disengaged with what those responsible for governance had to say.

“ The lead inspector clearly came in having already made her judgement and was determined to find evidence that could mould to fit this judgement. ”

A large number of responses suggested the meeting was rushed in order for the inspection to continue.

“ We were asked to attend a 40-minute meeting with the Inspector. This was cut down to 20 minutes in the room. She repeatedly interrupted us and hurried us on, making it clear that talking to us was not worth her time. ”

This view chimes with National Association for Head Teachers' (NAHT) report 'A Change for the Better: Ofsted's New Inspection Framework' (NAHT, 2020), which summarises the emerging views of NAHT members on the EIF collected between September and December 2019.

The report states:

**“Almost universally school leaders describe inspection as frenetic. They say inspectors are rushed and struggle to get through the evaluation schedule. School leaders report conversations being curtailed in mid-sentence, evidence supplied by the school being refused or ignored and meetings being unduly hurried.”**

Perhaps one of the most telling pieces of information we have gathered rests in the value that respondents have placed on the inspection process from a governance perspective. Just 17% of respondents said the inspection had helped them “to a great extent” in terms of improving governance in their organisation. This figure goes up to 34% for those who said it had helped somewhat, but that still leaves 48% saying the inspection has not helped them at all in terms of improving governance. This reflects the seemingly low value placed on governance within a significant number of inspections so far under the new EIF. Every inspection should, in NGA's view, provide valuable insight into the role that governance plays in the improvement journey of the organisation, and those inspecting should be equipped to inform boards where standards are not being met, through their primary role as an inspectorate which seeks to ensure that organisations work effectively and fairly.

The experiences of the respondents underlined the significant disconnect between the role of governance and the importance it has in the inspection process.

44% of respondents to the feedback form stated that the inspector did not ask to see their school strategy. The strategy is integral to considering the whole education offer and sets out the direction and the vision of the school at a strategic level.

There was praise for the conversational nature of interviews and inspectors:

- “I have experienced a lot of inspectors (must be double figures by now) and this was by far the fairest”
- “The inspector was approachable and realistic... she didn't expect everything to be perfect”

Yet the predominate feeling was the process was carried out with too much haste and pressure, with many respondents sharing their view that inspectors simply didn't have the time to engage:

- “Did not listen and held up the palm of her hand out to teachers who she told she didn't have time”
- “She didn't make eye contact throughout the interview”
- “The LI [lead inspector] gave the impression of being extremely stressed throughout the process”
- “Inspectors now have to do too much on the days of the inspection”
- “Rushed through, and she literally ran out of the room”
- “One inspector for two full days – ridiculous! Too pressurised for that person and does not allow time for in-depth professional discourse”
- “Crammed and rushed and not fair”

**“It felt relatively light touch and was ultimately more congratulatory and encouraging.”**



## A blur between the strategic and operational

“ Two governors during the interview had to remind the Lead inspector that her questions were not within our remit as they concerned day to day management and not strategic oversight. ”

Findings from the feedback forms indicate that occasionally, the role of the governing board and the role that they play with the curriculum often results in a blur between the strategic into the operational. This was an initial concern that NGA expressed in the consultation response to the draft education inspection framework (NGA,2019b). This concern has been validated by a significant number of reports and respondents from our feedback form, with repeated examples given whereby governors and trustees were questioned around deep dives, and specific detailed day to day curriculum areas of focus, distorting the line between being strategic and operational.

“ The inspector didn't have any understanding of governance... questions were asked as if governors were the executive leaders. ”

The setting of the curriculum's direction and purpose through the discussion of the governing boards with senior leaders is a different discussion to what happens on a pedagogical level on a day-to-day basis. The governing board need to be assessed on how they feed into the curriculum's intent and how their vision, ethos and values are injected into the curriculum at each stage, but not encouraged to find an incentive to become increasingly operational through the new framework. Inspectors should be mindful to keep their line of questioning within the boundaries of the strategic nature of the board.

## A view from the board – does the new inspection process work?

“ I would say from a governing body point of view the new framework was much fairer than the older framework. It was less intrusive with [some] exceptions. ”

The above statement gives a good summary of the prevailing view. Governing boards by and large are still supportive of the direction of the framework – “it is definitely better than the old framework” – but this statement appears to be closely followed with a ‘but’ and comes with a long list of caveats that need unpicking. The mixed picture comes with some highly notable themes emerging. The lack of time inspectors are given to speak to those governing is the most familiar of these themes. But also, the channel of questioning itself - the way in which the use of first-hand evidence collection sets the scene and leads to a full awareness for inspectors on how the whole curriculum works throughout the school environment was widely debated by our respondents. While there was clear praise for the way the new process allows inspectors to “look at the whole child, rather than focusing purely on results, there was also concern that those conversations are not being “targeted appropriately”.

There was an increasing view that those governing are being tested against a narrow line of questioning from what inspectors have already seen on the first day, and therefore conversations on the three core functions are not materialising.

“ What questions did inspectors ask about the core functions of governance? None. The inspector didn't appear to have any understanding of the role of governance. Questions were asked as if governors were executive leaders. ”



## Strand three: Capturing governance - feedback and how this is reported

“ On the whole it was a positive experience. ”

65% of respondents from the feedback form stated that they were either ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the overall inspection experience.

