

# The University of Hull

To what extent do Ofsted inspectors' values influence the  
inspection process (2005-2012)? An examination of Ofsted  
inspectors' perceptions

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By

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*This thesis is dedicated to my family, my wife Caroline and my son Ben, for their support and encouragement throughout my studies. It is also dedicated to my mother and brother who were there at the start but sadly were not there at the end of the journey.*

*With thanks to my supervisors, Professor Mike Bottery and Dr Sam Shields for their invaluable advice and guidance, and to all of the Ofsted inspectors who contributed to the study.*

## **Abstract**

*The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) holds a government remit to inspect all schools in England under the 2005 Education Act. Ofsted is required to inspect schools on a regular cycle, with the aim of providing information to parents as well as the Secretary of State for Education, to promote school improvement and to hold schools to account for educational provision and standards. Ofsted's strapline is 'Raising Standards, Improving Lives' and its goal is to 'achieve excellence in education and skills for learners of all ages' (Ofsted). Drawing on existing literature the thesis explains the underlying reasons for the introduction of a single national school inspection system in post-war England. The thesis also explores the literature on values, the nature of values in relation to organisations and individuals with particular reference to Ofsted.*

*Empirical research was conducted in the form of questionnaires and interviews into the perceptions of active and retired inspectors about how they carried out their work. The study explored the relationship between inspectors' values and those of Ofsted, examining the extent to which inspectors' values influenced their conduct during inspections and in particular how they mediated their work in schools. The degree to which inspectors mediate their work has implications for the perceived objectivity of Ofsted inspections.*

*The results indicate that the majority of inspectors' values were in alignment with those of Ofsted. However, a small minority group also existed whose values were not always in agreement with those of Ofsted and there also appeared to be a further sub-set of the minority group whose members were trying to change Ofsted from within. This is the first time research has been carried out into the work of Ofsted inspectors and their perceptions of what they do. It concludes that this area is worthy of a further, larger scale study.*

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## Introduction

### i. Introducing the Research

The Factory Act of 1833 introduced the concept of school inspectors. Primarily their job was to investigate sites and premises for the establishment of schools for the children of factory workers. In 1839 the Committee of the Privy Council on Education officially established school inspections and two inspectors were accordingly appointed to the role.

However, school Inspectors seem to have had something of a bad press since they came into being. For example, as far back as 1888, a newspaper for teachers entitled *The Schoolmaster* derided inspectors for their 'unfitness and irregularity' (Betts, 1986, pp.17-23). More recently Alec Clegg noted that the powers of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) can become too great:

'They can become the tool of a central government which seeks to encroach on the powers of the local authority or of individual schools. They can be used to propagate a government doctrine which may appear to be in the national interest but which may have little to do with getting the best out of every child.'

Clegg (1980, p.133)

While the process of school inspection has been the subject of criticism for over a century, it has continuously re-invented itself and arguably will evolve still further.

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) has been responsible for inspecting schools in England and Wales since the Education (Schools) Act, 1992. Section 10 of the 1992 Education Act made it a requirement for each

state-funded school in England and Wales, whether primary, secondary or special, to be inspected by Ofsted, at least once every four years.

Once Ofsted had been created a logistical problem was posed, in that there were insufficient Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) to carry out the required number or frequency of school inspections. As a consequence additional Ofsted inspectors were recruited from a wide range of educational backgrounds i.e. headteachers, Local Education Authority (LEA) school advisers, independent education consultants and retired school leaders. While Ofsted provided some training for inspectors, and HMI monitored the quality of inspections, inspectors were usually assessed, recruited and deployed by regional inspection providers. This strategy has continued, largely unchanged until the present time.

From their experiences, headteachers and teachers hold varying views about inspectors. For example, following the introduction of the Revised Inspection Framework in 2009 a data gathering exercise carried out by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) revealed that headteachers and teachers held a perception that Ofsted inspections are carried out by people who believe that they hold a position of 'omniscience' (NUT survey, 2009). School-based experiences of inspection reported by teachers also suggest degrees of inconsistency, pre-judgement and generalisation (Bangs, MacBeath and Galton, 2011, pp 115-118). The NUT survey concluded: 'Until inspections are de-coupled from their potentially punitive consequences and given a more developmental and supportive function, they will continue to drive up pressure and stress in schools' (NUT survey annex 2, 2009, para.22).

Despite some functional changes to the Ofsted inspection process over time it remains in essence a highly structured, deterministic and dictatorial strategy. Since Ofsted's inception inspectors have been directed in their work by clearly defined inspection criteria and protocols, set down in a series of inspection frameworks. In this way Ofsted has tried to ensure that the inspection process remains a standardised, consistent, fair and value neutral procedure. However, the inspection process relies on people to implement it and, because individuals are different and capable of interpreting directions, it is feasible that there is potential for variation to occur, which produces inconsistency. Consequently, an important theme within this research is the extent to which inspectors' values influence the inspection process and their conduct.

Much has been written about the impact of Ofsted inspections on schools and teachers (Wilcox and Gray, 1996; Jeffrey and Woods, 1998; Alexander, 1999; Cullingford, 1999; Scanlon, 1999; Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Learmonth, 2000). However, this research is an original study into the way Ofsted inspectors perceive their work, their relationship with Ofsted and their view of the impact of inspection, through what inspectors actually say about their work.

## **ii. Major Research Question and Sub-Research Questions**

My interest in this area of research originates from twenty years of school inspection experience that has often led me to wonder about how different inspectors apply a national statutory inspection process without somehow influencing it.

The aim of this study is to examine, through inspector responses, the nature of how they engage with Ofsted inspections and the extent to which their values

influence their work. This is an important inquiry because Ofsted's changes to the inspection process over time have concentrated on modifying procedural and structural features rather than considering the degree to which inspectors influence the process. Using the responses from inspectors, this thesis aims to investigate hitherto unexplored themes relating to mediation of the management of the inspection process in terms of the practicalities of inspectors getting the job done and the extent to which their patterns of work may impact on objectivity. The thesis will investigate the extent to which inspectors' values are fully aligned to those of Ofsted and whether, within the national body of inspectors, there are individuals or groups who hold different reasons for inspecting schools.

Therefore, my major research question is:

***To what extent do Ofsted inspectors' values influence the inspection process?***

Two literature review chapters will provide the background to this research. To understand the context in which Ofsted was established, and the nature of Ofsted's model of inspection, some knowledge of the history of school inspection in this country is required. Therefore, chapter one will provide a brief history of school inspection and examine the underlying reasons which led to Ofsted being established as the single national watchdog for standards in education. A main element of this chapter then is to understand the purpose of inspections, how they work in practice and perceptions of them by Ofsted and the wider world. Therefore the sub-research question for this chapter will be:

***SRQ 1: What is the nature of the Ofsted inspection process?***

The second sub-research question to be answered in chapter two is:

***SRQ 2: How do individual inspectors engage with Ofsted processes?***

The chapter will focus on the role and values of inspectors in the Ofsted process. It will consider the nature of values and how values are accrued by individuals, helping to shape their actions and their perceptions of the world around them. The chapter will contemplate whether values help to create a set of scripts, coping strategies and operational norms that inspectors rely on during inspections. Furthermore, it will begin to consider whether personal and professional values influence inspectors' judgements and the extent to which inspectors conform to Ofsted's values, objectives and protocols.

Chapter three focuses on the research methodology and the sub-research question this chapter will address is:

***SRQ 3: What are the best ways of investigating these issues?***

The chapter will provide a philosophical and methodological justification for the research approach as well as a description and explanation of how the research was conducted. It will also provide an overview and discussion of the ethical issues involved in the research. A mixed methods approach will involve postal questionnaires to Ofsted inspectors, followed by qualitative interviews with a selection of respondents. Originally, a third phase was to examine the nature of the complaints made by schools to Ofsted but on request to do this, permission was refused by Ofsted (see appendix 5).

**SRQ 4: *What are Ofsted inspectors' perceptions of how they engage with this process?***

To answer this question chapters four and five will examine the reported outcomes from questionnaires and interviews. Furthermore, Chapter six will analyse and discuss themes emerging from the data in the previous two chapters and consider the extent to which the values of Ofsted inspectors, their working practices and interpretations, influence the inspection process.

Chapter seven provides conclusions from the analysis of the research data. It will also consider the implications of the research, along with its limitations and make recommendations about future research in this area.

The following chapter provides a brief history of school inspections in England; the historical circumstances and political reasons that paved the way towards the introduction of Ofsted along with the nature and purpose of Ofsted.

## Chapter 1

### **A brief history of school inspections – A Review of Literature.**

#### **Introduction**

To answer sub-research question 1, this chapter provides a brief history of school inspections in England; the historical circumstances and political reasons that paved the way towards the introduction of Ofsted. It also explores the extent to which Ofsted is a government contrivance by which it is notionally able to maintain hegemony over schools by the normalisation of inspections through a process of continuous surveillance.

To provide an overview of the development of Ofsted this review of literature draws upon the following: journal articles; books; government policy documents; inspection instruments and internal reports. A lot of information exists about Ofsted and its work, much of which has been generated by Ofsted itself. However, there is very little empirical research into the work of Ofsted and that which exists tends to focus on the impact of inspection on teachers (i.e. Wilcox and Gray, 1996; Jeffrey & Woods, 1998; Cullingford, 1999; MacBeath, 1999; Scanlon, 1999; Case, Case and Catling 2000; Chapman, 2001).

At the time of this research, Ofsted continues to evolve in the light of national events and changes to government policy, which calls for periodic adjustment to inspection practice. However, the framework for this Literature Review ranges from 1992 until shortly after the appointment of Sir Michael Wilshaw as HMCI in January 2012 because the time frame for the research came to an end in 2012 after the interviews were carried out.

## **A short history of inspection in England**

### **i. Origins of inspection**

The Factory Act of 1833 established the first inspectors in England with powers to enter factories to check the health, wellbeing and education of children and young persons (Lawson & Silver, 1973). During the 1840s the number of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) increased and they 'became the major means by which government influenced educational practice for the next 150 years' (Bates, Lewis and Pickard, 2011, p.9). The Revised Code, introduced in 1862 required inspectors to visit schools and test students in reading, writing, arithmetic and (for girls) needlework (Lawson and Silver 1973, p.290-291; Learmonth, 2000, p.26). The outcome of the school's test results alongside attendance figures determined the school's grant and came to be known as 'payment by results'. As a result of the 1902 (Balfour) Education Act, inspections were expanded to include state-funded secondary schools. The 1902 Act abolished the 2568 school boards, set up by the 1870 Elementary Education Act and created in their place 328 Local Education Authorities (LEAs). The establishment of LEAs increased the number of inspectors at local level and increased accountability through regional inspections. However, as education evolved and responded to social need (Lawson & Silver, 1973) the diversity of dual inspection regimes (HMI and LEA) became increasingly problematic for successive governments. HMI and LEA inspectors adopted different inspection and evaluation methodologies across the country, which meant that central government did not have a full and complete profile of school

performance nationally. This complete picture did not occur until after the first full round of Ofsted inspections in the mid-1990s.

## **ii. Post war developments that paved the way for Ofsted**

Drawing on the content of the Norwood (1943) and Spens (1938) Reports, the recommendations of the 1944 Education Act were seen as essential requirements to address post-war social and economic changes and to endorse necessary educational improvements, required to rebuild a post-war nation. For example, the Act committed the country to a tripartite education system, which was free for pupils up to the age of fifteen.

During this period HMI inspections focused on key matters of educational interest, inspected samples of schools and reported directly to the Secretary of State for Education on the condition of education across the country. LEAs also inspected schools but in contrast to HMI, they also provided advice to schools in their local areas. The post-war system of education was 'locally administered' and involved 'a benign partnership between central government, local government and individual schools and colleges' (Chitty, 2009, p.22) and in the immediate post-war years the model of education operated on the basis of 'high trust' but with 'low accountability' (Waters, 2013, p.71). Government non-intervention in school matters continued through the post-war era into the 1960s and the 1970s, allowing headteachers to become relatively autonomous, running their schools with very little 'interference' from outside. 'Indeed, in many schools class teachers ran their classes with little interference from the headteacher. Teachers could teach what they thought was important, what they knew about or what they were interested in' (Waters, 2013, p.71).

### iii. Events in the final quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Government concerns over low levels of educational performance began to arise in the 1970s, at times reinforced by the content of the *Black Papers*. Between 1969 and 1970 Cox and Dyson (1969a; 1969b and 1970) raised questions about value for money relating to educational spending and linked this to growing perceptions of unsatisfactory educational standards in schools. The final two *Black Papers* (edited by Cox and Boyson, 1975 and 1977) advocated the introduction of a voucher system by which parents could choose which school they would send their child to. 'Schools that few wish to attend should then be closed and their staff dispersed' (Cox and Boyson, 1977, p.9). While this didn't occur in the 1970's, there are echoes of this position some thirty-five years later, whereby schools placed in special measures by Ofsted are likely to be converted into academies. The influence of the *Black Papers* was far reaching and the final two Black Papers for the first time encouraged a debate about parental choice and competition in terms of state schooling. Furthermore, a study into primary-school teaching methods undertaken by Neville Bennett in 1976 claimed that pupils taught using formal methods were 'on average, four months ahead' (Chitty, 2009, p.37). While Bennett's 1976 work was criticised because of flaws in the research design, it was seized upon by critics of 'progressive teaching methods' to prove 'that they simply did not work' (Chitty, 2009, p.37). Subsequent events at William Tyndale Primary School in Islington, in which teachers operated an excessively progressive curriculum, added credence to burgeoning criticism of 'progressive' or 'informal' teaching methods. (Auld, 1976, Tomlinson, 2005).

‘In the eyes of the media, the William Tyndale Affair was conclusive proof that enormous harm could be done by a group of ‘progressive’ teachers in a state school when parents were kept out of school decision-making and when managers and inspectors were clearly guilty of failing to fulfil their statutory duties.’

Chitty (2009, p.38)

The ‘sense of crisis surrounding the state education system’ was exploited by the Conservative Party who accused LEAs, HMI and academics of being complicit in embracing ‘progressivism’ which had ‘left a trail of destruction across the school landscape’ (Bangs, Macbeath and Galton, 2011, p.68). The Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) eventually held a public inquiry into the William Tyndale Affair and teachers were dismissed.

‘The affair called into question teacher influence on the curriculum, and encouraged calls for greater teacher accountability.’

Tomlinson (2005, p.25)

Prosperity was an integral feature in the maintenance the ‘welfare capitalist consensus’ but in the latter years of the 1970s prosperity was in decline (Chitty, 2009). The international oil crisis, which followed a period of economic recession, saw oil prices quadruple by the end of the embargo in 1974. The oil crisis ‘exposed all the underlying weaknesses of Keynesian social democracy’ (Chitty, 2009, p. 31). Chitty continues to make the case that the post-war ‘welfare capitalist consensus’ relied on prosperity for success and when prosperity declined, during a period of mounting inflation and rising unemployment, so did the consensus. Furthermore, there was a general belief that ‘global change [had] created conditions in which nations must compete against each other, organisations must compete for markets and resources, and individuals must compete for jobs, income and security’ (Clarke and Newman,

2006, p.48). Based on rising costs, a 'reconstruction of the relationship between the state and social welfare' was called for by the New Right (Clarke and Newman, 2006, p.14). Consequently, the cost of public services came under increasing scrutiny.

Finally, Jim Callaghan's 1976 Ruskin College speech attacked the educational establishment for 'not adequately preparing children for the world of work, and had not yet realised that higher standards of education were needed in a complex world' (Tomlinson, 2005, p.25). Callaghan's speech gave 'powerful encouragement to the "discourse of derision" being aimed at schools and teachers by the *Black Papers*' (Ball, 2008, p.73). In his speech he raised two goals, to equip children to have a 'constructive place in society' but also to provide them with necessary skills to 'do a job of work...not one or the other but both' (Callaghan 1976). The Ruskin College Speech 'challenged the monopoly of teacher education and educationalists over questions about the methods and purposes of education' (Ball, 2008, p.73). It also raised questions about the apparent secrecy of the curriculum in schools and that the 'secret garden of the curriculum' needed to be opened up (Ball, 2008, pp.73-74). Furthermore, during this period of rising concerns during the 1970s and 1980s, inspections carried out by HMI and LEAs were unable to provide central government with a complete overview of school performance across the country. As a consequence, successive governments did not have a complete understanding of what was going on in schools, or the ability to gauge whether schools provided value for money, because there was no national instrument by which schools could be inspected.

A consequence of these events led to the Conservative Government's 1988 Education Reform Act which 'resulted in a highly centralised education system with a National Curriculum; testing; inspection regimes and school league tables which formed the basis of a quasi-market in education and competition between schools' (Bates, Lewis and Pickard, 2011, p.38). The perception that the education system had to improve, and to be fit for purpose to help the country to be able to compete within a rapidly evolving global market, helped to pave the way for a new national system of inspection. Through a new national inspection system, parents, schools and central government would have a much clearer picture of standards of attainment, progress and quality in schools.

## **The perceived need for a new inspection system**

### **i. Criticism of the work of Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools and Local Education Authorities**

Between the 1960s and 80s, the role of HMI began to move away from whole school inspection activities because increasingly this was seen to be the domain of LEAs. During this period HMI provided circulars to schools and guidance materials such as the successful *Curriculum Matters* (HMSO 1984-89) and their work '...informed the development of the National Curriculum' (Learmonth, 2000, pp.31-32). The decline in the number of HMI school inspections posed questions as to their purpose if their role was now focused on advice and guidance rather than on inspection. The DFE (White Paper 1992, p.8) stated:

'At the prevailing rate of inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools, before the changes introduced in the Education

(Schools) Act, 1992, it would have taken some sixty years to cover every secondary school in England and two hundred years to inspect each of our twenty thousand primary schools.'

Following his appointment Sir Keith Joseph, then Secretary of State for Education, initiated a review of the work of HMI in 1982. The outcomes from the Rayner Report (DES 1983) set out the future role for HMI. The report established that the work of HMI was to assess standards and trends throughout the education system and to provide central Government with an 'independent professional judgement' about the condition of the national education system. While HMI were respected by teachers, they were regarded with suspicion by Conservative ministers 'as being part of the old educational establishment' (Ball, 2008, p. 78) and being 'progressive' in their thinking (Gillard, 2011). Indeed Kenneth Baker claimed HMI had encouraged a 1960s liberal, egalitarian consensus (Lee and Fitz, 1997, pp.39-52).

During the same period of time LEAs, hitherto largely responsible for appointment of headteachers, provision of new schools, maintenance of existing school buildings and the allocation of pupils to schools now 'took responsibility for offering the best provision that they could in their area' (Waters, 2013, p.72). LEA inspectors and advisers began to fill the vacuum left by HMI. [An outcome of the 1992 Education (Schools) Act was to reduce the national HMI team from approximately 500 to 175 inspectors (Chitty, 2009, p.100)]. While some LEAs had developed credible school monitoring strategies this was not consistent across the country and by the end of the 1980s the 'all-knowing' LEA had become something of a myth (Gray and Wilcox, 1995, p.43). Consequently, LEA monitoring did not provide the Government with a complete and consistent picture of the performance of schools across the country. What

followed was a statement to LEAs, issued in DES (1985b), for LEAs to develop a stronger school inspection ethos to raise standards and to provide the government with consistent information about school performance in their areas. This remained troublesome because they invariably introduced systems that were regionally different and influenced by local government policies to meet the needs of local communities.

Criticism of LEAs centred on the variance in the quality, areas of focus, frequency and accuracy of inspections. Compounding the problem was the issue of integrity. LEA inspections were not only seen to be insufficiently systematic but the 'relationship between LEAs and their schools was too cosy for the inspections to have teeth' (Learmonth, 2000, p.36). As Baroness Perry observed,

'What we would really like is some control over the local inspectorate because the local inspectorate...didn't inspect...they'd almost become social workers...(they would say) this is my favourite school so I give them this and this...It had become very corrupt (Baroness Pauline Perry, Review of Public Services, 2007)'

Bangs, McBeath and Galton (2011, p.21)

Not only were concerns being raised about the ability of LEAs to raise academic standards, regarding the development of inspection arrangements, some were also accused of being 'too slow and uneven and the Government could not let this continue' (Learmonth, 2000, p.33). A consequence of the growing dissatisfaction with the performance of LEAs was that Kenneth Clarke (Secretary of State for Education, 1990-1992) announced that '£75 million would be devolved from LEA budgets to allow schools to hire accredited inspection teams of their choice' (Ball, 2008, p.78). Finally the 1992 Education

(Schools) Act, in creating Ofsted, effectively took away from LEAs the power to inspect schools and established a new national system of school inspection.

## **ii. The emergence of Ofsted as a response to New-Right policies**

As discussed previously, Ofsted emerged in part because of the historical evolution of school inspection systems. It was also born out of recession in the 1970s as well as general dissatisfaction that HMI and LEAs were unable to provide government with a complete and up-to-date picture of quality and standards in schools. However, Ofsted also emerged as a result of 'new right' policies and reforms based on free markets and themes of 'choice, dynamism and responsiveness' (Clarke, 1998, p.238). The 'new right' philosophy centred on control of public spending, reducing 'the idea of the state as provider of services' (Banks, 2004, p.38) and upholding 'nineteenth-century notions of tradition, hierarchy and social order' (Chitty, 2009. p.47).