### The feedback meeting

The final interaction that the governing board have with the inspectors is the feedback meeting. This is one element of the new EIF that is widely seen as an improvement from those we have talked to. 88% of respondents attended the feedback meeting in person, 83% of which highlighted how valuable the feedback meeting was in understanding why the school obtained their rating.

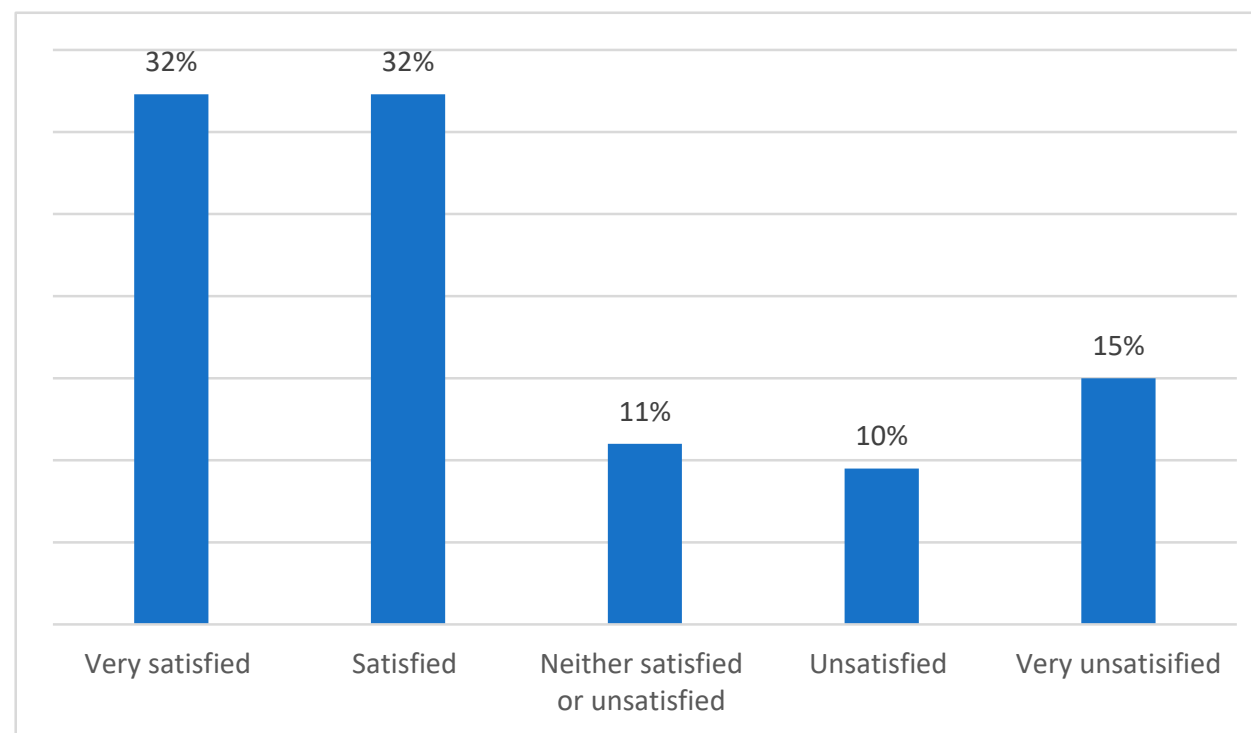
While respondents did state that much of what they were told with regards to the school’s strengths and areas of improvement was information that the governing board already knew, it is encouraging to note that 79% were either ‘satisfied’ or “‘very satisfied’ with the feedback meeting overall, 12% were neither satisfied or dissatisfied, while just 4% were dissatisfied and only 5% were very dissatisfied.

“Each area was gone through in detail – further detail was shared in the team meeting, and we were sure to insist a member of SLT noted this carefully also”.

“The inspector gave us detail on strategy, leadership and governance. Nothing is ever perfect, and we need to improve but it was good to hear what we do well”.

Figure 2

Showing the extent to which respondent were satisfied with the overall inspection experience



17% of respondents did say the feedback meeting was too rushed, too rigid and did not allow for a proactive discussion for school improvement. This further underlines inconsistencies, with the bulk of inspections providing a thorough, fluid feedback session and while others remain rushed and do not provide much room for engagement with leaders. Some participants noted that governance was ignored in the feedback meeting, but this was a small minority.

Following the launch of the EIF, The Deputy Director, Schools for Ofsted stated that the feedback meeting is the predominant method of obtaining the information for governors and trustees to gain a full picture of what the inspection had found and would be a “treasure trove” of information making these meetings critical for those governing (Knights and Purves, 2019). Many respondents stated that they relied heavily upon the information, with the inspection reports now primarily authored for parents in a simpler and less in-depth format providing no real substance for those governing.

The feedback meeting needs to consistently meet the purpose of informing attendees about how the judgements have been met and “for governors to play a part in beginning to plan how to tackle any areas for improvement”. The school inspection handbook update clarified that the feedback meeting can be clerked which provides school leaders with the ability to reflect on the meeting throughout the year (Ofsted, 2019). It is worth noting that the addition to the handbook which explicitly made clear that the feedback meeting can be clerked only appeared in November 2019, and therefore the experiences within the feedback meetings we have captured may differ depending on when the feedback form was completed and when the inspection took place.

The consensus of the feedback meeting was that it was beneficial for those governing to understand the improvements that should be made and to identify where inspectors gathered evidence that supported the judgement rating for each of the five areas. However, one respondent stated that the report “did not quite reflect the points for improvement as we understood it at the feedback meeting”.

Most governing boards praised the extended feedback meeting and had arranged for it to be clerked. That change of practice should be embraced by all, and there is no reason why the clerk – the governance professional – should not also be involved in the earlier substantive meeting with the inspector. 7% of respondents said the meeting was recorded by an independent clerk, 35% said notes were taken by a member of staff, who may act as clerk, while 23% said the meeting as noted by a governor/trustee and 21% said notes were taken by another attendee. It is essential that those responsible for governance gain all the information that they need to be able to effectively carry out improvements across the organisation. Worryingly,

14% of feedback from respondents did not record their feedback meeting whatsoever, meaning they are forced to rely on the inspection report itself. The valuable nature of the information that leaders receive at the feedback meeting is lost where the meeting is not properly clerked.

## The Ofsted inspection reports – hiding governance

“ [The report] is written for parents and so is of little use to the school. Ours is particularly poorly written... is very limited in its length, this has made it very difficult for the inspector to get across what we need to know. A separate report for the school would be much better. ”

Of 844 school reports we assessed, governance was not captured in a meaningful or helpful way across the vast majority of reports. Indeed, of all the reports NGA has read or been made aware of under the EIF, those with any reference to governance with any real substance are outliers and represent a tiny minority. While 66% of the 844 mentioned the word governance/governor/trustee somewhere in the report, this was largely tokenistic, often conflating governance with leadership and offered no indication of whether governance was strong or weak.

A blog released by Ofsted in 2019 raised concerns regarding the inspection reports following a clearer and simpler format (Harford, 2019). The blog outlined that the inspection reports would no longer include a section around the governance of the school in question. NGA's blog raised this concern highlighting that the removal of the governance section in the report would reduce the emphasis on

governance by inspectors. Despite reassurances that this was not the case from Ofsted, our collection of evidence points to the contrary.

Although over half of the reports analysed do mention governance, the depth to which governance is mentioned varies drastically. This varies from a short sentence discussing the governing board in relation to one individual aspect of the school to brief phrases which lump the function of the governing board with the leadership in the school. Examples include:

**“Leaders, including governors, support and motivate the staff. All work as part of a committed team. Staff morale is high. Teachers appreciate how leaders consider workloads and their well-being”.**

**“Governors carry out their legal duties regarding safeguarding well.”**

When analysing the inspection reports under the previous framework, there was a distinctive overview of governance, what was working well and what needed to be improved. This was consistent throughout all the reports that were published. The current reports no longer have this consistency, making it unclear about the important aspects of governance. In some cases, reports that do mention governance essentially refer to one specific governor/trustee in relation to one area rather than commenting on the effectiveness and role of the board on as a whole.

The reality is the usefulness of the report for those governing, executive leaders and staff is highly questionable. The reports are brief and too simplistic and increasingly interpreted as patronising.



Examples of the patronising nature of some reports were given in response to our questionnaire:

- **“It was too short. I did not like the first line which described us as a, happy little school”**
- **“On the first page it contains a quote from a pupil saying that football at playtime sometimes results in arguments”**
- **“The language used is not in keeping... it seems misplaced, laughable even”**
- **“The new parent friendly reports need urgently looking at – they are badly written and trite.”**

The aim to meet the perceived needs of parents has disadvantaged the substance of what is said in the reports in terms of school improvement. Many sentences are short and do not evidence where inspectors have observed what they are saying is happening. Engaging with external stakeholders is a positive step however, it may be necessary for a report to be produced that is authored for the educational professionals of the school which summarises the feedback presented in the feedback meeting. Again, NGA's findings reflect the findings from others across the sector and show this prevailing view is not exclusive to those governing, but particularly to school executives and leaders. The NAHT report 'A change for the better? – Ofsted's new inspection framework' states:

**“School leaders are disappointed by the new reporting style adopted by Ofsted. Brief and overly simplistic reports provide little insight and contain flowery un evidenced statements. Their broad-brush nature delivers vague recommendations, with limited reference to leadership. School leaders questioned their utility for schools or parents”.**

The school inspection update recognised that there were clear inconsistencies throughout the reports released during the first term of implementation and therefore the statement was altered from:

**“each report will contain a separate paragraph that addresses the governance of the school” to “each report will contain, if appropriate, a separate paragraph that addresses the governance of the school”.**

This essentially provides a greater degree of flexibility for inspectors as to whether or not governance is included.

As previously stated, 37% of the reports that have been analysed do not mention governance at all, and of those that do, the level of reflection is by and large simply insignificant or tokenistic, varying significantly.

**“ Personally, disappointed about the lack of recognition about governors. We attend all local training, including buying in our own. We know the school inside out... Without boasting, we are excellent at governance... Report - no mention whatsoever. In feedback she said, ‘staff and governors know the school well’, but when the report came out this had changed to ‘Leaders know the school well’ .”**

Regardless of a school's rating, the functionality of governance should be discussed within the report. Governance provides strategic oversight to holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the school (or groups of schools in the

case of federations or MATs). The governing board is also responsible for overseeing the financial performance of their staff. A level of discussion and account needs to be in place for governance to ensure that there is a strong governing board steering the strategic direction of the school. Ofsted inspections are often closely linked to 'high-stakes accountability' whereby, an inspection can be of detriment to the headteacher or other leaders. This is inclusive of governing boards. It is important that where reports only reflect on the developmental aspects of governance, there is scope for the board's strengths to be highlighted and for this to be consistent across all reports. As the value of reports now extend beyond educational professionals, it is more necessary than ever to eliminate the ideology of high-stakes accountability.