Tomlinson argues that the New Right vision in relation to education was 'translated into an economic market doctrine' and with increased consumer choice came the 'dismantling of a democratically controlled education system and its replacement by individual schools with centrally controlled funding and curricula' (2005, p.32). In addition, through increased parental choice there was an expectation that schools would become competitive to maintain pupil numbers and through competition, educational standards would rise (Ball, 2008; Bates, Lewis and Pickard, 2011). Implicit within the New Right philosophy were measures to reduce the autonomy of professionals and to 'render them more accountable to government and immediate clients' (Hoyle and Wallace, 2006, p.100). Chitty asserts that the New Right claimed to have a coherent strategy to

reconstruct the Welfare State and instigate the ‘...economic and moral regeneration of Britain, in which education clearly had an important role to play’ (2009, p.132). The method underpinning this was to replace the culture of ‘co-operation and public service’ by ‘competition and enterprise’ (Chitty, 2009, p.149).

Central control of the curriculum was to become an important feature of the ‘new-found desire to make schools and teachers more accountable to the public’ (Chitty, 2009, p.149). The 1988 Education Act introduced a National Curriculum that required students/pupils to achieve age-related standards, but reduced the influence teachers had on what was taught. However, the importance of curriculum reform was not central to the New Right vision to ‘empower the underprivileged...the rationale for curriculum reform was economic; to allow the next generation of workers to compete effectively in the marketplace of the future’ (Bangs, MacBeath and Galton, 2011, p.3) and its seeds were sown in Callaghan’s Ruskin College Speech. Ball argues that the New Right critique of the welfare state rested on an attempt to ‘deconstruct its collectivism’ and ‘to reinvent a form of Victorian laissez-faire individualism’ (Ball, 2008, p.75). The bureaucracy created by institutional inefficiencies was to be eradicated by policy makers and the ‘twin pillars of individual liberty (the freedom to choose) and market freedom (the disciplines of competition) were reasserted by the New Right’ (Ball, 2008, p.76).

The impact of neo-liberal philosophy on educational reform during the 1980s and 1990s created ‘a hierarchical system of schooling subject both to market forces and to greater control from the centre’ (Chitty, 2009, p.55). The introduction of Ofsted came as part of a growing lack of Government confidence

in the ability of LEAs or HMI to provide policy makers with an accurate overview of how well schools were performing (Gray & Wilcox, 1995; Wilcox and Gray, 1996; Tomlinson, 2005; Ball, 2008). The perceived need for a new inspection model was also in part, determined by a growing belief that educational professionals were influencing school policies and practices rather than schools serving the needs of consumers (Demaine, 1998, p.252; Banks, 2004; Clarke and Newman, 2006). There was also a burgeoning belief that schools were not uniformly providing an acceptable level of education across the country and teachers were teaching topics that interested them and not the essential skills young people needed for their future (Waters, 2013).

Through Ofsted the Government now had a national mechanism by which schools were held accountable for educational standards and provision. Those schools that fell below minimum expectations were identified as having 'serious weaknesses' and others were placed in 'special measures'. The first Chief inspector of Ofsted, HMCI Sutherland, stressed that the purpose of Ofsted was to 'make a contribution, through inspections, to raising Standards' (Ofsted 1993). However, his successor, HMCI Woodhead, described the purpose of Ofsted as to 'raise standards and improve the quality of education' (Ofsted, 1995a). While the first statement implies that inspection assists the raising of standards, the second and more definite statement suggests that raising standards and improving the quality of education are imperatives. This provides a hard-hitting philosophy that underpins the inspection process. Woodhead's HMCI style also proved to be contentious, often placing him and Ofsted in the public eye. He was controversial in that the philosophy of Ofsted was infused by his views and values, making them one and the same to teachers. This was

particularly the case when he claimed that within the national body of schools there were approximately 15,000 incompetent teachers that were 'ruining' children's lives. His view on this matter helped to instil a level of fear in schools about Ofsted inspections to which Woodhead unashamedly appeared to fan the flames. What was also central to the success of Ofsted's embryonic inspection system was to recruit educationalists who shared similar corporate values to those of Ofsted and its HMCI. It was expected that inspectors would be able to exercise a powerful mandate to 'evaluate objectively' (Ofsted, 2000, p.118), inspect 'without fear or favour' (Ofsted, 2014b, p.24) and hold a strong conviction that standards in schools could be raised through inspection

Twenty years from its inception, New Right expectations continue to exist in Ofsted's preoccupation with value for money, 'quality and accountability' (Ball, 2008, p. 48). Ofsted's practice of frequent inspections and constant surveillance, holding schools to account for educational standards, also helps to ensure schools are compliant to central policy expectations (Jones and Tymms, 2014). The 'increased frequency and detail of inspection' has increased the perception amongst teachers that they are no longer trusted (Bottery, 2004). As a consequence, some educationalists hold the view that teachers have become 'technicians who implement the educational ideas and procedures of others, rather than professionals who think about these matters for themselves' (Bottery, 2004, p.11).

### **iii. Ofsted and marketization**

The primacy of marketization in education arose from a period of high inflation, rising unemployment, increased expenditure on social welfare and as a

response to dwindling confidence in value for money through public services in the late 1980s and 1990s (Bates, Lewis and Pickard, 2011, p.81). Clarke and Newman (2006) make the case that economic costs of the welfare state with the state acting as employer linked to ‘the monopoly position of state providers’ was ‘distorting the state’s role as employer... stifling enterprise and ... denying customer choice’ (p.14). Hirsch (2002) makes the case that restructuring public services around a ‘market model’ was central to the “neo-liberal” revolt against existing public services’ (p.4) in which ‘consumers’ choose the services they require in the same way as they purchased ‘commercial products’ (Hirsch, 2002, p.4).

Neo-liberal economics introduced initiatives such as Local Management of Schools (LMS), reduced LEA control and created greater freedom for schools to choose how they spent their money. It also rationalized expenditure allocation for schools through a formula for pupil funding. Those schools with more pupils would receive bigger budgets. In this way schools that received ‘good’ or better Ofsted reports were likely to be attractive to parents.

While Ofsted emerged from the 1992 Education (Schools) Act it had its roots in John Major’s Citizen’s Charter of 1991, which encouraged greater transparency about standards and the quality of services consumers would receive.

‘People who depend on public services – patients, passengers, parents, pupils, benefit claimants – all must know where they stand and what service they have a right to expect.’

Speech by Rt Hon John Major MP, 1991

Within the detail of the Citizen’s Charter, provision was made for regular reports to be made about schools from independent inspectors. Through inspection

reports, parents would be able to see how good schools were in their communities and on that basis make informed choices for their children. Here we can see links to the content of the 1970s *Black Papers*. Based on Ofsted judgements and 'through the power of their success in the new education marketplace' (Trowler, 2003, p. 38), good schools would attract more pupils. The underpinning philosophy is one of improvement through competition, (which was seen in the final two '*Black Papers*' 1975 and 1977) wherein parents were encouraged to choose the best schools to send their children. This would lead schools to 'become more responsive to the interests, needs and concerns of clients' (Ball, 2008, p. 119). As a consequence, schools would become more accountable to their clients and the expectation from this would be for good schools to become better while weaker schools would have to improve to maintain educational credence and solvency.

#### **iv. Ofsted: Accountability, Managerialism, Performativity and Surveillance**

As previously discussed, the nature of Ofsted has evolved. It was born out of a concern that LEAs and HMI were inconsistent in their inspection of schools and accordingly unable to provide central government with a complete picture of educational standards and the quality of education across the country. Furthermore, Ofsted was in part a response to a growing right wing belief that education needed to be taken out of the hands of teachers and educationalists because educational standards were perceived to be in decline, with schools not adequately providing the necessary skills needed to create a workforce capable of competing in future global markets. Ofsted reports also provided parents with comprehensive information, through which they were able to

recognize the effectiveness of local schools and so make choices for their children's education.

Over time, and because teachers were fearful of inspectors and inspections, Ofsted affected a subtle form of control over schools. Through the standardised procedure by which all schools were inspected, and through its statutory reporting procedure, Ofsted opened schools up to a level of surveillance hitherto unseen. In preparing for inspection schools have adopted the architecture of inspection, applying the criteria designed by Ofsted and they have internalised Ofsted's philosophy as they have rehearsed for the inspection experience. In essence they 'play the game' (Waters, 2013). In this way, Ofsted inspectors have contributed to a process of pervasive socialisation in schools which, accentuates performativity.

The relationship between Ofsted, central government and schools is a complex one. For example, Ofsted not only provides government with information about how well schools are performing in relation to educational standards, it provides the mechanism by which schools are also held to account for central policy implementation. To ensure schools successfully navigate an Ofsted inspection, staff are obliged to have cognizance of the inspection process and adopt strategies that meet inspection requirements. Headteachers, teachers and governors have a good idea of what will be inspected because the criteria are clearly defined by Ofsted and so to Ofsted-proof themselves, they incorporate Ofsted's criteria and expectations into classroom practice. Indeed recently Waters has noted: 'What inspection does is spread its own notion of good practice and then recognise it' (Waters 2013, p.136).

In this way, the inspection criteria (even the language of inspection) has become ingrained in schools, influencing their culture and reinforcing performativity through degrees of compliance and surveillance. The way in which schools comply with Ofsted, apparently waiting to be inspected, influences the way they operate on a daily basis and the inspection process becomes 'normalised' and framed by the requirements of Ofsted. Alexander (2004) argues that teachers have not only lost control of the curriculum they teach but they have also lost control over pedagogical issues. 'The pedagogy of principle has yet to be rescued from the pedagogy of pragmatism and compliance' (Alexander, 2004, p.29).

## **Ofsted's Purpose**

### **i. The Purpose of Ofsted and its perception of itself as an objective organisation**

Created under Section 10 of the Education (Schools) Act 1992 Ofsted was established as a non-ministerial Government department to inspect state schools every four years and its arrival signalled a new era for teachers (Jeffrey and Woods, 1998, p.2). Under Section 10 of the Education (Schools) Act 1992, Ofsted's remit was to inspect and report on educational standards in schools; the quality of education; the quality of leadership and management and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (Ofsted, 1992). However, while the remit was cast in law, Ofsted defined the purpose of inspection as 'an appraisal of the quality and standards of education in the school...the function [of inspection] is to evaluate, not prescribe or speculate' (Ofsted. 1993, p.7) and in 2003 it said of inspections:

‘Inspection provides an independent, external evaluation of the quality and standards of the school...The published inspection report and summary inform governors, parents, the school and the wider community about the quality of education at the school and whether pupils achieve as much as they can. The inspection team’s findings provide a measure of accountability and help the school to manage improvement.’

Ofsted (2003, p.4)

Since its inception, Ofsted has made some strong claims about its role as an objective organisation, which has played a significant part in raising standards and improving schools. In 2004 a joint Ofsted and London Institute of Education evaluation into the work of Ofsted indicated that:

‘It is clearly important that while Ofsted’s direction is set by parliament and its course influenced by government, Ofsted’s inspection findings and advice should be impartial and rooted in the evidence collected by HMI and other inspectors working on behalf of Ofsted. In this way, Ofsted is able to contribute objectively and distinctively to the evaluation of the quality of educational provision.’

Matthews and Sammons (2004, para. 12, p.9)

Here the claim made from their internal research is that Ofsted is able to contribute ‘*objectively*’ to the evaluation of educational provision. This expectation is reinforced in the first bullet point of Ofsted’s code of conduct: e.g. Inspectors should: ‘evaluate objectively, be impartial and inspect without fear or favour’ (Ofsted, 2015, p.21). The notion of Ofsted as an objective organisation providing an ‘external yardstick’ has been challenged by Wilcox and Gray (1996, p.113). They argue that it is difficult for all inspectors to be ‘free from bias’. They also challenge Ofsted inspections in terms of schools being perceived ‘in terms of unambiguous facts’. Here they refer to questions raised by the headteacher of Alderman King Secondary School: ‘Schools are different things to different people – what it is like for one child is not the same for

another. It will also not be the same for different teachers. I worry about the assumption that you can give authoritative accounts of schools' (Wilcox and Gray, 1996, p.113). Finally they argue that it is difficult for individuals to apply 'procedural objectivity', which is the notion that personal judgements can be placed to one-side as inspectors clinically seek to apply the inspection criteria (Wilcox and Gray, 1996, p.113). These three points form the basis of their challenge to Ofsted's claim that inspections are objective because as they see it: 'The objectivity and the associated validity problematic cannot be resolved simply by increased attention to the details of methods and procedures. Objective truth is a *chimera*. Statements about schools are not like pictures which can be more or less like what they represent' (Wilcox and Gray, 1996, p.126). Finally, Ferguson, Earley, Fidler and Ouston (2000) note that while a large majority of headteachers are satisfied with the inspection process and the subsequent inspection reports: 'It should be recognised, however, that there are also examples of poor practice and a small number of inspectors have been de-registered' (p.12) which perhaps indicates poor judgement or a lack of objectivity on their part.

Ofsted claims that inspections perform three essential functions. They were there to:

'provide parents with an expert and independent assessment

of how well a school is performing, and help inform those who are choosing a school for their child

provide information to the Secretary of State for Education and to Parliament about the work of schools and the extent to which an acceptable standard of education is being provided. This provides assurance that minimum standards are being met, provides confidence in the use of public money and assists accountability, as well as indicating where improvements are needed

promote the improvement of individual schools and the education system as a whole.'

Ofsted (January 2014a, P.4)

The first function appears to facilitate parental choice through the provision of information relating to school performance. Since the Parents' Charter (1994) there has been an increase in parental involvement and decision-making in the life of schools (Wilcox and Gray, 1996; Learmonth, 2000). Subsequent to the Parent's Charter, the 2006 Education and Inspections Act strengthened 'the voice of parents' as consumers (Ball, 2008, p.131). While parents are able to use Ofsted reports to make informed choices, Ball (2008) argues that where such 'choice policies exist, they favour the middle class '...who can use their social and cultural skills and capital advantages to good effect' (p.133). As a result, in response to declining school standards, those parents capable of doing so, can move house '...into the catchment area of a "good" school...some went as far as to leave the state system entirely' leaving millions of pupils 'trapped' in underperforming schools (Chitty, 2009, p.82). A side effect of consumerism, market forces and increased choice has been widening inequality as schools sought to enrol 'desirable pupils' (Tomlinson, 2005, p.78) and middle class parents chose to send their children to "good" schools. The impact of Ofsted on the issue of parental choice has been to create a widening gulf between popular (good) schools and unpopular (special measures) schools because pupil numbers equate to an increase or decrease in resources.

The second function acknowledges the importance of holding schools to account for 'minimum standards' of education and for providing value for money. The outcome from this is that 'failing schools' (identified by schools in

which fewer than three out of ten pupils gaining five A\* - C GCSE grades) would face closure if they did not improve within a three-year period (Tomlinson, 2005; Chitty, 2009). Similarly, schools placed in special measures by Ofsted (because they do not have sufficient 'capacity to sustain improvement') would be directed to become academies. Through the academy process (modelled on the Charter School system in the USA) those schools deemed to be 'failing' could become 'independent semi-privatised schools sponsored by business, faiths or voluntary bodies' (Tomlinson, 2005, p.127). According to Chitty (2009) the promotion of academies is '...seen by many as a deliberate means of privatizing the education service' (p.87). If this is the case, then Ofsted could be surreptitiously assisting the Government's agenda in this matter. Certainly, the 2013 HMCI Annual Report indicates that 9% of primary schools and 50% of secondary schools are now academies and that that the proportion is growing (p.7).

The final essential function of Ofsted is to improve schools and the education system. Ofsted cites the three reasons for school failure as being '... underachievement of pupils, unsatisfactory or poor teaching and ineffective leadership' (Ofsted, 1997, p.4). The report claims that 'the majority of schools in special measures are making satisfactory or good progress in addressing the key issues for action in their Ofsted inspection report' (1997, p.6) without actually saying the ways in which schools are improving. However, Ofsted's claim that its inspections improve schools has been challenged by research carried out by Jones and Tymms, 2014 because their research findings suggest that there is insufficient evidence to support the link between inspections and school improvement.

Finally, within the context of Ofsted's essential functions (informing parents; informing the Secretary of State that schools are providing an acceptable standard of education and value for money; promoting school improvement) schools have changed. They have changed because, through their acknowledgement that Ofsted is a powerful force within education, they comply with Ofsted's expectations to gain the best possible inspection outcome. Ofsted has become 'normal' to schools and through it successive governments have a mechanism by which consistent educational practice can be maintained. As a result of Ofsted inspections and particularly through the recent one-day notice period, schools are in constant readiness for inspection. In this way, a degree of social engineering has occurred in schools in that they perform under constant regulatory scrutiny. In short, Ofsted inspections have created an educational panopticon.

**ii. The panopticon effect of inspection (authority, surveillance, compliance, normalization and legitimacy).**

"Discipline" may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a "physics" or an "anatomy" of power, a technology.'

Foucault (in Rabinow, 1984, p.206)

Here Foucault is referring to the formation of a 'disciplinary society' through which discipline is used to control people. He asserts that in the 'genealogy of modern society' political norms and laws only work because of the numerous 'small techniques of discipline' (p.213) that are found everywhere and through a 'universally widespread panopticism' through which laws are applied. Jeremy

Bentham's (1790's) idea for a panopticon prison (a system which could also be applied to schools, hospitals and asylums) was the method by which inmates believed that they were under continuous surveillance, which meant that they acted as though they were being watched by gaolers at all times. This perception of being constantly watched had a self-controlling effect on the prisoners and their behaviour. Foucault defines panopticism as 'an organ of generalized and constant oversight; everything must be observed, seen, transmitted: organization of a police force; instituting of a system of records' (2000, p.35). Here there are similarities with Ofsted's inspection strategies. Foucault notes that 'the Panopticon is a marvellous machine, which whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogeneous effects of power' (1978, p. 202). Within the Panopticon 'one is totally seen, without ever seeing' while those observing 'see[s] everything without ever being seen' (Foucault, 1978).

Perryman (2006) uses the expression 'panoptic performativity' to describe 'a regime in which the frequency of inspection and the sense of being perpetually under surveillance leads to teachers performing in ways dictated by the discourse of inspection in order to escape the regime' (p. 147). Similarly Plowright (2008) makes a case for school self-evaluation maintaining schools in a state of permanent readiness for inspection and 'under constant scrutiny' which increases 'pressure to perform' (p.121). He acknowledges that school self-evaluation protocols, created by Ofsted, have 'subtle and perhaps even insidious implications for the way schools are monitored' (Plowright, 2008, p.121). Furthermore he argues that (comparable to Bentham's Panopticon) school self-evaluation enables Ofsted inspectors to observe schools 'at arms length and out of sight...and being under constant but unseen observation,

schools will be forced into moving the inspection criteria to a daily focus, as they comply with and eventually internalise Ofsted's norms and procedures' (Plowright 2008, p.121). Indeed Ofsted has promoted the use of common criteria and language between schools and inspectors as a good thing. In reality through the process of self-evaluation, schools have adopted the criteria of Ofsted rather than the other way around. In this way the strength of discourse within the process of school self-evaluation has been defined by Ofsted and not by schools:

'It is advantageous to base school self-evaluation on the same criteria as those used in schools by inspectors. A common language has developed about the work of schools, expressed through the criteria. Teachers and governors know that the criteria reflect things that matter.'

(Ofsted, 1999a, p.138)

Foucault (1978) reflects that the power of 'normalisation imposes homogeneity', making it possible for all things to be measured.

'It is easy to understand how the power of the norm functions within a system of formal equality, since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences.

Foucault (1978, p.184)

In the early days of Ofsted a process of shock tactics was applied through inspections which encouraged a culture of league tables and the 'naming and shaming' of schools to develop. Ofsted's database was used by HMCI Woodhead to publicly criticise teachers for educational standards. In recent years, the inspection process has changed and a more subtle form of control

has taken shape. While, familiarity with the inspection process has helped to embed Ofsted's values and philosophy into the culture of schools, Ofsted's short time scale (next day) to notify schools of an impending inspection means that schools are on constant alert. Schools have 'normalised' the process with practices that are recognisable across different schools but which induce similar strategies of compliance. James Park (The Guardian, 07/05/13) makes the case that Ofsted inspections have pervaded schools to a point whereby Ofsted's criteria 'dominates what goes on in schools'. Plowright (2008) suggests that as a consequence of schools being in a constant state of readiness for inspection 'they have been in their own version of the Panopticon and that, in their eyes, escape now appears impossible' (p. 121).

### **iii. Changes to the Ofsted inspection process.**

There have been numerous changes to Ofsted's inspection methodology since its inception in 1992. During the past twenty years the length of an inspection has reduced from four days to two days; lay inspectors were introduced to the process and then withdrawn. During Ofsted's history, the number of grades have been reduced from seven to four and in its current format Ofsted considers 'good' or 'outstanding' to be the only acceptable grades that schools should aim to achieve. Over time headteachers and teachers have become familiar with the broad features of the inspection process but the level of anxiety surrounding Ofsted inspections still remains because for teachers being inspected is a high risk activity.