**“ I think there should be an official report that comes from inspector to school leaders as a reflection of feedback. The reports are so parent orientated they lose depth in terms of informing the development of school so I am pleased we have our minutes but think it wouldn't be hard for the inspector to use their framework to create a school leaders report. ”**

Each inspection report follows a standardised structure in relation to the sub-titles: what is it like to attend this school, what does the school do well and what does it need to do better, and what does the school need to improve (in a section 5 report). What is discussed in these sections understandably differs from one report to the other. However, it is important to pinpoint and evidence the essential areas of strength and improvement. For example,

## Section A

the way that finance is used in one school will not be raised in another. For parents and other stakeholders to understand the school in its full form, it is ineffective for key areas that rotate around the core functions and governance and other responsibilities that the governors have, to be ignored. Notwithstanding the positive intention behind parent friendly reports, the unintended consequence is the loss that the old-style reports have caused to those looking to engage with schools such as local authorities, trusts, improvement organisations etc. for whom such information was highly valued. Despite the reassurances that the feedback meetings will provide in-depth information about the school, it is important to consider that ways in which the governance contributes to the success and challenges of a school.

### Complaints

A minority of respondents who completed the feedback form informed us that they had planned to complain and appeal against their Ofsted rating and/ or the conduct of inspectors. The process that Ofsted follow for appeals and complaints has often been critiqued. In recognising the need to get inspection judgements right, Ofsted have since announced plans to revise the post-inspection arrangements, following a consultation, aiming to enhance the current arrangements to deal with any queries quickly and before an inspection report is finalised. These enhancements include an extension

on the length of time for draft reports to be reviewed, responding to formal complaints before the inspection report is published and providing greater consistency in post- inspection arrangements. It is reassuring to see that Ofsted is moving towards a more consistent approach across various remits, allowing an extension of time for school leaders to review their reports, amongst other improvements to develop the post-inspection experience for schools under a new framework.



# Emerging themes

What the inspection process tells us about the role and importance of...

## The core functions of governance

The core functions of governance intertwine. Without one core function being carried out effectively, it is difficult for the other core functions to work properly in a school.

When respondents were asked about the question's that inspectors asked in relation to the core functions of governance, only 3% stated that no questions were asked to the board about how the core functions were carried out. However, where inspectors did ask questions about the core functions, there was no consistent approach. The initial meeting that governing boards have with inspectors during the actual inspection process should be viewed as an opportunity for inspectors to learn about how the core functions are being carried out to ensure that the quality of education is good.

## Ensuring vision, ethos and strategic direction

Only 6% of the written inspection reports referred to the effectiveness of governance and how the first core function is fulfilled across the school. The agreed vision should explicitly state what the school/s will look like in three to

five years' time including a concise expression of what pupils will have left school having learned. This sets the foundation of the school as a whole and presents a picture of the school's aims for its pupils.

The reinvention of the written reports being primarily for parents has led to the majority of analysed reports lacking any mention of the vision and direction of the school, with no clear clarification for parents to establish what the school is aiming for and what it is that they want their pupils to leave school with. NGA's view is that the reports should provide the reader, regardless of who is reading it, with an overview of the ambition that sits within the boards vision setting and strategic decision making.

The findings from NGA's feedback form indicate that inspectors expect governing boards to know their school in-depth and occasionally ask questions surrounding deep-dive subject areas. This presents an opportunity for inspectors to identify how ambitious the governing board is being as it ensures their vision, ethos and strategic direction is consistently applied throughout the school.

## Holding leaders to account

For governors and trustees to effectively carry out their role, the board need to ensure that they hold their executive leaders to account. This function is fundamental to how the operational roles deliver the decisions of the board. 8.6% of the inspection reports assessed the extent to which governors and trustees effectively held their leaders to account. 6.8% of the inspection reports commented on how the board did not hold their executive to account. Despite the reassurance of a higher percentage of reports reflecting on the strengths of accountability compared to the weaknesses, a significant proportion of reports fail to mention the connection between accountability and the performance of the school at all.

Our findings show some inspectors are directly asking how governing boards are holding their leaders to account, but no consistent picture has emerged. A small number of respondents stated that they were asked to provide examples and evidence of how the board held their leaders to account. It is worth noting here that that 23%

of respondents stated that the new framework helped them to understand the school's key weaknesses and 43% said that the inspection somewhat helped the board to understand its own weaknesses. For helping respondents understand the key strengths of the school, 63% said it either helped to a great extent or somewhat. 36% said it either didn't help at all or helped very little. A higher proportion 72% said the inspection had helped their school develop an improvement plan to a great extent or somewhat.

### Overseeing financial performance

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 new framework in theory paves a way for Ofsted to increasingly question boards on how their financial decisions are leading to a better quality of education offer. Yet, the role of finance in school inspections under the new EIF has to date been inconsistent.

Assessing whether a school effectively manages money could allow inspectors to gain an in-depth view of how well governing boards are holding leaders to account for their financial decisions. But there is a big question mark regarding how this relates to the skills sets of inspectors themselves, and whether they are the right individuals to be assessing the extent to which the right financial decisions are being made at a school. Since the implementation of the EIF, numerous schools have raised that a school's financial circumstance is hugely impactful on the curriculum that is delivered. A school that has either been insufficiently funded or faced financial difficulties could be cast adrift by the new framework, especially when last decades,

increasing focus on attainment is considered, with many schools seeing curriculum narrowed as a result. While it is not the role of Ofsted to assess the allocation of finances within schools, it is the role of Ofsted to judge the extent to which governing boards hold executive leaders to account with regards to using resources efficiently.

Just 1.8% of the inspection reports discussed the role of governance and financial provisions. This was either considered in context of whether finance needed to be used better to support disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND, or whether finance leaders and governing boards worked cohesively to execute their functions surrounding finance effectively. The findings suggest that the third core function is not something that inspectors are currently pursuing or are well equipped to use for the basis of their questioning of boards.

Recent research conducted by Ofsted sought to explore how schools make decisions in relation to funding and how this impacts the quality of education overall. The conclusive findings pushed Ofsted to further investigate whether inspectors should have relevant conversations about funding if it is something that concerns quality of education. The report states:

“The financial health of schools and MATs is not itself within Ofsted's remit. This is the responsibility of the ESFA. However, we are concerned about any decisions that adversely affect quality of education. For this reason, we will be carrying out research to see whether or not it is helpful for inspectors to go into schools with some financial indicators, and what conversations with leaders, governors and trustees may help inform our judgements on leadership and management and quality of education. We will then

make a decision on whether or not to include these elements in future school inspections.” (Ofsted, 2020a). NGA would urge that research to be increasingly mindful of the role of governance.

### Safeguarding

Those responsible for governance hold a statutory duty to ensure all pupils are safeguarded, so again it makes sense for Ofsted to include governing boards as safeguarding is discussed.

An analysis of NGA's feedback forms show that ensuring safeguarding policies and procedures were met was a consistent measure taken during the inspection. Over a quarter (25%) of the inspection reports analysed linked governance within the school to the quality of safeguarding that takes place. While this is a minority, it needs to be seen in the light of governance being largely absent in inspection reports overall.

### The quality of education- the curriculum

The curriculum needs to embody the values, ethos and vision of the school. The new framework has quickly become characterised by its reliance on the “three I's” – intent, implementation and impact, which all refer to the quality of education as delivered through the schools, main learning tool – the curriculum. This assesses the drivers of the school's curriculum, how it is designed and planned, how sequential and ambitious it is, the actual delivery through how it is taught, how pupils received the information that they are to learn, and the outcomes and how well pupils are progressing.

Our analysis of the published inspection reports has identified that where the quality of education rating strives or is weak, the overall effectiveness of the school is impacted drastically. As the board is responsible for setting and driving the vision, ethos and ambition of the school, it is particularly important for inspectors to acknowledge the key role governance plays when considering how these drivers are reflected in the curriculum. Governance is not specifically mentioned in the school inspection handbook with regards to the three I's, but NGA's view is that boards have a huge role, particularly within the intent and impact phases.

“ It would appear that the only interest is the new curriculum and planning is not considered evidence of intent. ”

Deep dives introduce an interesting tension between not ignoring the governing board, but equally not pulling them into an operational role, which is not conducive to good governance. As the governing board is responsible for the intent of the curriculum, this should include asking questions about: what we want our curriculum to look like, and how do we make our curriculum ambitious, coherently planned, and sequenced. As governing boards aim to give all learners (particularly the most disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and or disabilities) the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life, our findings suggest they are increasingly anticipating what inspectors are likely to ask. Understandably, this means governing board are increasingly questioning how they seek assurances for the answers they are being given.

Governing boards also are a part of the impact phase which establishes whether pupils are learning and achieving well and whether they are ready for the next stage of their education. This includes ensuring that what pupils are learning is sequential, ambitious, and resulting in academic achievement. This is monitored through internal assessment data and regular meetings with the headteacher.

While the nature of the framework has changed, and there is a clear and strong argument for why inspectors should be asking the question of how the governing board know that the curriculum is meeting the broad and balanced curriculum expectation, our findings suggest the link between governance and the curriculum is inconsistent in the inspection reports.

Just 17% of the reports that are analysed provide a clear link between the curriculum and the role of the governing board. The role of governance in relation to the intent and impact of the curriculum is simply not currently being consistently reflected in the reports. A large proportion, 83% of the reports did not link the curriculum and governance at all. NGA are concerned that governance is not dependably considered as a part of it.

Where governing boards possess knowledge about the curriculum, it leaves them well-equipped to hold executive leaders to account and establish whether pupils are achieving. As the work of Ofsted, and the inspection regime holds such sway in the sector overall, it is important that Ofsted are leading the way in recognising and valuing governance, and the contribution it makes to the quality of education and therefore the success of the organisation.