Fullan (2000) argues that 'continuous improvement on a sustainable scale requires capacity building, sustainability...and teachers at all levels engaged in

changing their own context...what is bad is overdoing standards and assessment' (Preface, xii). Supporting this view MacBeath and Mortimore (2001) suggest that sustainable change involves like-minded people working together over a period of time and that 'blocks to improvement' are identifiable through 'fear of failure' and 'defences built up against threats from outside' (p.17). Brighthouse and Woods (2008) suggest that 'if a thing is worth doing it is worth doing badly' (p.11). The point being that change goes through phases and that it is unlikely to be successful in the first instance. Successful change requires practice and during an inspection, schools are given only one chance to get it right.

Some of the changes to Ofsted's methodology have transpired in response to financial restraints imposed to the national education budget by successive governments. From 1995 to 2005 under Section 10 of the 1992 Education (Schools) Act, schools were given between six to ten weeks notice of an impending inspection. During that period of time the Registered Inspector planned the inspection, visited the school to meet staff and parents as well as completing a pre-inspection commentary to brief the inspection team. Full inspections lasted four days and the number of team inspectors allocated to the inspection depended on the number of pupils/students registered at the school. Reports stretched to many pages because each subject required an individual summary report provided by individual inspectors. Revisions to the inspection process were made under Section 5 of the 2005 Education Act. As a consequence, the inspection tariff reduced from four to two days for each school. Lead inspectors no longer made a preliminary visit to meet staff or

parents, notice of an inspection was reduced to less than a week for schools, and inspection reports became standardised and much shorter.

Ofsted inspections have also evolved in response to social and public need. For example, in an attempt to improve basic skills the National Literacy Strategy was introduced by the DfEE in 1998 and the National Numeracy Strategy in the following year (DfEE, 1999a). These were non-statutory frameworks providing schools with guidance about the teaching of literacy and numeracy. The Strategies had a clearly defined set of criteria by which lessons were to be taught and inspectors were now required to judge the suitability of the structure of the lesson as well as the quality of teaching. In 2003 the Government published the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' following the death of Victoria Climbié and the five outcomes from this were also to be inspected by Ofsted. In 2007 Ofsted took over responsibility for the inspection of social care and child protection in local councils and were castigated in the media following the death of Peter Connolly (Baby P) because social care in Haringey Council had been judged as 'good' by Ofsted in the December before his death. The death of Baby P raised two major issues for Ofsted. The first was one of being stretched too thinly to successfully carry out the breadth of the new inspection remit. The second issue was that while the inspection remit was changing, Ofsted relied on inspectors who were largely from educational backgrounds to inspect new and unfamiliar areas of schooling. Further changes occurred in 2010 when Ofsted was renamed The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. This broadened Ofsted's remit further to regulate or inspect registered childcare, children's social care, including adoption and fostering agencies, residential schools, family centres and homes for children, non-association

independent schools, pupil referral units, initial teacher training, publicly funded adult skills and employment training, the Children and Family Courts Service and the quality of Local Authority provision. All of which is on top of Ofsted's role to inspect state maintained schools. While Ofsted's remit has broadened to encompass areas of care, local provision and further education, within schools inspection has retained a narrow focus on the relationship between teaching, learning and standards. This creates something of a paradox in how schools are judged and Bangs, MacBeath and Galton make the following case:

‘With a broadening social agenda and the progressive demise of other agencies of socialisation such as churches, youth clubs, youth organisations and traditional family/extended family influence, a narrowing school attainment agenda may be a regressive step. In the new slimmed down Ofsted the key discriminator which separates full and cursory inspection is measured by pupil ‘outcomes’, yet, as we have learned from half-a-century of research it is the social and economic context of the school that is the primary determinant of what pupils achieve in school.’

(2011, p.119)

Ofsted has maintained a philosophy that inspection improves schools (Annual Reports of HMCI; Ofsted, 1997; Matthews and Sammons, 2004). However, evidence from independent research contradicts Ofsted's official view (Lowe, 1997; Shaw, Newton, Aitkin and Darnell, 2009; Jones and Tymms, 2014). It is difficult to gauge Ofsted's role in securing school improvement during the past twenty years ‘because there is so little agreement as to whether schools have improved... and if they have, by how much’ (Elliott, 2012, p.4).

Inspection change has also been enforced by individual HMCI and their personal ideologies. For example, the style of inspection that evolved in the early 1990s was influenced by Woodhead's perception of the work in hand and

is one that became synonymous with the fear teachers felt about Ofsted (Jeffrey and Woods, 1998; Ferguson, Earley, Fidler and Ouston, 2000). 'When teaching competence is perceived to be wanting a major aspect of the teacher's life-purpose can be brought into question' (Wilcox and Gray, 1996, p.58). Brighouse (1997) described Woodhead's era as a 'reign of terror' (p.106). Woodhead was critical of bad teaching and 'dismissive of most educational research and skeptical of the way deprivation had been made an excuse for low standards' (Elliott, 2012, p.2). He was often outspoken in his claims, at times expressing his personal views through the platform of Ofsted and without inspection data to underpin them, for example in his claims that inspectors had found 15,000 teachers in England were incompetent and should not be teaching. In 1999, Alexander wrote of this matter, 'what HMCI presents as fact may be at variance with evidence' (Alexander, 1999).

The inspection process has continued to evolve and Woodhead's 'reign of terror' ended in 2000. It could be argued that teachers are now less fearful of Ofsted inspections because the process has become more self-evaluatory and teachers are now familiar with inspection expectations. Fear has been replaced by a degree of enculturation by which teachers know what to expect and prepare accordingly. Waters (2013) refers to this as '...ruses for passing the Ofsted inspection...' (p.104) or 'stage-managed public accountability' in which teachers comply with the requirements of Ofsted' (Case, Case and Catling, 2000).

A degree of fear remains in schools because as the inspection process has evolved the bar has been raised and the rules of inspection have changed

again. For example the 'satisfactory' judgement has been replaced by a new 'requires improvement' judgement.

'...if we have any ambition as a nation to compete with the best education systems in the OECD, then good has to be the only acceptable standard.'

Sir Michael Wilshaw, HMCI (2014)

Finally, schools are notified of their impending inspection during the afternoon of the working day prior to the start of the inspection. This procedure requires schools to be in constant readiness with teachers' expectations bound up in preparing for inspection, internalising Ofsted's norms and using the criteria of inspection daily. In short, the level of constant readiness for inspection ensures teachers are working within something resembling an educational panopticon.

"Ofsted has been moving towards a position of unannounced school inspection over a period of years. I believe the time is now right for us to take that final step and make sure that for every school we visit inspectors are seeing schools as they really are in the corridors, classrooms and staffroom."

Sir Michael Wilshaw, HMCI (The Guardian, 10<sup>th</sup> January 2012)

#### **iv. The extent to which changes to Ofsted have led to a more consistent inspection process?**

While schools remain in constant readiness for an inspection, a further consideration is with regard to the security of inspection judgements. Research carried out by Jones and Sinkinson (2000) into Ofsted judgements made in Mathematics courses for Initial Teacher Education challenged the validity and reliability of the Ofsted inspection process because of the 'considerable variation in the reports, in terms of word length, how particular criteria seem to

be applied and how judgements are expressed' (Jones and Sinkinson, 2000, p.79). They argue that:

'With the complexity of the framework for inspection, it is impossible, given the current model of inspection report, to properly distinguish between consistency of application and the loading given to any particular criterion.'

Jones and Sinkinson (2000, p.79)

Gilroy and Wilcox (1997) argue that the Ofsted approach is based on an assumption (by Ofsted) that the criteria used to make judgements are 'unambiguous' and that it is interpreted and applied in the same way during each inspection. Gilroy and Wilcox suggest that this is not the case because inspectors develop their own ways of working which creates variation: 'thus rendering doubtful the notion of consistent and objective practice' (Gilroy and Wilcox, 1997, p.23). As a consequence, they raise doubts about the validity of inspection judgements.

Furthermore, Alexander (1999) points out that final judgements become unquestionable. His claim is that complaints against inspectors usually focus on inspection conduct rather than on the inspection judgements. Alexander points out:

'In the Ofsted model it is impossible for an inspector to be wrong...This, manifestly, is to invest in Ofsted inspection judgements an authority far beyond what they can legitimately bear. I doubt whether for any other profession outside a totalitarian regime this would be even contemplated, let alone sanctioned, and those outside the education service may find it astonishing that in this country it was indeed both contemplated and implemented.'

Alexander (1999, pp. 124-125)

Waters emphasises that the inspection process is 'not a consistent impartial scrutiny' because of the degree of negotiation that takes place between the headteacher and lead inspector 'based on their relative assertiveness' (2013, p.128). Finally, (some twelve years after the research carried out by Jones and Sinkinson) in the TES on February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012, Professor Dylan Wiliam challenged Ofsted to evaluate the reliability of the inspection process by asking the question: 'if two inspectors inspect the same school, a week apart, would they come to the same ratings?'

## **Summary and Discussion**

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the evolution of inspection in England and post-war developments in education that helped to pave the way for Ofsted. It has also made a case for Ofsted being a bi-product of New-Right policies that emerged towards the end of the 1980's and it has highlighted that Ofsted had its roots in the Parent's Charter of 1991 and 1994. Elements of the literature endorse views that Ofsted is a political tool to facilitate Government initiatives such as academies. Despite claims by Ofsted, the literature provides little evidence to secure that inspections raise standards in schools but there is evidence to support the view that Ofsted's oppressive approach to inspection increased anxiety amongst teachers in the early years of inspection. Despite criticism, Ofsted has gained a degree of legitimacy amongst teachers and subtle changes have raised the bar and contributed to a high degree of compliance in schools. The chapter has explored the degree to which Ofsted has increased performativity in schools through a culture of permanent

surveillance, similar to that of Bentham's Panopticon, whereby they remain in permanent readiness for inspection.

The chapter has begun to unpick some of the assumptions around Ofsted inspections being objective. Inspections are based on clear criteria but a major concern has been the degree of change that has taken place to the inspection process, which has led to recent criticism about its overall objectivity and validity. While inspection is stressful for schools, for inspectors it is a complex, intense activity carried out in a short period of time. In 1980 Lipsky made the case that because of constraints, people 'simplify their tasks and narrow their range of perceptions in order to process the information they receive and develop responses to it...routines and simplifications aid the management of complexity' (p.83).

Chapter two will address sub-research question 2 about how individual inspectors engage with Ofsted processes. It will seek to provide a definition of values and consider the nature of values in terms of identity. It will also explore the importance of organisational values and their impact on individuals in terms of socialisation, conformity and control. Ofsted exercises a degree of hegemony over inspectors through specific expectations about the way inspections are to be carried out and these expectations are further reinforced through regular training and monitoring. While this is the case, chapter two will consider the role and values of inspectors and begin to enquire into whether the Ofsted process is influenced by inspectors' personal values as they mediate their role in schools.

## Chapter 2

### **Inspectors' values in the Ofsted inspection process.**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter provided the political and educational context that gave rise to Ofsted, replacing other school inspection regimes with a single national programme. The chapter considered the nature of how Ofsted has maintained its legitimacy over teachers through its ability to make powerful public judgements about schools and their performance. It also explored the degree to which Ofsted has infused schools with managerialist values and a culture of compliance through which teachers are 'subject to a myriad of judgements, measures, comparisons and targets' (Ball, 2008, p.50). This chapter will answer sub-research question two about how individual inspectors engage with Ofsted processes. The chapter seeks to provide a definition of values and consider the nature of values in terms of personal and corporate identity. It will explore the significance of organisational values and their impact on individuals in terms of socialisation, conformity and control. The chapter will also begin to consider inspectors' values in terms of whether the stability of the Ofsted process is influenced by inspectors' values as they mediate their role in schools.

During school inspections different value systems interact. These include the core values of Ofsted; the core values of a school and the values of inspectors. The values of individual inspectors appear to emanate from a collection of accrued personal and professional values as well as being influenced by Ofsted's inspection criteria in *The Framework for School Inspection* (Ofsted 2005a; 2009a) and the *School Inspection Handbook* (Ofsted, 2005b; 2009b). At

present no literature exists relating to the values of Ofsted inspectors or the extent to which their values may influence their conduct in schools or their judgements during inspections.

While acknowledging that many philosophical definitions of values exist within the literature, a broader pragmatic stance has been adopted for this research in terms of understanding inspectors' values and how individual inspectors engage with the process. In this regard, the following definitions and statements appear to encapsulate the way in which individuals with shared values work together in groups: i.e. Banks' (2004) definition of professional values as 'a set of attitudes or beliefs associated with a particular profession... and [values] as an expression of a profession's service ideal' (pp.138-139); Strike's (2003) 'social glue'; Deal's (1985) 'the way we do things round here' and Morgan's (1997) 'organizational values'.

Ofsted is a non-ministerial government department but it answers to the House of Commons Education Sub-Committee through annual reports from Her Majesty's Chief Inspector. While personal values are formed through experiences and influential others, Ofsted's core values and objectives have been defined by its political masters and then converted into working practices for inspectors to carry out. Inspection practices are to:

- inspect maintained schools and academies, some independent schools, and other educational institutions, programmes and further education
- inspect childcare, adoption and fostering agencies and initial teacher training
- publish reports of our findings so they can be used to improve the overall quality of education and training
- regulate a range of early years and children's social care services, making sure they're suitable for children and potentially vulnerable young people
- reporting to policymakers on the effectiveness of these services

(Ofsted, 2015, 'About Us' homepage)

These expectations are then defined in terms of inspection criteria and objectives, which are then disseminated and become embedded within the corporate culture of Ofsted. For example:

'Inspection supports improvement in education by setting standards, reporting on performance against other relevant standards set by government, and raising expectations of performance in all settings and remits inspected and regulated. It provides challenge and the impetus to act where improvement is needed.'

Ofsted (2015, p.5)

Ofsted's value system, beliefs, and expectations are reinforced through inspector training as well as through the ritual and practice of carrying out school inspections and working with other inspectors. The success of Ofsted's aim to create a value free model of inspection, devoid of variance is an optimal goal, which rests on the strength of Ofsted's 'corporate culture' (Morgan, 1997) and the extent to which inspectors' values align with those of Ofsted.

The values underpinning the school inspection process have been created by Ofsted and are reinforced through Ofsted's code of conduct and guiding principles. However, each inspector also brings their own values and beliefs to an inspection, which may or may not fully align with those of Ofsted. For example, while believing in the need for schools to improve some inspectors may not agree that the Ofsted model of inspection is the best one to induce school improvement. Inspectors may have a range of different reasons for becoming an inspector but all inspectors rely on Ofsted as their paymaster and as a consequence, the extent to which inspectors' values are always in full

alignment with those of Ofsted may be concealed by the need to earn money from the process.

Furthermore, different groups of inspectors may exist, whose perceptions of the world are underpinned by different values. Some inspectors' values may be idealistically aligned to Ofsted's values, complying with its protocols and fully applying the inspection criteria as defined by Ofsted. Other inspectors may hold an interpretivist view of the world, applying their own values and experiences to understand and make sense of the context they are working in. Some inspectors may lean towards pragmatism, that the nature of knowledge is not absolute and consequences determine meaning. In this way, personal values may influence the way in which inspectors perceive their world and the way in which they practically apply their skills in schools. Investigating the extent to which inspectors' values align with those of Ofsted and the degree to which inspectors mediate their work in schools are core features of this research. This chapter will begin to explore the complex nature of values and provide a framework in relation to the work of inspectors and how they engage with Ofsted processes.

### **What are values?**

There are numerous philosophical definitions of values, their origins and influence over human actions, interactions, perceptions and judgements. For example, there is widespread agreement in the literature that values are beliefs (Allport, 1961) and that they relate to desirable goals or end states that people strive to attain (Rokeach, 1973). They are principles and qualities based on assumptions that an individual perceives to be worthy or desirable (Kluckhohn,

1952; Rockeach, 1973). Values help to define individuals and groups, through the way the opinions, beliefs and truths that group members hold important or worthwhile are translated into behaviours (Haralambos and Holborn, 1996; Taylor, Richardson, Yeo, Marsh, Trobe and Pilkington, 1996). They are constructs created out of deep rooted beliefs which contribute to the creation of value systems and cultures based on mutual agreement and trust (Grondona, 2000; Uslaner 2002; Bottery, 1998; 2004). Similarly, values provide 'powerful explanations of human behaviour because they serve as the standards or criteria of conduct' (Kamakura and Mazzon, 1991, p. 208). Once embedded, values become standards for life and work, contributing to the make up of 'professional identity' (Banks, 2004) and 'corporate culture (Morgan, 1997), which underly the criteria for making decisions and daily actions (Gellermann, Frankel and Ladenson, 1990, Kolodinsky, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2008). 'Values are ordered by importance relative to other values to form a system of value priorities' which characterize individuals and 'serve as guiding principles in people's lives' (Schwartz, 2006, p.1).

Grondona (2000) argues that there are two categories of values: 'intrinsic and instrumental' (p.45). Intrinsic values are those that people possess as core beliefs and 'uphold regardless of benefit or costs', for example *patriotism* or *trust*. Instrumental values are those values that are directly beneficial to us but are temporary. Grondona uses the example of economic growth as an instrumental value. He suggests that 'only intrinsic values are inexhaustible. No instrument survives its utility, but an intrinsic value always calls to us from an ever distant summit' (Grondona, 2000, p.45) and that 'a person is moral when answering to intrinsic values' (p.46).

There is an argument to be made that because the work of teachers and inspectors differ, the values of these groups are also different, increasing the potential for conflict during an inspection. The values of teachers have evolved to reflect collegiality, care, creativity (Carlyle & Woods, 2002) and are dependent on clearly defined levels of trust in relation to perceptions of self-worth and professional identity (Giddens, 1991; Banks, 2004; Bottery, 2004). Schools as learning communities have evolved over time, often attracting like-minded people with similar sets of values to work together. They may settle into the community in which they teach, serving the school for many years and forming lasting relationships with colleagues based on trust and shared beliefs.

Ofsted may also attract people whose values are in alignment but in contrast to schools, inspectors work together fleetingly. Therefore, the 'social glue' that binds inspectors is embedded in their enjoyment of what they do, a commitment to Ofsted's values, and a belief that they are doing good work rather than their fidelity with other inspectors. The corollary of this, in terms of 'guiding principles' for Ofsted inspectors and their work, is that their personal and professional values are likely to become interlaced and infused with the core values of Ofsted through the 'the social processes, images, symbols and rituals' of the 'corporate culture' (Morgan, 1997). However, the extent to which inspectors conform to Ofsted's values and objectives may vary. Some may inspect schools frequently and hold very close affiliation to Ofsted's philosophy, others may not. Therefore, the extent to which inspectors conform to Ofsted's norms and values may influence the way in which different inspectors apply Ofsted's inspection criteria and mediate the management of their work in schools. Consequently, this research will consider whether, as Waters, (2013) has asserted the '... only

consistent aspect of an Ofsted inspection is that it is an inconsistent mechanism' (p.128).

While the values of individual inspectors may have evolved as a result of professional experiences as teachers or school leaders, the values and principles relating to their work as inspectors are defined by Ofsted. These values, principles and protocols are subsequently assimilated by inspectors, through training and through the practical application of the inspection process in schools. Morgan (1997, p.132) [using the leadership of an American insurance company as an example] argues that 'corporate culture develops as an ethos ... created and sustained by social processes, images, symbols and rituals.' In this example he suggests that the role played by those in power in shaping the values that guide the organisation is 'crucial'. Ofsted expects inspectors to apply the protocols of inspection in a systematic and replicable manner but contextual variables may impede this happening. This is because each school context is different and the potential for variation to occur in the process is revealed in the way different inspectors use their prior experience and their personal values to interpret and apply the inspection criteria. In this way any interpretation of the inspection criteria by individual inspectors in schools could influence the final judgements, causing variation to the reliability of the inspection.

## **Organisational Values**

Each individual has a set of personal values born out of experience and interaction with influential others. However, working within an organisation introduces an individual to organisational values. Organisational values help to

define organisations and underpin the purpose of the organisation. These values are usually established by leaders of the organisation to achieve organisational goals and help to create symbolism, culture and policies that help to define that organisation (Deal, 1985). Organisational values help to firm up the reality and purpose of the organisation through the creation of traditions (Giddens, 2000) and rituals, ceremonies and stories (Deal, 1985). They also help to attract like-type people to the organisation and this can be seen in schools as well as in the body of Ofsted inspectors. Once the organisation has been established a degree of self-responsibility is required by employees to carry out assignments and 'personal autonomy' becomes an important value for many 'modern, highly educated employees', (Bovens, 1998, p.157). In this way, while an organisation has its own set of predetermined values, perhaps established by leaders to fulfil the purpose of the organisation, within some organisations there is an expectation that individuals apply a degree of 'autonomous power' through making decisions to help the core purpose of the organisation. Bovens (1998) suggests that the concept of 'bureaucratic responsibility' has grown, increasing the nature of 'people's individual, autonomous power of judgement' (Bovens, 1998, p.157). Business management has been influenced through stronger integration of individual and organisational goals. The way in which organisations enable individuals to apply their own values within the context of their work helps to shape organisations and influences 'managerial practice' (McGregor, 1987, pp17-18).