Just 3% of inspection reports referred to the extent to which governing boards contributed to, at a strategic level, strong curriculum. There may be several reasons why this figure is so low. Firstly the strategic role of boards means they are often not viewed as direct contributors to the implementation of the school's curriculum. While this is a fair conclusion, it is integral that as the framework seeks to focus not just on the implementation but what both precedes and succeeds it, the inspection process itself also comes to value the decision making that rests within its setting including the rationale, and the full evaluation and review process which guides its future.

To understand how the inspections conducted in the first term are assessed alongside the curriculum weighting, respondents were asked to inform NGA about how prepared the school's curriculum for their inspection. Figure 3 shows that 62% of respondents stated that their curriculum required some changes or were ongoing or partially embedded.

How judgements are made in light of this year of embedment, the extended grace period and any leniency from inspectors is unclear. A number of our respondents voiced frustration at being subject to the new EIF inspection so early on. There is a view that schools that have been inspected in the first term have not been provided with equal opportunity to embed their curriculum; some respondents shared their view that it was unreasonable for inspectors to be assessing data from an academic year that functioned under a framework with a completely different focus.

## A quick note on extended services and cultural capital

The EIF saw the separation between personal development and behaviour and attitudes judgement, allowing a refined focus on the monitoring of behaviour in schools and ensuring that pupils are given the opportunity to enhance their personal development. To date, our findings reveal this is generally not an area where governors/trustees and inspectors are engaging in dialogue.

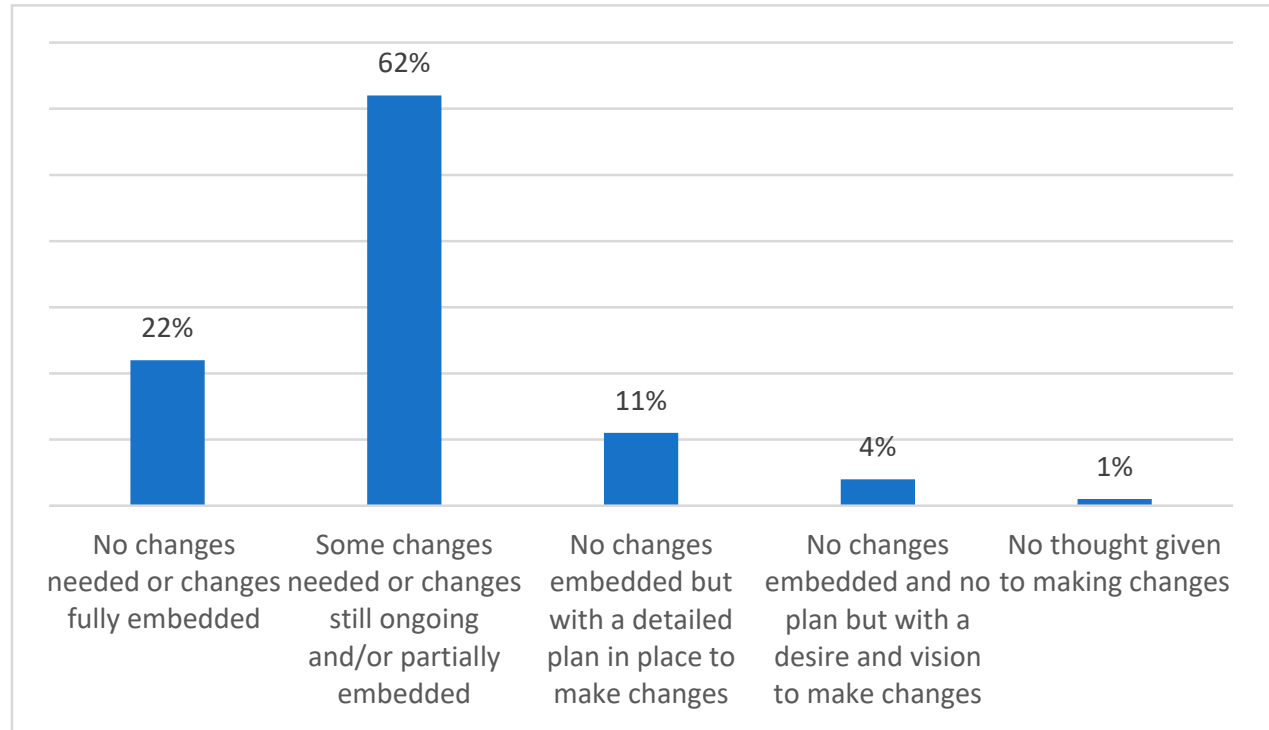
Funding is recognisably a core barrier between the education pupils receive, the skills that they can develop and the experiences that they are able to be a part of. Only 2.4 % of the inspection reports refer to whether pupils engage in enrichment, extra- curricular activities and are exposed to the wider curriculum. The boundary between the curriculum and enrichment activities can become blurred but reports are commenting on the wider curriculum or enrichment, this should to be consistent through all reports.

## Data

The Ofsted consultation outcome report stated that inspectors would be interested in the conclusions drawn and actions taken from any internal assessment data but would not examine or verify the data first-hand. Internal data is important for governing boards to monitor pupil attainment and the progress that is made over a period of time. At NGA's summer conference in 2019, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector stated that the "framework aims to support school leaders and teachers, including governors and trustees without getting 'dragged into the weeds' by requiring large amounts of school data" (Spielman, 2019a).

Figure 3

Identifying how prepared the respondents' governing board was for the new framework.