Morgan advocates that those in power play a 'crucial role...in shaping the values that guide the organization' (1997, p.132). This can be seen in the way that Ofsted's values have been crafted to meet the needs of the inspection

process. In this way values not only guide an organisation but they influence the level of unity, commitment and affirmation amongst employees within the organisation's 'corporate culture'. Individuals often aspire to join an organisation because they uphold similar beliefs and the creation of a strong 'corporate culture' helps to develop an 'ethos' (Morgan, 1997, p.132-133), which is easily recognised by others within it. Morgan also emphasises that an organisation is 'holographic', comprising a number of parts. The development of 'vision, aspirations, core values, operating norms and other dimensions of corporate culture...creates a capacity for each person to embody and act in a way that represents the whole' (p.102). As a consequence, corporate values within an organisation evolve into a powerful and unifying mechanism through 'social glue' (Strike, 2003) and 'the way we do things round here' (Deal, 1985).

The problem that exists in defining the term 'organisational values' hinges on the issue that it has many different meanings (Banks, 2004). Banks refers to Rawls' (1998) contractarian theory in which 'rationally acceptable moral principles are those which everyone could agree to as principles to govern their dealings with one another, and that if everyone could agree to them, then no one's interests are being sacrificed' (p.198). As a result, organisational values are often identifiable as a set of ethical principles that guide the practice of those working within the organization and defined by what is acceptable practice. Banks (2004) refers to some of these ethical principles as 'professional values'. 'Professional values' tend to be 'used more specifically to refer to the core ethical principles underpinning the profession' (Banks, p.138). Banks also, suggests that the term 'professional values' may be 'used more loosely to mean any set of attitudes or beliefs associated with a particular profession' (2004, p.

138). In this way teachers and Ofsted inspectors will have some shared values, notably high quality teaching and the care and guidance of young people, which is provided through secure educational principles, provision and effective school leadership. As a result of shared values, inspectors are able to quickly grasp what is going on in schools, recognising strengths and weaknesses. However, inspectors' values are aligned with those of Ofsted and not to those of schools, which sets inspectors apart from teachers. The nature of the Ofsted process requires inspectors to use the inspection criteria and apply the protocols of inspection in a uniform and consistent manner. However, the paradox for inspectors is that to successfully carry out their work a degree of 'bureaucratic responsibility' is required through which individuals apply a level of 'autonomous power of judgement' (Bovens, 1998, p.157).

Previously it was argued that values have a profound impact on the creation of corporate culture within an organisation and that the degree of commitment to an organisation may depend on how closely individuals align themselves to those organisational values. Hoyle and Wallace (2006) observe that while values can range from the 'ultimate values of truth, justice and goodness' to the 'proximal "values" of an organisation as expressed by Deal (1985) and Morgan (1997), '...few writers spell out what these values are in relation to educational organisations' (p. 115). Schwartz, (1994, 2006) explains that 'value priorities' characterise people as individuals with different goals, expectations and outlooks. In the context of working within a specific group or organisation, individuals are often motivated to achieve the same organisational goals. For example to coordinate with others in the pursuit of goals:

‘Individuals represent these requirements cognitively (linguistically) as specific values about which they communicate.’

Schwartz (2006, p.2)

The definitions of Ofsted’s organisational values are relatively unclear because they are expressed in utilitarian terms which relate to the functional apparatus of carrying out an inspection, i.e. Ofsted’s guidance on how to apply the criteria by which to make judgements and the code of conduct for inspectors. To reduce any variation within the inspection process, Ofsted requires inspectors to conform to the mechanism of Ofsted’s inspection framework. However, in the context of pursuing Ofsted’s goals or working within its ‘corporate culture’ Ofsted inspectors are imbued with a degree of ‘autonomous power’ to make judgements. It is at this juncture that inspectors personal and core values may re-emerge providing them with a degree of freedom to mediate their work in schools.

### **Ofsted’s values and managerialism**

Ofsted expects inspectors to assimilate Ofsted’s values as they inspect schools. These values are in essence functional and ‘instrumental’ (Grondona, 2000), have been designed by Ofsted and are set within Ofsted’s code of conduct to specify what it is that inspectors should do as they inspect:

- evaluate objectively, be impartial and inspect without fear or favour
- evaluate provision in line with frameworks, national standards or regulatory requirements
- base all evaluations on clear and robust evidence
- have no connection with the provider that could undermine their objectivity
- report honestly and clearly, ensuring that judgements are fair and reliable
- carry out their work with integrity, treating all those they meet with courtesy, respect and sensitivity
- endeavour to minimise the stress on those involved in the inspection
- act in the best interests and well-being of pupils

- maintain purposeful and productive dialogue with those being inspected and communicate judgements clearly and frankly
- respect the confidentiality of information, particularly about individuals and their work
- respond appropriately to reasonable requests
- take prompt and appropriate action on any safeguarding or health and safety issues.

Ofsted (2014b, p.24)

These statements act as a rationale for inspectors to follow as well as guidance for them to uphold Ofsted's corporate values and expectations. They appear to include a number of values, which would resonate with inspectors' personal and professional values as they work within Ofsted's 'corporate culture'. They include key words and statements such as 'impartial', 'report honestly', 'fair and reliable', 'integrity', 'courtesy, respect and sensitivity' and significantly to 'inspect without fear or favour'. However, the code of conduct statements support Ofsted's functional expectations about how inspectors should carry out their work and they hinge on a predominance of 'outcome-focused practice based on utilitarian principles' (Banks, 2004, p.193). In this way Ofsted appears to have adopted the language of a number of 'intrinsic' values to help inspectors modify their personal values and to conform to Ofsted's objectivist values. However, fundamentally the statements relate to mechanical actions, utilitarian values and are 'managerial' (Bottery 2000).

Over time Ofsted's values have infiltrated those of schools through the way in which schools use inspection criteria to prepare for an inspection and is indicative of the pervasive influence of Ofsted's managerialist values. Bottery (2000) provided a discourse in which he argues that managerialism is increasingly influencing values and where a predominance of managerial values

exist, wider values are debased. He argues that policy-makers in pursuit of management objectives have reduced 'first-order social and moral values to second-order values' which weakens the 'deep value structure of society' (Bottery, 2000, p.68). He provides examples whereby seven 'first-order social and moral values' have been 'reduced to second-order managerial values. These are autonomy, criticality, care, tolerance, equality, respect and trust' (2000, p.68). His discourse argues that the 'rhetoric of managerialism has spread to influence the language and thought, and then the practice, of politicians and professionals alike' (2000, p.73). Bottery (2000, p.77) asserts that 'education is an inherently value-laden and ultimately moral activity'. In teaching children teachers are influenced by a broad range of 'first-order' values as they teach, nurture, protect, care for and guide them. In contrast Ofsted inspectors operate within a limited range of 'second-order' values. Almost all of these are of a utilitarian nature and can be identified in Ofsted's code of conduct for inspectors. There may be some truth in the premise that the way in which inspectors repeatedly apply Ofsted's code of conduct contributes to an internal value system and 'corporate culture' (Morgan, 1997) based on mutual agreement and trust (Grondona, 2000; Uslaner 2002; Bottery, 1998; 2004) which contributes to the make up of their 'professional identity' (Banks, 2004).

Ofsted reports to central government and its annual reports provide government with a national overview of how good schools are based on their performance against Ofsted's inspection criteria. Ofsted provides a powerful debate about that which is considered to be important to raise educational standards. In response to this, and through a fear of failure, schools Ofsted-proof themselves by incorporating inspection criteria into their daily practice but in doing so they

increasingly comply with Ofsted's managerial values. Research carried out by Baxter and Clarke (2013) highlighted headteachers saying that they focus a lot more on inspection framework priority areas now than they previously did. Fergusson (1994, p.113) argues:

‘As sceptical teachers submit to *force majeure* and comply with the National Curriculum programmes of study, test their pupils, accept appraisal...they come gradually to live and be imbued by the logic of new roles, new tasks, new functions, and in the end to absorb partial redefinitions of their professional selves, first inhabiting them, eventually becoming them.’

Ofsted's strapline of '*Raising standards, improving lives*' is of interest here because the process Ofsted adopts to achieve this is through measurement, accountability and surveillance. The foundation for Ofsted's objectivist stance appears to be based on an assumption that schools *need to* improve and that this will happen only through Ofsted inspections. It is part of human nature for individuals and groups to be the best that they can be and not be at the bottom of the educational ladder. Cameron and Quinn in outlining the importance of their *Competing Values Framework* suggest that:

‘No organization in the twenty-first century would boast about its constancy, sameness or status quo compared to ten years ago. Stability is interpreted more often as stagnation than steadiness, and organisations that are not in the business of change and transition are generally viewed as recalcitrant.’

Cameron and Quinn (2006, p.1)

There are similarities here to the stance adopted by HMCI Sir Michael Wilshaw, ‘...if we have any ambition as a nation to compete with the best education systems in the OECD, then “good” has to be the only acceptable standard’

(2014). The issue for inspectors and schools is the nature of what is educationally important to be inspected to constitute being “good”. Waters (2011) interviewed by Bangs, MacBeath and Galton makes the case: ‘If we believe that health, civic participation, respect, capacity for further learning, being responsible are all what we want, we should measure schools on that, and not be measuring schools on a very narrow range’ (Bangs, MacBeath and Galton, 2011, p.119). Indeed Bangs, MacBeath and Galton go on to suggest that many features of schools cannot be captured by the ‘snapshot’ approach of Ofsted (2011, p.120). Ofsted’s narrow range of values underpin an outcomes based philosophy through which schools are measured, judged and accordingly improve. While Matthews and Sammons (2004) reported that Ofsted inspections do improve schools, others (Chapman, 2001; Jones and Tymms, 2014) hold opposing views.

### **Values, attitudes, symbolism and identity**

Values contribute to organisational identity, through the formation of group attitudes and a ‘corporate culture’. ‘The visions, values, and sense of purpose that bind an organisation together can be used as a way of helping every individual understand and absorb the mission and challenge of the whole enterprise’ (Morgan, 1997, p.102). Attitudes evolve to become lasting evaluations of the social world that are stored in our memories and contribute to the make up of our identity.

We acquire attitudes in different ways, for example, from other people through social learning (Baron and Byrne 1997, p.114). Attitudes may also be formed through classical, subliminal or instrumental conditioning as well as through

modeling and social comparison. In terms of the development of inspectors' values, modeling and social comparison provide a powerful reinforcement of attitudes. This is because new inspectors learn from experienced inspectors and compare their effectiveness through watching the performance of significant others, often adjusting to adopt effective strategies. For example, as a relatively junior inspector, a more experienced colleague explained to me how he always required cause and effect judgements to be recorded on evidence forms in relation to pupils' achievement. I could see the worth of this and adopted his approach and continue to apply it.

Eagly and Chaiken (1993) define attitudes as 'a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor' (p.1) Attitudes, similar to values, may be learned from other colleagues, peers, family members or influential personalities and 'strongly held attitudes have been found to be more stable over time and less likely to change in response to persuasive messages' (Schwartz and Bohner, 2001, p.15). Another perspective is that individuals may hold multiple attitudes about a subject or object and draw down on different ones at different points in time (Wilson, 1998) and that new attitudes may override, but not replace, old ones. Hitlin (2003), referring to Goffman's (1963) work on social identity argues that 'the general identity-values of a society may be fully entrenched nowhere, and yet they can cast some kind of shadow on the encounters everywhere in daily living' (Hitlin, 2003, p.118).

Individuals conceptualise themselves in terms of personal identity, affiliations and symbols. Here Geertz (1993) makes a strong case for man as being a 'symbolizing, conceptualizing, meaning-seeking animal' and that 'symbolic

activities...are attempts to provide orientation for an organism which cannot live in a world it is unable to understand' (pp. 140-141). In this context Geertz was referring to the symbolism of religion in the world and in particular the relationship between religion and values. However, with reference to Ofsted inspectors there is a great deal of symbolism in terms of the structural mechanism, format and inspection experience. While symbols are not the philosophical core of the inspection process they are often the things that define it to those applying it or receiving it. The fact that schools are anxious about inspections and inspectors are empowered to undertake inspections reinforces the way different individuals perceive and react to the process. 'If symbols are strategies for encompassing situations, then we need to give more attention to how people define situations and how they go about coming to terms with them.' (Geertz, 1993, p.141).

As previously discussed, professional values are likely to influence professional attitudes. Subsequently, the values and attitudes of different groups may be recognised by the symbolism of those groups, and through repetitive actions, a professional identity may become tangible rather than abstract. In this way professional identity is influenced by the way an individual perceives him/herself in a working situation as well as the perceptions of others, and may evolve over time into a professional culture. Professional culture can be seen as a mixture of shared values and shared perceptions of an identifiable and homogeneous group (Friedson, 2001) which form and influence professional identity. In this way a recognisable culture of inspection may be identifiable by those who inspect as well as those who are inspected. Hoyle and Wallace (2005) claim that members of a professional culture share ideologies, values and attitudes to

working that are specific to that working culture. The mix of values, attitudes and symbolism in the inspection process may be a strong anchor when working in different contexts with unfamiliar colleagues. Inspectors understand what is expected of them as they apply the inspection process. Here professional practice is a combination of organisational values and an individual's values applied to the inspection process. In this way professional identity and professional culture become inextricably linked to 'organisational values' (Morgan, 1997) and Deal's 'the way we do things around here' (1985).

### **Values, culture and 'the way we do things round here'**

As previously discussed, values are often shared by individuals and shared values help underpin the 'corporate culture' of organisations. 'Without shared values, members of society would be unlikely to cooperate and work together' (Haralambos and Holborn, 1996, p.6). As a result, they are often reinforced in the culture of an organisation through recognisable symbols, language, accordance and approval. Gray points out that value systems are highly personalised and are personified in normal behaviour (Gray, 1982). Normalised behaviour may be apparent in the conduct of an Ofsted inspection where it can be identified through ritualistic activities, becoming recognisable as 'the way we do things around here' (Deal, 1985). John Dewey (1916) makes a case for group values being based on perceived 'measures of worth' and desirable traits within the culture of the group (Dewey, 1916 in Lauder, Brown, Dillabough and Halsey 2006, p.92). Dewey suggests that to make a societal standard two elements must be considered:

‘How numerous and varied are the interests which are consciously shared? How full and free is the interplay with other forms of association?’

Dewey, 1916 in Lauder, Brown, Dillabough and Halsey, 2006, p.92

In relation to Ofsted the values of inspectors are narrowly focused on achieving the inspection goals in a short period of time. Their values may have some affiliation with those of the school but their purpose is to seek evidence to secure judgements rather than to embrace or understand the deep values of the school and those working within it. In this context, any conflict or misunderstandings that occur between inspectors and teachers may result from a mismatch between the values of inspectors and the narrowness of their objectives and the broad values of teachers as they work with children in a range of different contexts. The potential for conflict and misunderstanding between individuals may also occur because of the nature of human interaction. The nature of human interaction between inspectors and teachers may also contribute to a degree of variation within the inspection process and this will be an area to be investigated in the research.

Bottery (2004) makes the case that ‘personal identification with a group provides a sense of historical continuity and psychological security’ (p. 139). However, when ‘cultural reification’ occurs, he concludes that terms like ‘culture’, ‘community’ and ‘ethnic group’ become ‘more than physical and psychological places for shared norms and values: they can become places where *truth* is decided and stimulated’ (p. 139). Here, he poses a concern about the nature of the lack of ‘access for communicative critique by outsiders’, based on the ‘ascribed primacy over the individuals within it’ (pp. 139-140). In this

context, 'issues of power – who gets to decide which ideas are counted as true – may come to dominate internally' (Bottery, 2004, p. 140). This position resonates with Weber's 'social stratification' (Weber, 1948, pp.180-195) whereby Ofsted holds authority over inspectors and schools and through the *truths* it defines for inspection purposes.

Cultures involve 'major ideological systems and practice that constitute the conditions of our daily affairs' (Anderson and Englehardt, 2001, p. 59). Anderson and Englehardt (2001) argue that no culture operates independently of other cultures. However, Banks (2004) notes that different public sector organisations find it difficult to work together as a result of 'different professional identities, values and cultures' (p. 135). Successful organisations reflect the cultural beliefs and values of the people within them and 'for values to be genuinely embraced and lived they must stand for what is of significance to the population' (Lee and Shafer, 2005, p.76). The values of teachers have become fixed over time as they work together sharing knowledge, skills and practice that they believe to be effective in educating young people. New teachers are inducted into these practices so that the values of the organisation and those of the teachers become entwined over time. In terms of school inspections, Ofsted focuses on performance, outcomes and accountability and in this way, a school's 'service ideal' is different to that of Ofsted and Ofsted inspectors. Ofsted's outcomes focused 'service ideal' reinforces its legitimacy because it has authority to hold schools to account through a reporting system that rewards or punishes schools.

These illustrations show that professional groups have contrasting sets of values and these may be in conflict rather than in harmony with each other. The ideologies, value systems and social constructs underpinning schools have grown wider over time which differs from those that have influenced the development of the Ofsted inspection process. While drawn from the same profession, they have been created differently to achieve different goals. Schools' values have evolved over generations through specific rituals, concordance, care and well-being. The values of Ofsted inspections are driven by an outcomes model and constructed around notions of accountability, surveillance and making judgements about pupils and schools' performance in a limited time scale. In many schools the shared values and 'social capital' have created a strong bond over time. In contrast to this inspectors rarely work together on a regular basis and the 'social glue' that maintains their value system is Ofsted's inspection criteria, Ofsted's code of conduct and that they generally enjoy what they do. In this respect, the impact of applying and reapplying Ofsted's norms will contribute to the maintenance of a 'corporate culture' through a set of shared expectations which are similar to Deal's 'the way we do things round here'. However, the values contained within Ofsted's code of conduct, working practices and culture, may not be universally accepted by all inspectors. At times, inspectors' personal values may override Ofsted's values as individuals act and interact during inspections and in this way individual inspectors may mediate their work depending on the context in which they find themselves.

## **Socialisation, conformity, compliance, power and influence**

### **i. Socialisation**

Socialisation is 'the process by which a society's behaviour patterns, standards and beliefs are transmitted from one individual to another' (Schaffer, 1995, p.1). According to Taylor, et al., (1996) the main agencies of socialisation are family, school, community, workplace and mass media. In more recent times social networking can also be added to this list. Individuals make a conscious decision to become Ofsted inspectors when they make their initial applications. In so doing they acknowledge the things Ofsted will expect of them and demonstrate a willingness to conform to Ofsted's values. From Ofsted's perspective it is important for the organisation to be seen to be objective, impartial and unbiased in its work. The significance of this is to reinforce its credibility with central government, parents and with schools. To ensure that Ofsted maintains its legitimacy and the inspection process remains consistent over time it then becomes essential to recruit, train and deploy inspectors who are dependable to carry out the work. The process of socialisation and absorption of Ofsted's values commences during assessment and training. Over time inspectors are further socialised through the strength of the organisation's 'corporate culture' and through 'induction' (Kelman and Hamilton, 1989).

### **ii. Conformity and compliance**

Previous illustrations have identified the importance of Ofsted's values in helping to create a 'corporate culture' and professional identity for inspectors, through regular inspection practice and adherence to Ofsted's code of conduct.

When inspectors accept Ofsted's values, culture and objectives then it is likely that there will be a high degree of conformity to Ofsted's objectives amongst the national body of inspectors in the way that they carry out their work. The majority of inspectors are likely to conform because they believe in Ofsted's core value that inspection 'raises standards and improves lives'. As a consequence of their acceptance of that premise, inspectors enjoy what they are doing because they believe they are doing good work. Consequently, it is improbable that inspectors would volunteer to be trained to carry out a process that they did not believe in. Furthermore, for many, the inspection process is a source of financial income or helps to inform their work in schools as advisers or independent consultants. Therefore, to be non-conformist in some way would predictably lead to complications regarding their role as inspectors and could even lead to dismissal from inspection work.

As afforded earlier there are a variety of reasons why inspectors conform to Ofsted's objectives which include financial reward and believing that they are doing purposeful work. Professional kudos is a possible further incentive for some and for other inspectors, to feel accepted into a highly visible minority educational group could be another reason. Consequently, a degree of normative and informational influence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Asch, 1963) may occur which encourages inspectors to conform because they want to be accepted by Ofsted and their peers. However, while working within Ofsted's service ideal and remaining true to Ofsted's core values, it is entirely possible that variation may occur during inspections as individual inspectors mediate the management of the process.