“ Lots of questions relating to data and progress, lots of questions about how governors monitored standards in schools – they discussed internal data in response to these questions. ”

NGA understands that time limitations restrict inspectors from assessing internal data in-depth and that there is room for inaccuracies in any internal data that relates to the

progress and attainment of pupils. Therefore, it is important that inspectors are allocating enough time to listen to the conclusions that governing boards come to with the data that they keep. It is important to remind governing boards that although this is no longer a focus for the inspection process itself, boards should still be considering their own internal data as a method of monitoring progress of their pupils and highlighting key weaknesses and strengths.



“ Inspectors were not willing to discuss internal data. ”

An internal data industry has emerged over recent years, impacting staff workload, so it is right that this is being addressed. Ofsted has a powerful voice in helping combat the over reliance on data and over the generation of data full stop. That said, boards should never become over-reliant simply on the words they hear from executive leaders, and board reporting should be triangulated through a mixture of methods, including both internal and external data. It is therefore important that governing boards do not fall into the trap of ignoring internal data just because Ofsted are, but at the same time are ensuring only necessary and helpful data is being produced, and workload implications are considered.

“ [The inspector] also stated the governors shouldn't be concerned with data but was unable to suggest how governors should monitor successfully. ”

A vast majority of respondents said internal data did not feature in the line of questioning but there were still a number of reports that contradicted this general finding.

“ What were governors asked about in relation to the curriculum in their school? Practically nothing – all questions focused around data, rather than the curriculum which was a surprise and not what we had been led to expect. ”

As expected, reports that have been released since the launch of the inspection framework make little reference to performance and exam results that the school receive however, the reports link whether pupils are achieving well to the curriculum that a school has in place. NGA along with others in the sector are hearing reports that some inspectors are refusing any consideration of a school's statutory data at all, including through the conduct of deep dives.

Only 1% of the inspection reports that were analysed, mentioned the extent to which governors and trustees ascertain and utilise data to effectively change or maintain standards.

“ Inspector came in with preconceived judgement, fixated on the progress data even though it was explained the KS1 data was unreliable. ”

One respondent to the feedback form commented on how their rating was impacted due to the keeping of inaccurate data from a previous headteacher. Another respondent stated that questions were asked to the governing board regarding the data that was held however, this was asked in a “rude and confrontational manner”. Although the move away from data analysis is welcomed across the sector, a large role of the governing board is monitoring progress towards strategic targets. In understanding the importance of data for the board, Ofsted need to establish whether the data that is kept satisfies the strategic planning for the school. The board have different resources at their disposal which make internal data relevant. Governing boards are unable to overstep their mark and carry out lesson observations or workbook scrutiny and therefore need to rely on the judgement of the professionals when assessing the quality of learning in the classroom (NGA, 2019).

## Staff wellbeing and workload

“ The staff all agreed it was, in their words, a profound bruising experience, they have been through Ofsted many times but felt this was a horrific experience beyond any other. They were all crying after the meeting... it felt like an assault, and a pointless one at that. ”

The release of the inspection reports underlines the increased importance of considering staff workload and staff wellbeing. The inspection framework aims to recognise the importance of managing teacher workload and ensuring wellbeing through the inspection process, yet only a small proportion of inspection reports (14%) acknowledged the link between the decisions of the board and the impact that this has on wellbeing and workload.

“ [The] inspector wanted long in-depth conversations with staff. It was quite disruptive to the running of the school. The SLT and subject leads were questioned long and hard. The inspector wanted to see the curriculum working throughout the school and one year building on the last etc. Staff were asked why they were teaching certain topics and how the foundation stage curriculum was incorporated into topics e.g. a book and reading matter chosen for a specific topic should be chosen to fit the curriculum and not just the topic. Staff were having to back each other up in classrooms. Not sure how it would work in smallish primary school. ”

Ofsted have stated that it is considerate of staff workload with the new framework, which has the reduction of staff workload within the drivers for its own design. Ofsted have sought to maintain this throughout the methodology of the new inspection framework. Inspectors do not require any extra internal assessment data from staff, subject leaders and leaders other than what is already available. This change decreases the workload of staff, allowing them to concentrate on delivering a high quality of education to their pupils. Evaluations of staff survey results are valuable to governing boards and other leaders in considering policies and procedures that contribute to the wellbeing, morale and motivation of staff. Yet there are concerns across the sector that rather than helping to address the staff workload issues, the new framework may contribute to it. Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) summarised the issue in a blog in response to the annual report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector on 21 January 2020 (Barton, 2020):

“ There are teething problems with this new system, and we are concerned about a growing perception that Ofsted appears to be grading down schools which give pupils three years to prepare for GCSEs rather than two years. This is exacerbated by the fact that Ofsted grades are too blunt to capture any nuance and leave schools feeling unfairly treated. We have asked Ofsted to keep the issue of GCSE preparation time in proportion and we are pressing the government to review the grading system. (Barton,2020). ”

To ensure that all schools are considering workload and that all inspections are evaluating the level of workload staff have, high-level data that is suitable for both governors and leaders on an operational level should be created.

We could find no reference as to whether subject-link governors or committee structures is seen to strengthen the way that data is used to reduce staff workload. But at a strategic level, planning must be undertaken by the board for the reduction of workload and the improvement of wellbeing to be successfully implemented across the school. It is important for the inspection to discuss the measures that governing boards have taken to ensure that staff workload is reduced to aim a better quality of education for pupils.

### Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special education needs and/or disabilities

The curriculum that is provided in schools needs to hold the same level of ambition for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils. NGA believe that this is important for every school to foster into their curriculum and governing boards have an essential role in monitoring this.

Just 4% of the reports referred to the extent to which those governing supported or did not support pupils with SEND well. This suggests that the role governing boards play in ensuring best endeavours to create a full inclusive culture and ethos that guides the practice of the school is not being fully recognised by the inspectorate. Given the first core function is vision, ethos and therefore how inclusive the organisation is, given that the challenges schools face in ensuring they develop a curriculum that works for all, it

is surprising that SEND does not feature in conversations between governors/trustees and inspectors to a greater extent. Safeguarding on the other hand features far more prominently.

At the NGA's annual conference 2019, Chief Executive of NASEN, Professor Adam Boddison gave a keynote linking SEND to culture and leadership and called for the status of SEND to be elevated, while noting no school should be awarded outstanding if they are not inclusive and do not consider SEND appropriately (Boddison, 2019). The new framework takes this into account and places an emphasis on schools to showcase how they are meeting their duties in relation to SEND and should, therefore feature increasingly in discussion between inspectors and the board.



# Conclusion

## Understanding the importance of governance

The findings and analysis from this report cast a light on the Education Inspection Framework (EIF), from the perspective of the governing board. There are various factors that contribute to the function and success of a school: governance being the top-level of decision making and strategic input. However, the collective views and experiences of the new framework paints a relatively different picture as to the importance of governance afforded within the EIF. In effect, what is said in the framework is not mirroring what is happening in practice. NGA is concerned that to date, the inspection process under the new framework does not actively utilise the function of governance to evaluate the school from the top through to the operational level. In addition, the evidence in this report leads us to the conclusion that governance as part of the wider leadership and management judgement has decreased in value and prominence with the new framework, albeit as a seemingly unintentional consequence of the new direction Ofsted has taken.

While the principles that underpin the EIF must be applauded and represent a move in the right direction, the findings identify there are too many inconsistencies at this early stage. The findings also demonstrate current inspections are under-resourced with the vast majority of responses sharing the view that the overall process is rushed, and governance is being side-tracked as a result. There are issues in relation to how the practice of school

inspections and first-hand evidence gathering then transpire into written format. NGA's concerns largely relate to the level of inclusivity of governance, and that the published inspection reports are only fulfilling the needs of one audience – parents.

An exploration of each layer of the school's governance, leadership and management structure should allow inspectors to establish a holistic view of how the ethos and values of the school are embedded into the ambition, culture and curriculum of the school, and how this influences what is being taught to children and young people. The implementation of the new framework appears to have led to an unintentional consequence of preventing this from happening with the role of governance diminished from the official inspection outcome.

As the role of governance remains in the leadership and management judgement, which now in itself carries less weight in the process overall, governance has become somewhat lost, or perhaps, even ignored. Under the previous framework, the separate paragraph on governance within the inspection reports helped to retain some consistency as to the level of consideration and visibility governance was given during the inspection process. While the decisions that governing boards make, rightly

fit within the leadership and management judgement, governance serves a strategic purpose which is different to the operational purpose of executive leaders and other senior leaders which should be recognised as part of the performance of the school.

“ I was surprised he didn't ask us anything about governance although he was aware of our experience and roles in education so focused on school's performance. ”

The strategic role of the governing board lays a foundation for the direction of the learning, skills, values and attitudes pupils possess for life after school. Yet the evidence base for this report reveals that instead of raising the profile of governance, governance is being pushed into the side-lines.

That said, NGA absolutely acknowledge the direction of Ofsted on the underlying principles of the framework which encourage leaders and teaching staff to focus on the substance of education and concentrate on delivering a strong, broad and balanced curriculum rather than 'teaching to the test' or to meeting Ofsted requirements; our findings have done nothing to dissuade us from the view that this is the right approach overall.

Yet we would call on Ofsted and the sector to acknowledge that there was a varied response to the questions that were asked through our feedback form, and the new EIF is not being universally or wholeheartedly embraced; one respondent went as far to say that *“this latest framework has destroyed my belief that Ofsted is there to help”*. While a significant number of the experiences of our respondents chimed with other statements such as *“we were made to feel comfortable and the lead inspector recognised our hard work as volunteers and thanked us”*, there are clear discrepancies between the inspections that schools have, and the rushed nature of many of the inspections in our view is fuelling some of the ill feeling that is being directed against the new EIF.

By way of a final thought, 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. According to the findings from the feedback form, time constraints appear to be a key factor that influence the interactions that governors and trustees are having with inspectors. This leads us to the view that in order for Ofsted to maximise the impact of the new EIF, further investment is required. 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.



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“ I’m delighted to back this campaign. Governors give their time for free for the benefit of schools, but most importantly, the children they teach. High quality governance is important both to the smooth running of our schools and in making sure children get the best possible education. Ofsted welcomes any initiative that boosts the profile of this role and encourages high quality people to volunteer. ”

Amanda Spielman, Ofsted’s Chief Inspector



National Governance Association  
36 Great Charles Street  
Birmingham B3 3JY  
0121 237 3780

[www.nga.org.uk](http://www.nga.org.uk)

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