Once they have been trained and 'signed-off' as practising Ofsted inspectors, they are afforded a degree of autonomy in the way that they work in schools. While this is the case, Ofsted applies a number of mechanisms to quality assure the effectiveness of inspectors and ensure control over their work. These include training and assessment, monitoring of inspectors' work in schools, quality assurance of inspection reports and post-inspection feedback from headteachers. Therefore, Ofsted uses two strategies to reinforce conformity. The first is to recruit individuals whose values are in close alignment with those of Ofsted and the second strategy, despite a level of practical autonomy, is to micro-manage the work of inspectors. These strategies help to create a 'corporate culture' of professional behaviours and expectations amongst inspectors in the way that they conduct themselves, think and perform. As a result, inspectors become socialised into what Ofsted expects of them and in this way are likely to conform to Ofsted's values and working requirements when they are working autonomously in schools.

Kelman and Hamilton (1989) perceive compliance as the process 'whereby individuals are influenced by others in the hope of achieving a 'favourable reaction, or avoiding an unfavourable reaction, from the other' (p.104). In the case of Ofsted inspectors, they are regularly monitored and assessed by HMI but they are also under scrutiny by schools. Therefore to receive a 'favourable' reaction inspectors must be seen to diligently apply Ofsted's inspection criteria, operate within the parameters of Ofsted's code of conduct but also satisfy schools that they have inspected in a 'fair and reliable' manner (Ofsted, 2014b, p.24). Morgan (1997) argues that the 'motions of the organizational structure thus produced are made to operate as precisely as possible through patterns of

authority – for example, in terms of job responsibilities and the right to give orders and to exact obedience’ (p.18).

Kelman and Hamilton (1989, p.126) argue that once the legitimacy of a system has been established, ‘obedience further depends on the perceived legitimacy of the specific authorities who are issuing the order in the name of that system’. They make the case that legitimacy is perceived in the way people ‘comport themselves’ (p.126). While Ofsted inspectors do not wear a standard uniform, they wear a mantle of inspection experience and perhaps carry out their work in a ritualised way referring to a standard set of inspection criteria, using specific and precise language of measurement and judgements. The use of specific language and the symbolism of vocabulary helps to bestow status on the inspection process and reinforces social stratification between inspectors and schools. Labov (1991) argues that the ‘social distribution of language’ is linked to ‘social stratification’. In terms of inspectors and schools, the use of Ofsted’s language may be accepted and help to reinforce the primacy of inspectors over schools. While not claiming that ‘social stratification’ exists between inspectors and schools, during an inspection the language of Ofsted will be substantially used by inspectors and most probably be adopted by teachers during discussions. This not only helps to give primacy to the work of inspectors in schools but helps them to sanction their work with each other.

### **iii. Power and influence**

The concept of power is closely related to that of Authority. The influence of power is dependent on who owns different types of resources (French and Raven, 1959; Frost and Stahelski, 1988). When considering Ofsted’s legitimacy,

a degree of power exists because Ofsted holds schools to account for educational standards and inspectors are also held responsible for the effective conduct of inspections. While this may be the case, it is possible for individual inspectors to exercise a degree of influence through professional autonomy. Kelman and Hamilton (1989) suggest that individuals modify, adapt and arrange 'externally derived values' as 'they are integrated into the ever-evolving value system that is unique for each person (p.108)' Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004) assert that to accept the legitimacy of a system to a person 'may conceal a range of states of knowledge and a variety of attitudes', which may range from 'reluctant acquiescence...through lukewarm acceptance to enthusiastic approbation' (p. 155). As outlined earlier many inspectors may approve of the work they do because their values are closely aligned with those of Ofsted but this may not be a universal position for all inspectors.

'A person may develop an internalized commitment to certain societal roles and readiness to adhere to certain societal rules because he sees these as necessary to the fulfillment of collective values that he shares. Similarly, the person may be committed to the societal rules out of identification, accepting the need to adhere to them faithfully as one of the requirements of a role that has become central to his self-definition.'

Kelman and Hamilton, (1989, pp. 113-114)

As argued earlier in the chapter, many inspectors hold a similar ideological position to that of Ofsted, in that they consider inspections to be good for schools; quality and standards can be measured and quantified by inspectors and through a defined a set of inspection 'truths' Ofsted is perceived to be helping schools to improve. Other inspectors may hold a different ideological position and may remain detached from Ofsted's core values and principles,

believing that other educational factors beyond Ofsted also help schools to improve. Those inspectors who hold such an interpretivist stance are unlikely to passively accept that Ofsted's 'truths' are absolute. A further group may hold a pragmatic position in that they accept to undertake Ofsted inspections because they hold a belief that it is beneficial for children but they mediate the process when working in the context of schools.

### **Inspectors as 'street-level bureaucrats' and constraints on achieving service-level values**

Working within the specification of Ofsted's code of conduct, inspectors aspire to do a good job in terms of their own professional and personal values as well as within the expectations of Ofsted. However, over time contractual changes have occurred to the inspection process which have placed additional pressures on inspectors to effectively carry out inspections while fulfilling Ofsted's expectations. The first constraint relates to a perception held amongst inspectors that while the daily tariff has been reduced, there is more to do during an inspection and the impact of this creates pressure on inspection teams to achieve Ofsted's goals within the allotted time. It is possible that a lack of time to complete the work, as well as the inclusion of additional inspection activities, imbues a belief amongst inspectors that inspections are no longer as thorough as they were. Lipsky (1980), referring to people working in public services as 'street-level bureaucrats', acknowledges the dilemma professionals face when wishing to carry out their work to high standards while at the same time facing the constraints of time and high case-loads. The consequence of this is that 'they typically cannot fulfil their mandated responsibilities' (p. 29) and

resort to developing ‘coping behaviours’ and ‘routines’ to complete bureaucratic expectations of them while facing circumstantial constraints. In this way Ofsted inspectors may be similar to Lipsky’s ‘street-level bureaucrats’.

‘Street-level bureaucrats ... believe themselves to be doing the best they can under adverse circumstances, and they develop techniques to salvage service and decision-making values within the limits imposed upon them by the structure of the work. They develop conceptions of their work and of their clients that narrow the gap between their personal and work limitations and the service ideal.’

Lipsky, (1980, p.xiii)

While trying to uphold the service ideal and apply Ofsted’s expectations, the reality of inspecting schools may require a degree of compromise between ‘service ideal’ and contextual necessity. Should this be the case inspectors are liable to act as pragmatists, mediating their work through the application of coping strategies while upholding the values implicit within Ofsted’s code of conduct. The second constraint emerges from the way in which inspectors gather evidence and make judgements. Inspectors are expected to uphold Ofsted’s objectivist methodology but are also expected take ‘bureaucratic responsibility’, applying a degree of ‘autonomous power’ and exercising discretion when making judgements.

Accordingly, decisions and judgements will be influenced by the values of Ofsted’s ‘service ideal’ and the ‘corporate culture’ of inspectors. However, applying Lipsky’s (1980) concept of inspectors as ‘Street-Level Bureaucrats’, it is likely that within the day-to-day routine of inspection, choices will be made by individual inspectors. Decisions will be influenced not just by Ofsted’s

expectations but also by inspectors' personal values and their desire to do the best that they can within the constraints of time and the context of the inspection. While the inspection framework is a clearly defined and criteria driven document, it is entirely possible that inspectors may mediate their work through the choices they make. In this way, knowing the volume of work to be achieved, the working practices of experienced inspectors may include a set of coping strategies that help them to successfully negotiate their work. In this way 'autonomous power' may lead to a balance being struck by inspectors to complete everything in the allotted time. Consequently, Ofsted's 'service ideal' which is based on objectivity may be compromised by the way inspectors carry out their work.

## **Summary and Discussion**

This chapter has explored how inspectors engage with Ofsted processes. To do that it has considered the nature of values and how they contribute to individuals' attitudes and identity. It has examined the way in which values help to define organisations and the extent to which rituals, symbolism and shared language help to induct and socialize individuals into organisations. In this way, organisational cultures are established in which core values are internalised by individuals through rehearsal and practice, materialising into 'the way we do things around here' (Deal, 1985). Furthermore, the constructed identity of an organisation such as Ofsted is recognised by those who work within it as well as by those who are in receipt of its services. Consequently, the core values of Ofsted are reinforced and affirmed by those who inspect schools and apply Ofsted's 'service ideal' (Banks, 2004). Over time inspectors create a corporate

culture, which acts as 'social glue' (Strike, 2003) to their work and the process of inspection.

The chapter has also begun to analyse the nature of inspectors, inspectorial approaches to their work and their ideological positions. It has explored the extent to which some inspectors may be fully aligned to the values of Ofsted, complying with Ofsted's constructed knowledge, truths and beliefs, while others may hold a different epistemological perspective. While Ofsted expects inspectors to conform to its core values and inspection protocols as defined in its code of conduct (Ofsted, 2005a, 2009a, 2014a & 2005b, 2009b, 2014b) a degree of autonomous power also exists within the process which may afford some inspectors opportunities to mediate the management of their work. This therefore, creates a dilemma for Ofsted in that it is impractical for the organisation to micro-manage the work of every inspector, while at the same time it is necessary to allow inspectors sufficient freedom to make professional judgements.

The chapter has identified that there is a degree of interplay between different sets of values, (those of Ofsted, individual inspectors and teachers in schools) during an inspection. Furthermore, while schools conform to the inspection process, recognising the legitimacy of inspectors to carry out the work, inspectors may exercise varying degrees of autonomous power within the process, as they pragmatically mediate the management of the work, to ensure that Ofsted's expectations are fulfilled in the allotted time. This may result in the process of inspection being conducted differently by inspectors applying the same inspection criteria while working within the parameters defined by Ofsted. As a consequence, the definition 'the way we do things round here' may from

time to time be interwoven with 'the way *I* do things round here' in different contexts. Should this be the norm, then it is likely to have a profound impact on the consistency of inspections and challenges Ofsted's narrative that inspections are objective.

The next chapter considers the best way to investigate the research questions. It explores research concepts and the reasons underpinning the adoption of a mixed methods approach.

## Chapter 3

### Research Methodology

#### Introduction

The previous two chapters provided the contextual, political and theoretical background for this research. This chapter will address the sub-question *What is the best methodology for investigating the major research question?* It will provide a philosophical, methodological and procedural justification of the approach taken to carry out the research.

The chapter is in three parts. In order to provide a philosophical justification of the research approach adopted it is necessary to begin by examining the fundamental beliefs that underpin the quantitative and qualitative research paradigms; the key principles of each approach and the marrying of paradigms into multi-method approaches. Part two will provide a justification of the research methodology adopted for the thesis. Part three will describe how the chosen methods were used in practice.

#### Part One

##### The nature of ontological and epistemological beliefs

‘People have long been concerned to come to grips with their environment and to understand the nature of the phenomena it presents to their senses.’

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001, p.3)

Approaches to research are based on a set of philosophical beliefs about the nature of reality. Central to the ontological debate is the question of whether 'objective entities... have a reality which is external to social actors or whether they can and should be considered social constructions built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors', (Bryman, 2004, p.16).

An Objectivist ontological position maintains that 'social phenomena confront us as external facts' (Bryman, 2004, p.16) and that it is 'a given "out there" in the world' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.6). Those who lean towards a scientific or naturalistic paradigm make the case that 'the world we inhabit has an ontological reality, an existence that is not dependent on our perception, understanding or descriptions of that reality or world' (Plowright, 2011, p.177) and is 'independent of the researcher' (Creswell, 1994, p.4). In this way, knowledge is considered to be 'tangible' and 'objects have an independent existence and are not dependent for it on the knower' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.6). Knowledge is therefore arrived at through 'the gathering of facts that provide the basis of laws – *inductivism* [and] science can be conducted in a way that is value free – *objective*' (Bryman, 2004, p. 11). This *empirical* paradigm assumes that the researcher will apply replicable scientific methods that are formulated from a hypothesis, which can then be tested, leading to *generalizability* (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001; Opie, 2006; Yin, 2011).

In contrast Qualitative researchers subscribe to positions such as phenomenology, constructivism, naturalism and interpretivism. Interpretivism has spawned a number of anti-positivist positions, which include phenomenology, ethnography and symbolic interactionism. The central tenet of

these research positions (which began with the work of Max Weber and Alfred Schutz during the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and continued with George Herbert Mead) is to establish how individuals make sense of their world. In keeping with these positions, qualitative researchers seek to apply strategies which allow insights 'into how an individual creates, modifies and interprets the world in which they find themselves' (Opie, 2006, p.9). Furthermore, it allows for greater affiliation between the researcher and participants or social context (Yin, 2011, p.42), enabling qualitative researchers to take a more pragmatic stance based on a perception that social science is the understanding and recording of the 'subjective meaning of social action' (Bryman, 2004, p.13). Their position is to reject the scientific procedures and protocols adopted by quantitative researchers in favour of attention being paid to individual participants' interactions, observations and descriptions of the world they see. Qualitative researchers see this as facilitating a broader and richer interpretation of social science. Further consideration of the nature of the different paradigms will now take place followed by a discussion of the approach adopted to address this research.

## **Quantitative Research**

Quantitative researchers uphold an objectivist viewpoint and believe that the world can be investigated by using the same methods and practices adopted by the natural scientist (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001; Bryman, 2004; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Plowright, 2011). A positivist stance assumes that social science investigations 'can be formulated in terms parallel to those of natural science...[and] may be characterised by its claim that

science provides us with the clearest possible ideal of knowledge' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, pp.8-9). Applying a positivist approach to educational research will:

'almost certainly lead to procedures, which result in the collection of quantitative data and testing of hypotheses, such as data from questionnaires and hard facts from experimental work,'

Opie (2006, p.8)

In this scientific context the role of the researcher is considered to be neutral.

Features of the quantitative approach include:

**(a) Precise concepts that can be measured**

'Concepts are the building blocks of theory and represent the points around which social research is conducted' (Bryman, 2004, p.65). To examine our world more closely we require a set of concepts through which we are able to define and share meanings. Cohen, Manion and Morrison define a concept as 'the relationship between the word (or symbol) and an idea or conception' and that concepts 'enable us to impose some sort of meaning on the world' (2001, p.13). They can be measured and then be used to provide meanings to aspects of the social world. Within a quantitative research project 'the researcher attempts to eliminate bias' (Creswell, 1994, p.116) and the formation of an appropriate hypothesis through which concepts can be measured helps to do this. An important feature of the scientific method is to show how findings have been arrived at, but essentially that methods are 'sufficiently clear for fellow-scientists to repeat them' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.15). However, concepts are difficult to define and issues of validity may occur when there is a

mismatch between concept definition and the reliability of the measurement design.

### **(b) Cause and effect**

Quantitative researchers consider that 'knowledge has to be built upon demonstrable facts or observations' (Opie, 2006, p.7). The epistemological differences between the purely objective position, 'knowledge as being hard, real and capable of being transmitted in a tangible form' and the 'more subjective spiritual or even transcendental kind' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.6) has polarised the perceptions of researchers and has influenced research design for generations. Beck (1979) argues that many positivists hold a strong belief in social determinism, in that the way 'men behave is determined by their society and culture' (p.35). Adopting a pure objectivist standpoint would assume a degree of *determinism*: i.e. 'events have causes and these can be found' (Opie, 2006, p.7) through observing or measuring that which exists. The outcome from research findings may enable laws to be formulated 'to account for these events' (Opie, 2006, p.7). This leads to greater reliability through 'consistency of measures' whereby observations may be reapplied or tests can be retested leading to the same findings (Bryman, 2004, p.70). However, establishing causal relationships between 'things' is not always possible. 'There is a causal relationship between two things if the incidence or existence of one thing guarantees the incidence of the other, all else being equal' (Opie, 2006, p. 62). Exploring relationships between variables means 'searching for evidence that the variation in one variable coincides with variation in another variable' (Bryman, 2004, p.230). Furthermore, Bryman (2004) asserts that when analysing relationships between variables it is the *relationship* that is uncovered

and 'there are cases when what appears to be causal influence working in one direction actually works in the other way' (Bryman, 2004, p.230) and a criterion of 'good quantitative research is frequently the extent to which there is confidence in the researcher's causal inferences' Bryman, 2004, p.77).

### **(c) Generalisability**

Quantitative researchers subscribe to a view that the social world may be treated like the natural world and seek 'universal laws which explain and govern the reality which is being observed' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.7). Here the researcher is concerned with the ability to 'say that his or her findings can be generalised beyond the confines of the particular context in which the research was conducted' (Bryman, 2004, p.76). Opie (2006, p.5) notes that while there is no need to produce research results that can be generalised the findings may have important implications for future research. However, Bryman also argues that because there is such a strong concern to be able to generalise within the quantitative paradigm, 'that the limits of the generalizability of findings are frequently forgotten or sidestepped' (Bryman, 2004, p.77). Finally, Opie comments that the 'reliability' of the research is more important than its 'generalisability' (2006, p.5).

### **(d) Reliability, replication and validity**

The key quality control issue when conducting quantitative research deals with the '*validity* of a study and its findings' (Yin, 2011, p.78). Ensuring that the research data is properly collected and interpreted is essential to support the conclusions of the study. Validity is concerned with accuracy and it is crucial that the data and its interpretation 'accurately describe the phenomena being

researched' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.107). According to Bryman (2000), because 'concepts and their measurement are so central to quantitative research, there is much concern about the technical requirements of operationalization' (p.28). This leads to researchers adopting methods that consider validity and reliability in which different approaches to measuring are adopted to 'test for the validity of a measure' (Bryman, 2000, p.29). Bell (1999) states that 'Reliability is the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions' (p.64). According to Yin (2011, p.80), having 'a skeptical attitude' drives the researcher to collect more data from more than one source to ensure confidence in the 'study's ultimate, description, attribution, or interpretation.' While replication provides a means of 'checking the extent to which findings are applicable to other contexts' it is also a way of checking for 'the biases of the investigator' (Bryman, 2000, p.37). Critics of quantitative research see it as being overly deductive and focused on finding causal explanation through the application of scientific methods. The target of anti-positivists in this criticism 'has been science's mechanistic and reductionist view of nature which, by definition, excludes notions of choice, freedom, individuality, and moral responsibility' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.17). Critics of quantitative research purists argue that 'the social world we are dealing with, has such a complicated set of interacting causal factors that we cannot isolate the events under consideration from this complex reality. There can never be the laboratory purity of the scientific world where standard and limited conditions can be assured' (Pring, 2004, p.65).

## Qualitative Research

Qualitative research strategies are 'characterised by a concern for the individual' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.22). The followers of qualitative research argue that positivist, natural science models are inappropriate for studying people. Bryman (2000) acknowledges: 'Much of the argument levelled against the orthodoxy of quantitative research derived from the growing awareness and influence of phenomenological ideas which gained a considerable following in the 1960s' (p.3). From a qualitative perspective social science can therefore be viewed as a subjective rather than an objective process. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) offer the view that anti-positivists would argue that the behaviour of 'individuals' can only be understood by the researcher sharing their frame of reference: understanding of individuals' interpretations of the world around them has to come from the inside, not the outside' (p.20). Beck (1979) encapsulates the interpretivist, anti-positivist stance in the following way:

'The purpose of social science is to understand social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the action which they take within that reality. Since the social sciences cannot penetrate to what lies behind social reality, they must work directly with the rules he devises for coping with it. While the social sciences do not reveal ultimate truth, they do help us to make sense of our world. What the social sciences offer is explanation, clarification and demystification of the social forms which man has created around himself.'

The strength of qualitative research is in the way it offers the researcher an opportunity to get close to the context and inside it.

**(a) Understanding social phenomena through the eyes of those being studied**

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) provide a 'generic definition' for qualitative research.

They define it as:

'a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (pp.4-5).

A key factor in the qualitative research process is to investigate how individuals create their world and how they perceive themselves in it. In this way, proponents of qualitative research methods 'claim that it is only through qualitative research that the world can be studied through the eyes of the people who are studied' (Bryman, 2004, p.441). To do this, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that to try to understand as fully as possible the extent to which participants interpret and ascribe meaning to their everyday lives then 'studies must be set in their natural settings as context is heavily implicated in meaning' (p.39).

Critics of qualitative research methods argue that because it is important for the researcher to get close to the research context and participants, his/her personality, demographic profile and traits may also influence the research and its outcomes. Yin (2011) makes the point that the researcher's demographic profile '(gender, age, race and ethnicity and social class) ... might not only

affect the *research lens* through which the researcher interprets events but also the ways in which participants might reflexively react to the researcher's presence, including the participants' choice of topics or responses in field conversations' (p.42). Bryman (2000, 2004) refers to the 'reaction on the part of those being investigated to the investigator and his or her research instruments' as 'reactivity' (2000, p.112). Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, p.79) refer to this as 'best behaviour syndrome' by which [reactivity] 'creates a variety of undesirable consequences in that people's behaviour or responses may not be indicative of their normal behaviour or views' (Bryman, 2000, p.112). Furthermore, Bryman (2000) acknowledges that it is rare for ethnographers to adopt a stance of being 'sponges' (p.73) 'whereby they absorb subjects' interpretations.' Usually they have a focus of interest. This means that a qualitative researcher may apply greater meaning to certain interactions, responses or perceptions than others and in so doing applies a degree of influence to what is essentially a subjective and interpretivist research process.

### **(b) Description and the importance of context**

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) make the case that 'qualitative researchers believe that rich descriptions of the social world are valuable' (p.10) and Geertz (1993) argues that 'ethnography' is 'thick description' (pp.9-10). The level of detail provided in qualitative studies is 'important for the qualitative researcher, because of their significance for their subjects and also because the details provide an account of the context within which people's behaviour takes place' (Bryman, 2004, p.280). To underpin this point Bryman (2000) refers to Burgess's (1983) ethnographic study of a comprehensive school in which the

broad detail of the social interaction that takes place within the school is recorded.

‘Thus an important contribution of descriptive detail for the ethnographer is to the mapping out of a context for the understanding of subjects’ interpretations of what is going on and for the researcher to produce analyses and explanations which do justice to the milieu in which his or her observations and interviews are conducted.’

Bryman (2000, p.64)

Quantitative researchers are concerned with the ‘soundness of findings that specify a causal connection’ (Bryman, 2004, p.30) through manipulation of variables and demonstrating that the data accurately supports ‘the phenomena being measured’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.107). However, for qualitative researchers *ecological validity* is important. Here qualitative researchers adopt a naturalistic stance and seek to collect data through *not* manipulating the research conditions. ‘The intention here is to give accurate portrayals of the realities of social situations in their own terms, in their natural or conventional settings’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.110). To capture the natural everyday life conditions of participants ethnographers may adopt less structured research methods, especially when interviewing and it is through the ‘depth, richness and scope of the data achieved’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.105) that qualitative researchers secure *ecological validity* for the research. In this way researchers provide more than a descriptive record of their research projects but also seek to analyse the environments, circumstances and context of that which they investigate. Bryman asserts ‘one of the main reasons for the ethnographer’s endorsement of such descriptive detail is to allow a backdrop whereby events and situations can be viewed

within a social context (2000, p.65). In this way 'a preference for contextualism' enables the ethnographer to understand the connection between 'events, behaviour, etc. in their context' (Bryman, 2000, p.65). Positivist research methods have difficulty in showing the contextual relationship between events, interactions, cause and effect; and 'the 'social, institutional, and environmental conditions within which people's lives take place' (Yin, 2011, p.8). However, advocates of qualitative research have been criticised for their adoption of rich descriptions because they can tend towards 'an anecdotal approach to the use of data in relation to conclusions or explanations' (Bryman, 2000, p.77). Here the complaint of 'anecdotalism' questions 'the *validity* of much qualitative research' (Silverman, 2000, p.177). Another criticism of qualitative research methods is that the presence of the researcher may 'influence the generation of data' (Burgess, 1997, p.144) and Yin (2011) acknowledges that the 'interpretation of findings' of the research is influenced by the researcher's 'meanings and interpretations' (p.272). Furthermore, in longitudinal ethnographic research projects there is a danger that researchers can 'lose their sense of being a researcher and become wrapped up in the world view of the people they are studying' (Bryman, 2004, p.302). This is known as 'going native'.

### **(c) Trustworthiness.**

*Trustworthiness* is used to establish that the research is carried out in a 'publicly accessible manner' (Yin, 2011, p. 19). Accordingly, all qualitative research procedures must be documented so that others, who may wish to replicate the research or refine it, are in a position to do so. For the data to be fully trustworthy, the protocols for the research in relation to the gathering of data

need to be able to withstand close scrutiny by others (Yardley, 2009, pp. 243-250). Critical of the application of standards of validity and reliability to qualitative research and the notion of 'absolute truths' Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that in researching the social world, *trustworthiness* is made up of four criteria. These are: *credibility*; *transferability*; *dependability* and *confirmability*. *Credibility* is important to ensure that the research is 'carried out according to the canons of good practice' (Bryman, 2004, p.275). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) credibility in naturalistic inquiry is achieved through: prolonged engagement in the field; persistent observation; triangulation; peer debriefing; negative case analysis and respondent validation.

#### **(d) Multi-strategy research**

'Mixed methods' or 'multi-strategy research' (Bryman, 2004) is the process by which the researcher applies more than one research method within the same single research project. Denzin and Lincoln describe the multiple methodologies of qualitative research as a *bricolage*. In other words 'a pieced-together, close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in a concrete situation' (1998, p.3). Denzin and Lincoln (2003, p.4-5) apply the analogy of 'quilt maker' to the *bricoleur* because the researcher 'borrows from many different disciplines.'

Brannen, (2005), makes the case that greater convergence between the paradigms rather than less, strengthens research and that increasingly methods will be mixed because there is a need for research to become more flexible. Gorard and Taylor, (2004), reinforce the argument that methodologies are interchangeable at a technical level and that to be effective researchers, a

range of techniques should be used rather than on a reliance on ontological preferences. 'Our choice of method is determined by the needs of the investigation not the personal preferences or fears of the investigator' (Gorard and Taylor, 2004, p.3). They note that greater convergence between the paradigms enables the researcher to select methods that 'fit the research question being posed' (2004, p.4). Gorard and Taylor (2004, p.150) advocate a more pragmatic approach to social science research and suggest that the distinctions made between quantitative and qualitative methods are 'exaggerated'. While some researchers consider the chosen methods to reflect a 'commitment to a certain kind of truth', Gorard and Taylor, (2004, p.150) use Tashakkori and Teddlie's, 2003 work to argue that in real life, methods can be 'separated from the epistemology from which they emerge', so that researchers who adopt either quantitative and qualitative methods do not have to be tied to either a 'positivist' or a 'interpretivist' paradigm.

'... we therefore need to reconfigure our methods classifications in some way to make it clearer that the use of qualitative and quantitative research methods is a choice, driven largely by the situation and the research questions, not the personality, skill or ideology of the researcher.'

Gorard and Taylor (2004, p.2)

Hammersley (1996) proposes that multi-strategy research can be used in three different ways to secure robust research outcomes. These are 'triangulation', 'facilitation' and 'complementarity'. **Triangulation** is the strategy by which the researcher uses two or more methods or sources of data in the study of social phenomena or human behaviour (Bryman, 2004, p.275; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.112). The term 'triangulation' derives from trigonometry whereby positions can be defined by examining where different data intersect. It

is the process by which 'the results of an investigation employing a method associated with one research strategy are cross-checked against the results of using a method associated with the other research strategy' (Bryman, 2004, p.454). Furthermore, qualitative researchers 'believe that triangulation may improve the reliability of a single method' (Silverman, 2000, pp.98-99) and Denzin and Lincoln (1998) make the case that 'the use of multiple methods, or triangulation reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question' Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, pp.3-4). Furthermore, in acknowledging that 'objective reality can never be captured' they propose that 'triangulation is not a tool or a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p.4).

Hammersley (1996) proposes that **facilitation** is the process by which one research strategy is used to aid or enhance the other strategy adopted and **complementarity** is the process by which different elements of a research programme can be investigated using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Klaus Bruhn Jensen argues that adopting both paradigms to complement each other strengthens the validity and reliability of a research programme (2002, p.254). While arguments remain that oppose the marrying of the two paradigms because some consider them to be 'grounded in incompatible epistemological principles' (Bryman, 2004, p.454), fusion is seen to be possible when quantitative and qualitative methods are brought together as practical tools in a 'technical version' to answer the research question. For example, the data emanating from quantitative studies 'are often depicted as hard, rigorous and reliable' while qualitative data is routinely described as 'rich' and 'deep' (Bryman, 1988, p.103).

### **(e) Fuzzy Generalisation**

Yin (2011) articulates that qualitative research is 'multifaceted' which 'embraces a mosaic of orientations as well as methodological choices' (p.11). What this does is to allow the researcher to customise the research to meet the requirements of the study. The important thing is to use methods that answer the research questions rather than 'adhering to some narrow methodological orthodoxy' (Patton, 2002, p.264). Using a multi-strategy approach enables some general estimates to be made from the findings from both quantitative and qualitative paradigms.

Bassey (2000) suggests that through 'the principle of 'fuzziness' it is possible to develop the idea of 'fuzzy generalisation' and 'best estimates of trustworthiness [BET]' (pp.1-16). His discourse draws from the field of fuzzy logic which is an approach to computing based on degrees of truth rather than *is it true* or *is it false*? Making predictions in social settings has been problematic for educational researchers in the past because of the complex nature of the social world and that there 'are too many uncontrolled variables in most social settings for straightforward [predictive] statements to be made' (Bassey, 2000, p.1). However, Bassey argues that by making a professional judgement 'expressed in a fuzzy form' it is possible using a 'best estimate of trustworthiness [BET]' for a researcher to say that in most 'circumstances' the prediction will be true. In terms of generalisation Bassey makes the distinction between scientific generalisation in which 'particular events *do* lead to particular consequences' and fuzzy generalisation in which particular events *may* lead to particular consequences' (2000, p.2). He argues that 'fuzzy generalisation' may provide a powerful tool for researchers to communicate with potential users of research

and also to develop a cumulative approach to the creation of educational theory' (Bassey, 2000, p.13). According to Creswell (1994) adopting a mixed methods approach to research design strengthens the process, not only through 'triangulation' but because the methods may be used to 'complement' each other; 'developmentally' where one method is used sequentially to help inform the second method. A mixed methods approach may also help to 'initiate' fresh perspectives and 'add scope and breadth to a study' through 'expansion' (p.175). Adopting a 'mixed methods' approach is 'increasingly recognised as the third major research paradigm' (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner, 2007, p.112) because it 'frequently results in superior research' (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.14) compared to mono-method approaches.

## **Part Two**

The major research question of this research asked:

*'To what extent do Ofsted inspectors' values influence the inspection process?'*

The sub-research question that this chapter explores is: *What are the best ways of investigating these issues?*

## **Justification of Research Methods**

While the ontological roots of each paradigm are different, mixed methods research 'offers an option that actually tries to take advantage of the similarities and differences in qualitative and quantitative methods' (Yin 2011, p.289). As a consequence, and despite the admonishment of purists, contemporary support for mixed methods has grown (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003 and 2009; Greene

2005; Johnson, 2006; Creswell, 2009; Plowright 2011). 'Because they cover complex programmatic topics or interventions and often at multiple sites, evaluations tend to need a variety of methods' (Yin, 2011, p.290).

In this research the questionnaire phase preceded a small sample of participants who were subsequently interviewed using a qualitative interviewing approach. Selecting participants from the questionnaires to be interviewed allowed the chosen participants to expand on their original responses at a later date. The interviews also provided the researcher with more insight into '...the relationship between human beings and their environment...' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2001, p.168) and adopting a qualitative interviewing approach provided additional 'rich' descriptive data in support of the questionnaire responses. The importance of introducing a qualitative interview approach, rather than conducting a structured interview, was to allow respondents opportunities to 'project their own ways of defining the world' and injected 'flexibility rather than fixity' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, pp. 146-147).

The relationship between Ofsted, the process of inspections and inspectors' values is a complex one. While questionnaires provided opportunities for Ofsted inspectors to anonymously express their views they did not fully provide an opportunity for inspectors to explain their perceptions of Ofsted and their work as inspectors or the extent to which they mediated their work in schools. Exploring inspectors' understanding of whether they believe that their values influence their work required an approach which enabled inspectors to talk about their work and the extent to which this is influenced by their values. The knowledge gained in this way would be '... softer, more subjective... based on experience and insight of a unique and essentially personal nature' (Cohen,

Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.6). It would also enable the researcher to explore the extent to which the inspection process is both uniform and reliable. Adopting a 'mixed method' approach also enables a degree of triangulation to take place, through which the results from one research method may be cross-checked against the results of a method associated with the other research strategy. Essentially the 'confidence in the findings deriving from a study using a quantitative research strategy can be enhanced by using more than one way of measuring a concept' (Bryman, 2004, p.454).

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) identify a number of advantages to research validity through the use of mixed methods. It provides a broader view of 'the complexity of human behaviour and of situations in which human beings interact' (p. 112) and it reduces bias in the research caused by the use of a single investigative approach. Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2001) also propose that 'multiple methods are suitable where a controversial aspect of education needs to be evaluated more fully' (p. 115).

## **Part Three:**

### **Application of Methods**

#### **The questionnaire phase**

The advantages and disadvantages for adopting a self-completion questionnaire approach, as the first phase of the research, were considered. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) propose that the advantages of questionnaire usage over interviews are that the questionnaire is '... more reliable; because it is anonymous, it encourages greater honesty...it is more

economical... in terms of time and money' (pp. 128-129). Disadvantages centre on 'there is often too low a percentage of returns... and some questions have different meanings for different people' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.129).

Questionnaires were designed in the spring of 2010 and a small pilot took place involving 3 practising inspectors. They made responses about the structure of the questionnaire, the number, wording and format of questions. This enabled small adjustments to be made to questions so that: i.e. repetition, through asking the same question in a different way, was remedied.

Twenty-five closed questions were included in the questionnaire and a Likert Scale was adopted to enable respondents to select the most appropriate answer for them. Three further multiple choice questions were added towards the end. Questions were placed into two groups. The first group asked questions about how inspectors carried out the inspection process and applied the inspection criteria. A second group of questions sought to explore inspectors' views of their values in relation to carrying out inspection work; their reasons for inspecting schools and the extent to which they believed that Ofsted was of benefit to schools. Participants were required to indicate whether they 'strongly agree'; 'agree'; 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' with the question. At this point the participants could move on to the next question without adding further detail. However, there was space under each question for participants to provide '*further comments*'. This allowed inspectors to voluntarily add additional information, opinions, anecdotes or perceptions from which interesting trends could be subsequently explored. The additional written responses were transcribed and tagged for similarity of responses, regular agreement or

disagreement with the question. Interesting themes or scenarios were also noted. It was important for the questions to be unambiguous, for accompanying guidance to be clear in the covering letter and for the questionnaire to be '... easy on the eye' (Bryman, 2004, p.136). It was also important to carefully craft the questions so that respondents were able to use their professional experience when answering. The questionnaire was posted to 100 practising or retired inspectors of varying age, professional background and experience in October 2011, along with a covering letter and a stamped addressed envelope for return. Seventeen practising or retired inspectors completed the questionnaires. Although the number of questionnaire returns was small (less than 20%) the sample provided some interesting responses from which themes could be pursued during the interview phase. Although the Likert Scale provided a range of 'broad-brush' initial responses, on reflection, the data gathering process would have been more effective if a five-point scale had been employed. For example, this would have allowed for the inclusion of a fifth middle and neutral response of *'undecided'*. The decision to not include a neutral response meant that where participants were undecided they appeared to leave all of the boxes blank. While there may be subtle differences between 'agree' or 'strongly agree' and 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' there is a big discrepancy for respondents between 'agree' or 'disagree'.

'Though rating scales are powerful and useful in research, the researcher, nevertheless, needs to be aware of their limitations. For example, the researcher may not be able to infer a degree of sensitivity and subtlety from the data that they cannot bear.'

(Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p. 253)

## Sampling

The sampling strategy chosen was purposive in that those selected were all practising or retired Ofsted inspectors. However, within that group 100 participants were randomly selected to complete the questionnaire from the nationally published list of additional inspectors available on the Ofsted website.

At that time the list of additional inspectors completing inspections on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills was spread unevenly across three geographical regions:

CfBT – 675 additional inspectors

SERCO – 1150 additional inspectors

TRIBAL – 1140 additional inspectors

In 2010 across the country there was a total of 2965 additional inspectors. While the national database provided the names of inspectors it did not provide contact details. This aspect was resolved because the researcher was included in team email circulations for CfBT and SERCO, which represented 1825 inspectors across two regional inspection providers. The researcher made a judgement to randomly select inspectors from the SERCO and CfBT lists of additional inspectors and to email them directly. The basis of the simple random sample (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.100) took this into account and 60 inspectors' names and email addresses were selected randomly from the SERCO list, while a further 40 were selected on the same basis from the CfBT list, making a total of 100. Cohen, Manion and Morrison. (2000, p.100) make the point that even in 'simple random sampling' the sample should contain a cross-

section of the [inspector] population, old, young, male female etc. However, beyond the names and email addresses of the sample, the researcher had no additional knowledge of inspectors' experience, age or specialist areas they inspected. As a consequence, the first page of the questionnaire asked the participants to identify their gender, years of experience inspecting schools, practising or retired and phase specialism.

The sampling strategy chosen for the second phase of the research was also purposive and the researcher wished to interview a small number (four) of inspectors to follow up interesting questionnaire responses. Within this context, the researcher wanted to avoid interviewing any inspectors that he had worked with on a school inspection. Following their questionnaire returns, more females than male inspectors responded that they would be willing to be interviewed. At this point the researcher telephoned inspectors to explain the next phase of the research process and to ascertain where in the country they lived. The distance each inspector lived in relation to the researcher was another consideration relating to interviewing participants. In this respect, the researcher initially considered interviewing participants by telephone. This was quickly rejected on the basis that the research was sensitive and that it would be better to interview each participant face-to-face. The nearest participants were 125 miles away in Manchester. Those selected comprised a convenience sample (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.102) of four inspectors who lived or worked close together and who were easily accessible to the researcher.

### **Qualitative semi-structured interviews**

From analysis of the questionnaire information, four respondents were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. Adopting a qualitative interview approach (Yin, 2011) or 'open-ended' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001) allowed greater freedom for the researcher and participants (when compared to structured interviews) because the 'relationship between researcher and the participant is not strictly scripted' (Yin, 2011, p. 134). The process 'enables respondents to project their own ways of defining the world. It permits flexibility rather than fixity of sequence of discussions, and it enables participants to raise and pursue issues and matters that might not have been included in a pre-devised schedule' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, pp.146-147). This approach is also best for exploring '... those things we cannot directly observe: feelings, thoughts, intentions, previous behaviours, the meanings they attach to the world' (Patton, 1990, p.278). While the researcher had a number of questions relating to themes that he wished to ask, the unscripted nature of this approach enabled a conversation to develop, which was 'individualised' to each participant. Qualitative interviewing may lead to 'a social relationship of sorts, with the quality of the relationship individualised to every participant' (Yin, 2011, p.134). As a consequence, while the participants understood the nature of the interview, they were not waiting for the next question in a battery of questions. This allowed for a degree of flexibility in the process and enabled the researcher to explore interesting avenues of enquiry as they arose. In this way, the 'conversational mode, compared to structured interviews, presents the opportunity for two-way interactions in which the participant may even query the researcher' (Yin, 2011, p. 134). This process is suited to an interview between researcher and participant where both are mutually familiar with the topic focus,

i.e. Ofsted inspectors. However, validity is reported as being problematic when adopting an 'open-ended' interview approach (Cannel and Kahn, 1968 in (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.120). They suggest that bias is the issue within this context and may relate closely to 'reactivity' (Bryman, 2000) and 'best behaviour syndrome' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983) referred to earlier.

## **Interview protocols**

At the start of each interview, an amount of time was taken to explain the nature of the research before the process commenced. A digital recorder was placed between participant and researcher to record the interaction. At the end of the interview the recording was played back to each participant to enable them to listen to their responses. At the end of the interview participants were reassured by the researcher that all data would be anonymised, carefully stored in a secure place and not used for other purposes.

The researcher had an interview schedule, which was used as a prompt sheet rather than a script but to facilitate a flow to the conversation this was not made available to participants. This was also done so that participants' answers would not be influenced by the nature of them being able to see following questions. (Clark & Schober, 1994). However, participants were provided with copies of their original questionnaire responses to refer to during the interviews. Developing rapport with the participants and creating a comfortable environment in which to ask questions and listen to responses were crucial to build a 'relationship' that allowed the researcher to find out about each participant's values, beliefs and inspection practice (Ceglowski, 2000; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998).

Within the context of the qualitative interview participants were at liberty to move between areas of focus... 'I think I said that earlier'...or 'can I go back to something I said earlier'. As a consequence, the researcher must be able to listen carefully at all times as well as being aware of his/her 'positionality' within the interview context. Effective qualitative interviewing relies on facilitating talk but also 'intense listening...and a systematic effort to really hear and understand what people tell you' (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p.17). While advocating the qualitative interview process Yin (2011) provides examples of its complexity as a data-gathering tool.

'First you should know two things about entrances and exits. The "entering" can clearly set an interpersonal tone that will carry into the substantive conversation, so you should prepare your "entering" dialogue and not just wander into it.'

(Yin, 2011, p. 140)

During the interviews it was important for the researcher to begin key points by asking a focused question to begin the 'conversation' then allowing each participant opportunities to answer in their own way. Consequently, some responses were lengthy, others were relatively short and at times required a sub-question or prompt to probe deeper (see Appendix 3).

Once the interviews had been carried out, the researcher transcribed each one and emailed them to the participants to allow them to read and check the content for accuracy. Only when the participants were completely satisfied with the accuracy of their responses, was the recorded information used to support the research.

### **Ethical considerations for 'insider' research**

Research ethics can be defined as the application of a set of mutually recognised moral principles, which act as a guiding boundary regarding acceptable and unacceptable research conduct. It prevents harming or wronging others while upholding principles of fairness and respect (Sieber, 1992, p.14). 'In the context of research, ethics focuses on providing guidelines for researchers, reviewing and evaluating research, and establishing enforcement mechanisms to ensure ethical research' (Aguinis and Henle, 2004, p.35). Issues regarding ethics must be carefully considered by the researcher because 'each stage in the research sequence may be a potential source of ethical problems' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.49) and because there may be 'unintended or unexpected consequences either to the people directly involved in the research' or as a result of its findings (Opie, 2006, p.26).

Central to any research are issues of 'intuition, interpretation [and] understanding' of the relationship between the researcher and the subject of research (Cassell and Symon, 2004, p.192). Researchers by the sheer nature of their interest in the area of research bring 'something of their objective and subjective selves to the feast of the research activity' (Cassell and Symon, 2004, p.195). Bourke (2014, p.1) argues that 'research is a process' in which 'the identities of both researcher and participants have the potential to impact the research process.' He makes the case that 'positionality' is important for the researcher to be aware of, in that he/she has the potential to impact on the research in terms of how the researcher interacts and engages in it (Bourke, 2014). [This was particularly the case for me carrying out research from within the national body of Ofsted inspectors into an area that I am very familiar with]. Managing, what the researcher already knows about a subject is crucial so that

bias does not creep into the research in such a way that its direction is influenced. However, a degree of prior knowledge and understanding about the political, sociocultural and historical context (Yin, 2011, p.14) of the area of research (particularly with regard to Ofsted) is important as it adds credibility when asking questions of other Ofsted inspectors about the ways in which they carry out their work in schools.

To strengthen the research findings a third phase was planned that would require Ofsted's permission to proceed. A rich source of evidence could be gleaned from exploring the nature of complaints made by schools to Ofsted about inspectors and the inspection process. This would provide an excellent basis to gauge whether complaints were in relation to inspectors' reporting judgements, procedural matters or whether they related to individual inspectors, their conduct, interpretation of the inspection criteria or in the way that they mediated their work. Consent was requested from Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) but the request was refused. The letter also requested authority for the researcher to approach the regional inspection service providers (SERCO, TRIBAL or CfBT) to ask for additional inspectors to complete the research questionnaire and for a small number to participate in follow-up interviews (appendix 4). This was also refused because it constituted 'an actionable breach of confidence'. (appendix 5). In this context, Plowright (2011) makes the point that gaining access to the 'culture, activities and events taking place' within an organisation is about 'trust' (p.163) and he advocates the 'need to avoid any conflict of interest that may be potentially harmful to the research' (p.164).

The researcher, considered the nature of the research to be educationally important and decided to continue with the research without Ofsted's support. As a consequence, the situation was now one of the research becoming sensitive. The nature of researcher 'positionality' was now very important and for the research activities to be carried out with utmost integrity and sensitivity so as not to damage the work of the organisation being researched or individuals working within it. Bryman, acknowledges that to reduce bias it is important for the researcher to recognise that research 'cannot be value free but to ensure that there is no untrammelled incursion of values in the research process and to be self-reflective and so exhibit *reflexivity* about the part played by such factors' (2004, p.22). Drake and Heath (2011, p.58) indicate that when 'considering insider-research, the very term "insider" implies a boundary with the default being "outsider" research'. As a consequence, it was important to fully explain the purpose of the research from the beginning and to explain that the researcher was self-funded and not acting on behalf of Ofsted or any organisation with a specific angle of interest. Furthermore, it was important to ask questions that were not value laden or appear to unduly lead participants into areas that were overly sensitive. The researcher also held a concern for the protection of participants during (and after) the research project. This was because the researcher was conscious that participation in the project could in some way compromise participants' future work with Ofsted. Equally, proceeding with this inquiry required careful consideration to ensure that there was no detrimental impact on the researcher's position as a practising inspector.

‘Researchers undertaking qualitative research, and particularly qualitative research on sensitive topics, need to be able to make an assessment of the impact of the research on both the participants and themselves’

Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen and Liamputtong (2007, p.328)

Drake and Heath further argue: ‘There is no disinterested researcher. As the project proceeds, there is a merging of these functions so that both research and practice inform each other. This reflexivity requires us to let go our grip on the ideas of “researcher role” or “practitioner role” and instead to think in terms of position’ (2011, p.58). The researcher completed the Faculty of Education’s *ethics permission proforma* prior to research commencing and each participant completed an IFL consent form (Appendix 1).

### **Dependability, generalisability and reliability in the research methods adopted**

Cohen, Manion, Morrison argue: ‘For research to be reliable it must demonstrate that if it were to be carried out on a similar group of respondents in a similar context (however defined), then similar results would be found’ (2001, p.117). Replication and generalisability were both evident in the questionnaire process. The questionnaire was designed to ask questions of Ofsted inspectors about a specific process, that of how do they engage with Ofsted processes. As the inspection process is based on established and familiar criteria, the questions in the questionnaire could be replicated using other inspectors. Some generalised features of the survey process were:

- gathering data that could be processed statistically;

- gathering data on a 'one-shot' basis and so is economical and efficient;
- the need for sampling because it represented a wider population;
- gathering standardised information using the same questions for all participants;
- questions that were relatively easy to answer and add weighting to using a Likert scale.

Morrison (1993, pp. 38-40)

A key feature of this research was the importance of building rapport with the respondents and to use *respondent validation* to confirm that the researcher had correctly understood the social world as portrayed by the participant. Qualitative findings often relate to unique contexts and the research instruments used are unlikely to facilitate replication or *transferability* in the same way that those applied in quantitative research do. As a consequence, qualitative researchers are encouraged to produce 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of the contextualised behaviour, providing rich detail for others to refer to and to use to make informed judgements about the transferability of findings to other contexts. In this way *trustworthiness* and *dependability* are terms that parallel *reliability* in quantitative research (Bryman (2004). In this process the researcher should adopt an 'auditing approach', ensuring complete records are kept of each phase of the research process, selection of participants, correspondence, field notes etc. In qualitative methodologies *reliability* 'includes includes fidelity to real life, context and situation-specificity, authenticity, comprehensiveness, detail, honesty, depth of response and meaningfulness to the respondents' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.120). While complete objectivity is 'impossible in social research' (Bryman, 2004, p.276),

*confirmability* is the process by which the researcher can be shown 'to have acted in good faith' not allowing personal values or inclinations to have swayed or influenced the conduct of the research.

In order to ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the research project, the researcher:

- constructed a pilot questionnaire and to ensure that the questions were clear and relevant, three practising inspectors were asked to complete, criticise and amend it;
- posted questionnaires to a randomly selected group of 100 practising or retired Ofsted inspectors who because of their identity as inspectors formed a purposive sample.
- selected 4 Ofsted inspectors to participate in a single in-depth interview;
- used a process of convenience sampling (from the survey responses) to select interviewee participants;
- maintained awareness of his influence on the data gathering process through careful framing of questions and used respondent validation in which participants were required to read interview transcripts;
- provided a full description of the research methods adopted.

Uniformity of the data gathering process may be established within the qualitative element of the research but reliability in this phase of the research gathering is less straight forward. A different insider-researcher, using the same qualitative interviewing approach with participants who are practising or retired inspectors may 'come up with very different findings but both sets of findings

might be reliable' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p. 119). Brock-Utne (1996) argues that replication of the same answers is unlikely in qualitative research but the notion of reliability is construed in terms of 'dependability' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p. 120) and 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973).

## **Summary and Discussion**

This chapter has examined the complexity and sensitivity of the research focus and the story behind the methodology chosen to gain information from participants. The chapter has provided the reasons why a mixed methods approach was adopted because it provides a robust framework for the gathering of research data. The following chapters will analyse the research data and report the results of the research.

## Chapter 4

### **Evidence gathered from questionnaires in relation to inspectors' perceptions of how they engage with their work.**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the extent to which Ofsted inspectors' values influence the inspection process. It does this through analysing the questionnaire responses provided by inspectors. In particular, this chapter (along with chapter five) considers Ofsted inspectors' perceptions of how they engage with the process of inspection and answers SRQ 3.

In this chapter, individual inspectors are identified as 'R.1' (i.e. respondent 1) and quotations from respondents are italicised. One hundred questionnaires were posted to participants and seventeen were returned to the researcher. Table 1 below outlines the profile of each of the respondents. The respondents had between three and twenty years' experience of inspecting schools and the average number of years experience was thirteen. The gender mix of the respondents was eight males and nine females. A large majority of the respondents (79%) were 'active' inspectors with three having withdrawn from the process for unspecified reasons. The response to 'how many inspections have you carried out?' brought various replies ranging from nine to one thousand. Some of the responses were unspecific but the average number of schools inspected was over one hundred and fifty. During the information gathering process participants were asked to provide additional information as further reflections or expansion to their initial answers. Their perceptions about

Ofsted were also noted, along with any conflict they expressed between their values when working for Ofsted or any conflicting personal or professional values. The chapter presents the numerical responses as raw data and percentages. Each response is then followed by a summary, in which additional written responses from inspectors augment the numerical data. The summary is then followed by a brief commentary.

**Table 1: List of respondents**

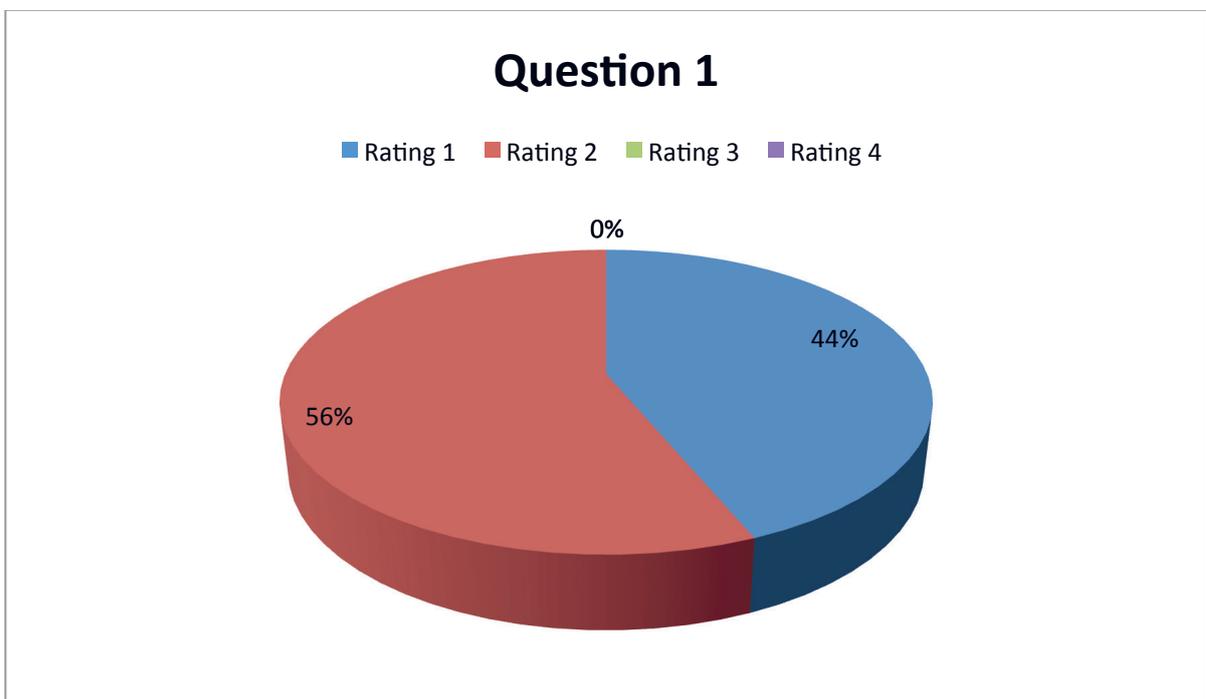
<b>Respondents</b>				
<b>Respondent Number</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Inspection Experience</b>	<b>Number of inspections completed</b>	<b>Retired/withdrawn/active</b>
R. 1	Male	3 years	24	Active
R. 2	Male	17 years	150	Active
R. 3	Female	15 years	50 x section 10, 50 x section 5 and 10 x section 8	Active
R. 4	Female	7 years	162	Active
R. 5	Male	20 (former HMI)	(approx.) 1000	Active
R. 6	Female	18 years	150	Active
R. 7	Male	17 years	55 x section 10, 18 x section 5 and 3 x RTI	Active
R. 8	Female	13 years	20	Active
R. 9	Female	8 years	6 x section 10 and 4 x section 5	Active
R. 10	Female	16 years	20 x section 10	Withdrawn but shortly to begin inspecting again
R. 11	Male	18 years	(approx.) 100 x section 10, 120 x section 5 and 20 RTI	Active

R. 12	Male	13 years	(approx.) 300	Active
R. 13	Male	15 years	46 x section 5, 2 x RTI and 1 x section 8	Active
R. 14	Male	8 years (former HMI)	Hundreds x section 5, dozens x RTIs & section 8s	Active
R. 15	Female	15 years	200+	Withdrawn
R. 16	Female	15 years	Hundreds	Active
R. 17	Female	10 years	3 x section 10	Withdrawn

## Analysis of questionnaire responses:

**1. The current OFSTED Inspection Framework provides sufficient guidance for inspectors to carry out their work.**

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
8	9	0	0



### Summary.

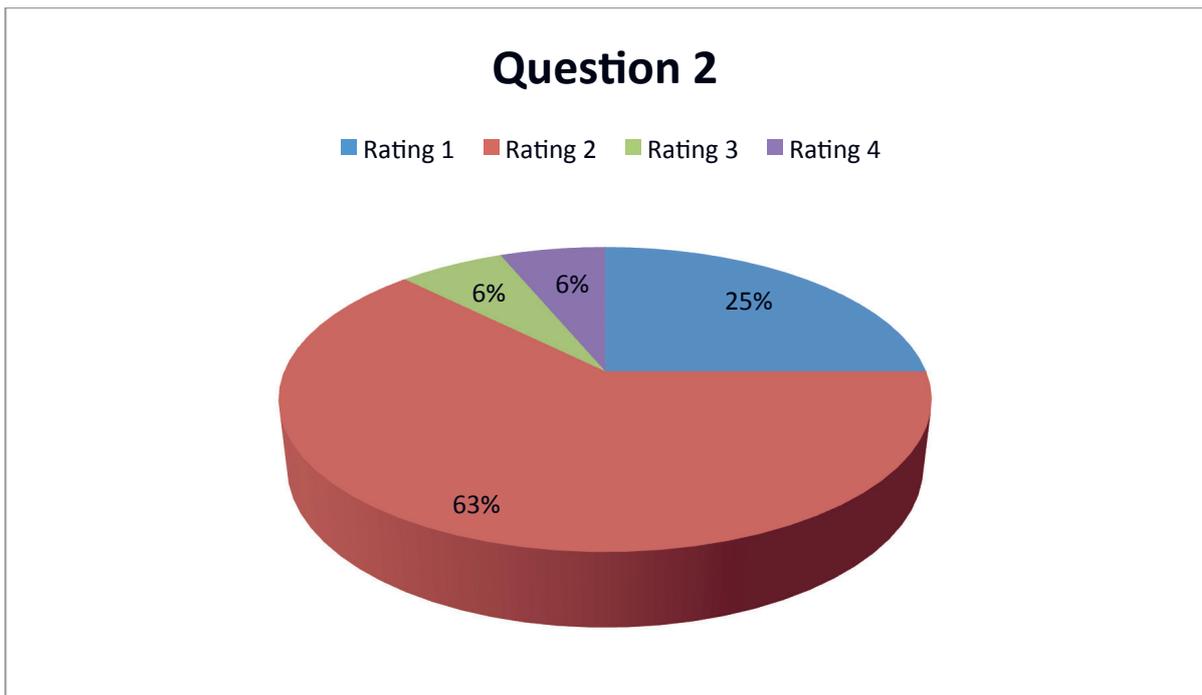
56% of the respondents agreed that the current Ofsted Inspection Framework provided sufficient guidance to inspectors for them to be able to carry out their work. A further 44% strongly agreed that this also applied to them: *'the national inspection framework has clear criteria and the areas are also finely targeted'* [R.10]. There were 0 responses supporting 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' but [R.3] commented that *'it would be better if people could talk about a range of judgements and how different people have different interpretations'*.

## **Commentary**

All of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the question and here there were few surprises because Ofsted inspectors are a self-selecting group of people who generally enjoy inspection work.

**2. The quality of inspection training I received, was adequate to enable me to become an effective inspector.**

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
4	10	1	1



### Summary.

63% of the respondents agreed that the quality of inspection training they had received adequately prepared them to become effective inspectors and a further 25% strongly agreed with this: *'the original team inspector and subsequently Rgl [registered Inspector] training was very good' [R.2]; 'It was one of the best CPD experiences I have had professionally' [R.8].* One response (6%) strongly disagreed and another disagreed that the quality of inspection training they received was adequate to enable them to become an effective inspector: *'I was part of the first batch of training for Ofsted inspectors in 1993. Five days of paperwork in a hotel, constant assessment, people asked*

*to leave each day. Only about 30 of the original 72 trainees completed the course. Did it help me to inspect schools? NO!* [R.11].

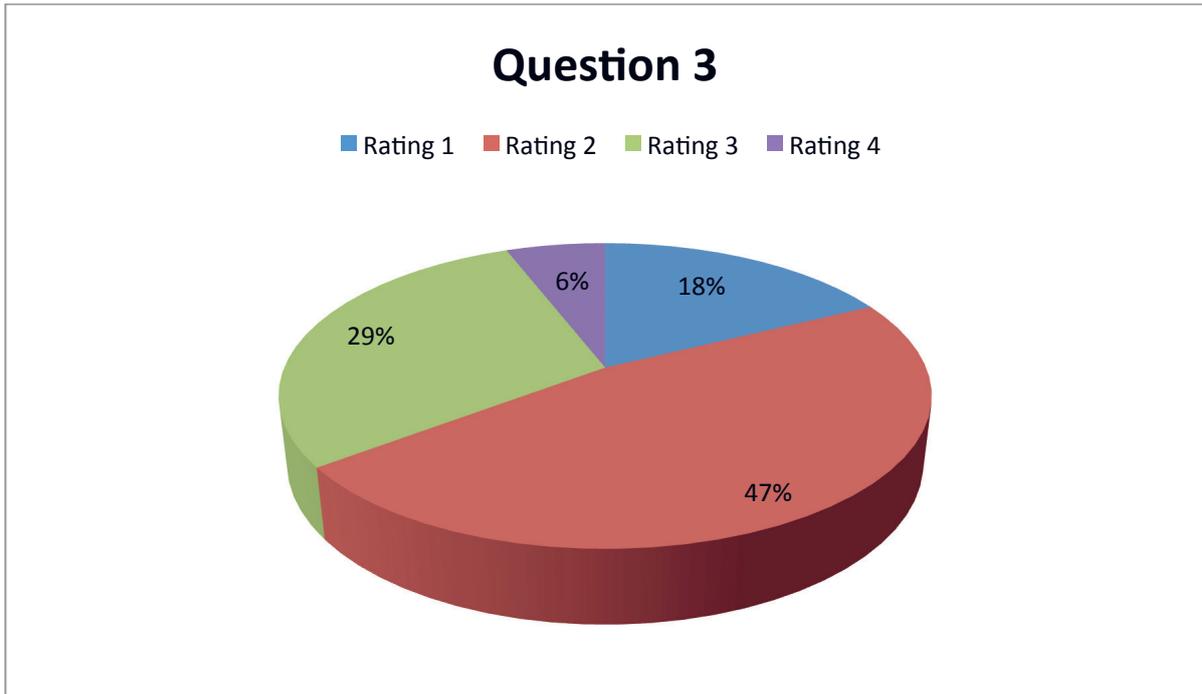
### **Commentary**

In asking this question, I assumed that inspectors would report that the quality of training they experienced had been variable, leaving gaps in their understanding of the inspection process. However, almost all of the respondents reported positively that the training they had received was 'adequate' to enable them to become effective inspectors. The level of positivity may reflect trainee inspectors' aspirations to become effective inspectors and that most were very good students.

A minority of respondents commented that following their initial training they continued to learn '*on the hoof*' [R.6] or '*learn as much by doing the job!*' [R.7]. This would suggest that inspectors continued to develop their inspection skills and knowledge through practical experience. These responses also suggest that new inspectors learn from working alongside experienced inspectors. In this way a degree of assimilation into the 'corporate culture' (Morgan, 1997) of Ofsted may occur. Furthermore, the term 'effective' could possibly have been interpreted by inspectors in two different ways e.g. for some, 'effective' may have meant applying the Ofsted inspection criteria in a literal or precise way. For others it could have meant flexibly applying Ofsted's inspection criteria, taking into account the contexts of individual schools.

**3. To ensure Ofsted inspections are consistent it is essential for inspectors to systematically replicate their work during each inspection.**

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
3	8	5	1



### Summary

47% agreed and a further 18% strongly agreed that it was essential for inspectors to systematically replicate their work during each inspection: *'Yes in covering the basics and gathering evidence' [R.5]; 'If you mean use the schedule and framework consistently, following systematic approaches is important' [R.7]; 'I think this is essential – keep to criteria and ensure that there is parity across all inspection teams' [R.10].* However, 29% disagreed and a further 6% strongly disagreed that it was essential for inspectors to systematically replicate their work during each inspection: *'Not necessarily' [R.3]; 'Of equal importance is the professional approach of treating schools as*

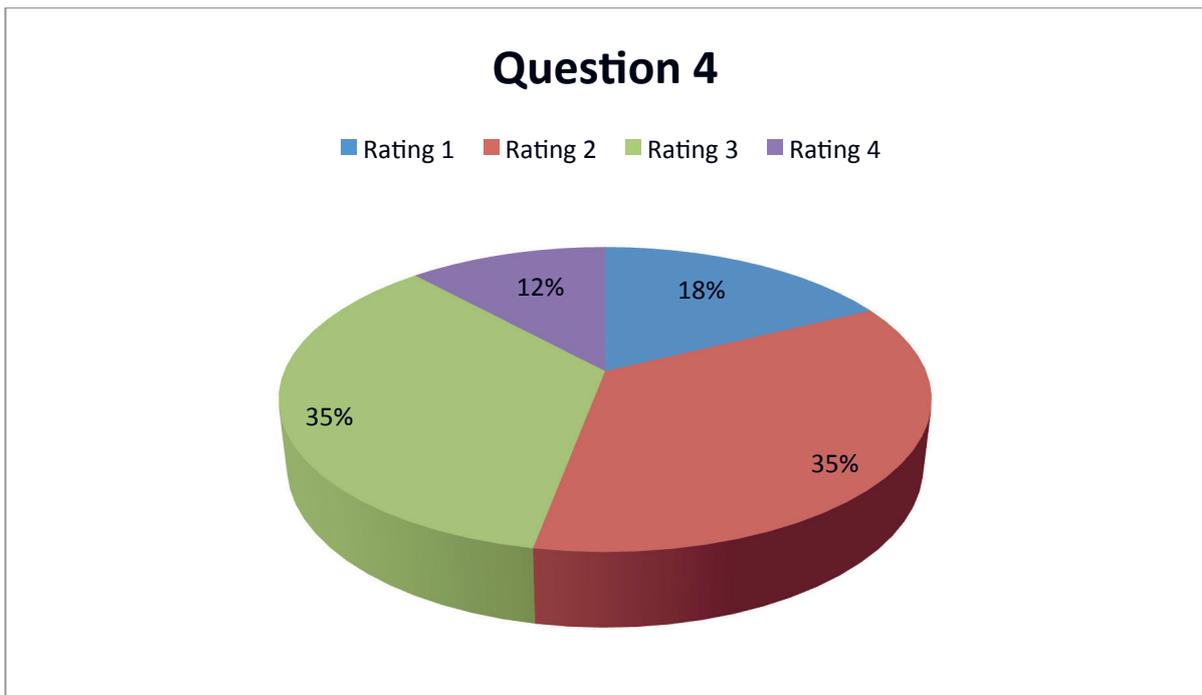
*individual institutions and using professional judgement to arrive at fair outcomes' [R.7]; 'They need to get the same information to ensure consistency, they may find it or get it in different ways' [R.15].*

### **Commentary**

The majority (65%) affirmed that to ensure that inspections were consistent it was important to systematically replicate their work during each inspection. Here respondents seemed to indicate that it was important to adhere to Ofsted's inspection criteria when collecting evidence and, in doing so inspectors should not allow context to influence the inspection process. However, six inspectors said that, while it was important to apply the inspection criteria in a consistent way, the individuality of schools should not be lost during the inspection process e.g. *'A school is a living organism, not a piece of machinery' [R.6]*. Others indicated that e.g. *'You have to be consistent with your application of the criteria in the framework but you do not always gather the supporting evidence in exactly the same way' [R.9]*; *'this is not a formulaic process and given the number of variables then effective inspections depend on experience not knowledge only' [R.3]*. These opinions provide an interesting dichotomy about the purpose of Ofsted. The minority group that did not support the question could be inferring that because schools are *'individual institutions' [R.7]* and information may be found *'in different ways' [R.15]* a degree of mediation may take place during inspections between inspectors and schools e.g. *"Replicate" implies an automaton-type approach, which would not be appropriate. Good inspectors take account of circumstances, seek to work with schools as individual institutions and to take account of school requests, whilst at the same time seeking to be fair and impartial' [R.14]*.

**4. In my experience inspectors cut corners during inspections to get everything done in time.**

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
3	6	6	2



### Summary.

35% of the respondents agreed that, in their experience inspectors cut corners during inspections to get everything done in time. A further 18% strongly agreed. One respondent said that this occurred because e.g. *'under the present framework there is not enough time to complete the necessary paperwork, especially if you are leading a team as I do'* [R.11]. An almost equal number of respondents disagreed that inspectors cut corners with 35% disagreeing and 12% strongly disagreeing with the question e.g. *'That implies a shoddy job. We all struggle to get everything done, but use our professional judgement in deciding how much time to spend on any one area'* [R.6]; *'I have never*

*witnessed a team or lead inspector or an HMI cut corners in any way during any inspection that I have been on' [R.9]; 'I have never experienced this' [R.10].*

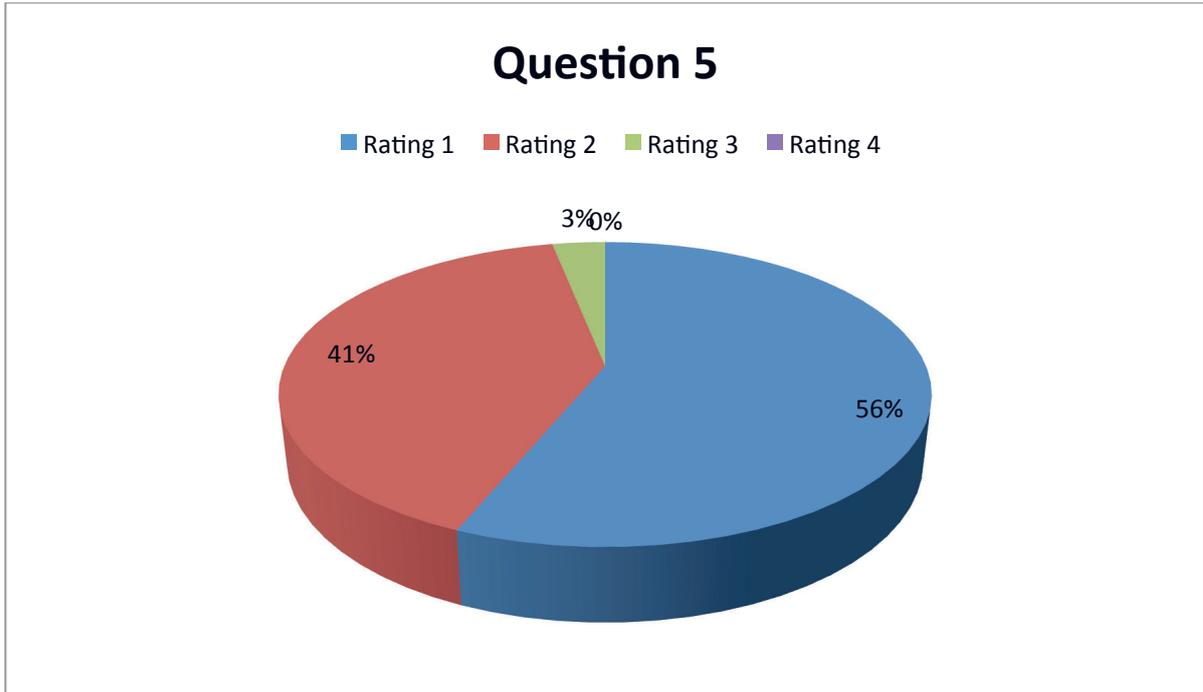
### **Commentary**

There was almost an even division between the proportion of respondents who agreed or disagreed that in their experience inspectors cut corners during inspections to get everything done in time. However, respondents suggested two underlying reasons as to why corners were cut. The first inference pointed towards there being a degree of professional ineptitude or laziness e.g. *'Occasionally, team members tried to skimp aspects of the evidence gathering but I did not allow this and did not work with them subsequently' [R.2]; 'Only those inspectors allowed to "get away" with cutting any corners! Also those not efficient enough or who do not plan well enough may attempt to cut corners, but any good lead inspector will stop that' [R.7].* The second reason related to a perception reported by some respondents that there was insufficient time to complete inspection requirements e.g. *'Time is of the essence and it does depend on the PIB [pre-inspection briefing] and lead given by the LI to ensure that the workload of team inspectors is manageable' [R.13]; 'Inspection is a highly pressurized activity, and it is inevitable that inspectors face decisions about the allocation of their time. They may not always be able to spend the time they may wish on some aspect of the evidence. The aim remains to do what is essential to make the inspection fair and accurate. Aspects of the inspection/evidence which are not deemed essential will inevitably need to be cut' [R.14].*

From the explanations provided, respondents indicated that context may be an external influence on the way some inspectors carried out their work. Implicit within the additional responses was a perception that the relationship between inspectors and particularly the direction provided by the lead inspector (LI) was also an important influence on inspectors' work. The suggestion that there was too little time within inspections may trigger some inspectors to make choices about which inspection activities are important to pursue. A consequence of this could be that a degree of discretion could creep into the process as inspectors 'develop shortcuts and simplifications to cope with the press of responsibilities' (Lipsky, 1980, p.18).

**5. The Ofsted inspection process has made a significant contribution to individual schools and their improvement agendas.**

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
9	6 + X1(0.5)	0 + X2(0.5)	0



**Summary**

56% strongly agreed and 41% agreed that the Ofsted inspection process has made a significant contribution to individual schools and their improvement agendas e.g. *'Historically, the OFSTED process has had a massive impact, particularly on primary schools. There was no such thing as an improvement agenda 18 years ago' [R.6]; 'This is the most important reason for inspecting schools' [R.11]; 'I don't think there is any doubt about this at all. Schools might hate Ofsted and hate the process but it has certainly been a driver for improvement' [R.14].* One respondent felt that the question was unclear and that person's response was split between agree and disagree on the basis that

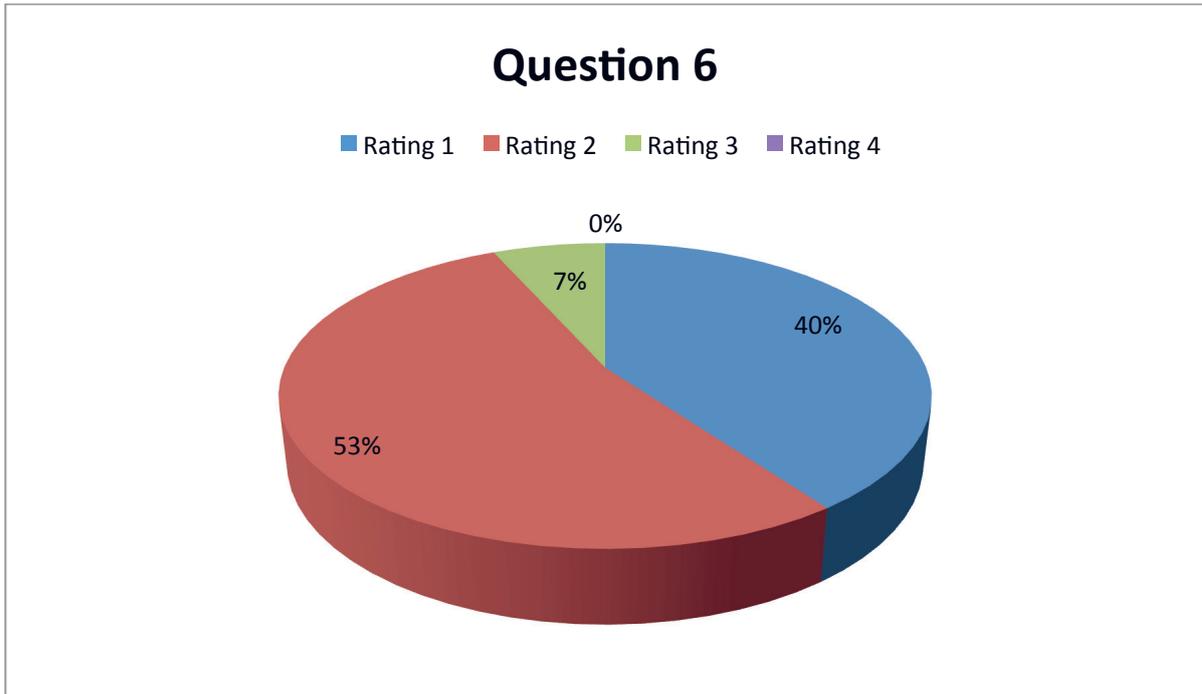
*'...I think the answer is unclear - X1 the benefits are greater for poor schools than X2 good schools'* [R.1]. None of the respondents strongly disagreed with the question.

### **Commentary**

The high level of affirmation from respondents, endorsed their view that inspections have improved schools. As indicated earlier, inspectors are a self-selecting group that undergo a lengthy programme of training prior to inspecting schools. Their responses indicated that they enjoy inspecting schools, believe that they are doing good work [R.11] and their affirmation of the impact of Ofsted inspections justifies the time that they spend doing this work [R.14]. The responses from this small sample may be indicative of a more widely held belief amongst inspectors that there is a causal link between inspections and school improvement.

**6. The OFSTED inspection process has made a significant contribution to the national school improvement agenda.**

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
6	9	1	0



**Summary.**

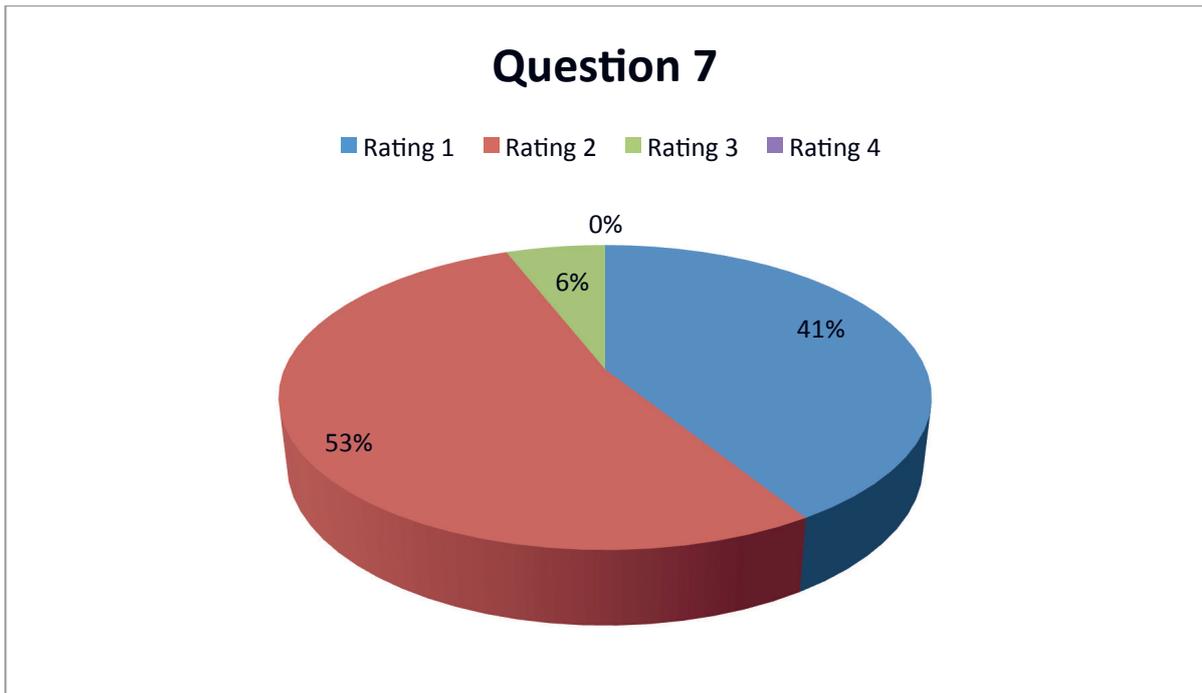
53% of the respondents agreed and 40% strongly agreed [93%] that the Ofsted inspection process has made a significant contribution to the national school improvement agenda e.g. *'Yes but not in the way that politicians would like. It has caused schools to be accountable for their outcomes and that is what is important for children' [R.3].* 7% of the respondents (1 response) disagreed e.g. *'Not always as we can only make suggestions for improvement and, even in cases where schools are judged to be failing, local authorities do not always ensure things have improved by the time of the next monitoring visit or inspection' [R.11].*

## Commentary

Here a number of positive responses were similar to those of question 5 which related to individual schools and their improvement agendas. Despite the high degree of agreement for the question, there was indecision in a minority of additional written responses about the contribution inspection has made to the national school improvement agenda e.g. *'I think that may have been true in the past, I'm less sure that is true now'* [R.1]; *'Overall I suspect this is the case, although some others may not concur'* [R.7]. Respondent 17 reported that Ofsted inspections have *'ensured consistency and a common expectation'* but that *'creativity of learning'* has been sacrificed in schools because of the inspection process.

**7. Ofsted's main objective is to hold schools to account for quality of provision and standards achieved.**

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
7	9	1	0



**Summary**

53% agreed and 41% agreed [94%] that Ofsted's main objective is to hold schools to account for quality of provision and standards achieved e.g. *'Object of inspection is to: provide parents with information; this informs their choices and preferences about the effectiveness of the schools their children attend in the future. It keeps the Secretary of State (and parliament) informed about the work of schools. This provides assurance that minimum standards are being met; provides confidence in the use of public money. It assists accountability and promotes improvement of individual schools and the education system as a whole' [R.7]; 'This is essential – I have worked with schools before the*

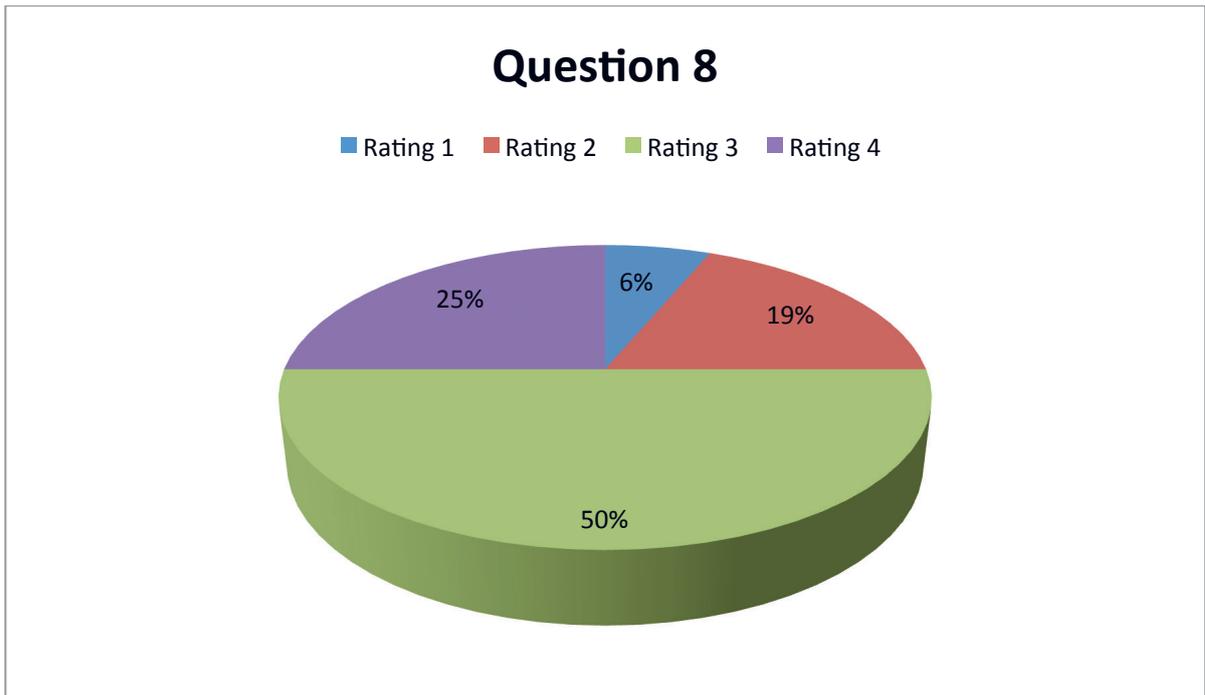
*introduction of inspection and there was potential for a free for all – or free for none in some cases!* [R.10]; *'And why not?'* [R.15]. One respondent (6%) disagreed e.g. *'Ofsted's objective is what ever the government decides it is, education is a political football'* [R.1].

## **Commentary**

The overall majority of responses supported the position that Ofsted's main objective was to hold schools to account for quality of provision and standards achieved. A number of additional written responses indicated that Ofsted inspections provided additional opportunities for schools to e.g. *'become more self-evaluative and sustaining'* [R.2]; *the inspection process gives headteachers an objective professional dialogue and supports them in challenging their staff to aim higher'* [R.6]. The expression *'hold to account'* was seen to be inappropriate by one respondent because: *"hold to account"...is inappropriate. 'Ofsted's role is to act as a frank and fair evaluator of quality'* [R.14]. While there was a strong affirmation for the question there appeared to be a veiled protest from [R.1] that Ofsted carried out whatever the government asked it to do. This may be a view based on additional areas of focus for Ofsted to inspect within the same timescale.

**8. Ofsted’s main objective is to ensure schools conform to national education policies and initiatives.**

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
1	3	8	4



**Summary**

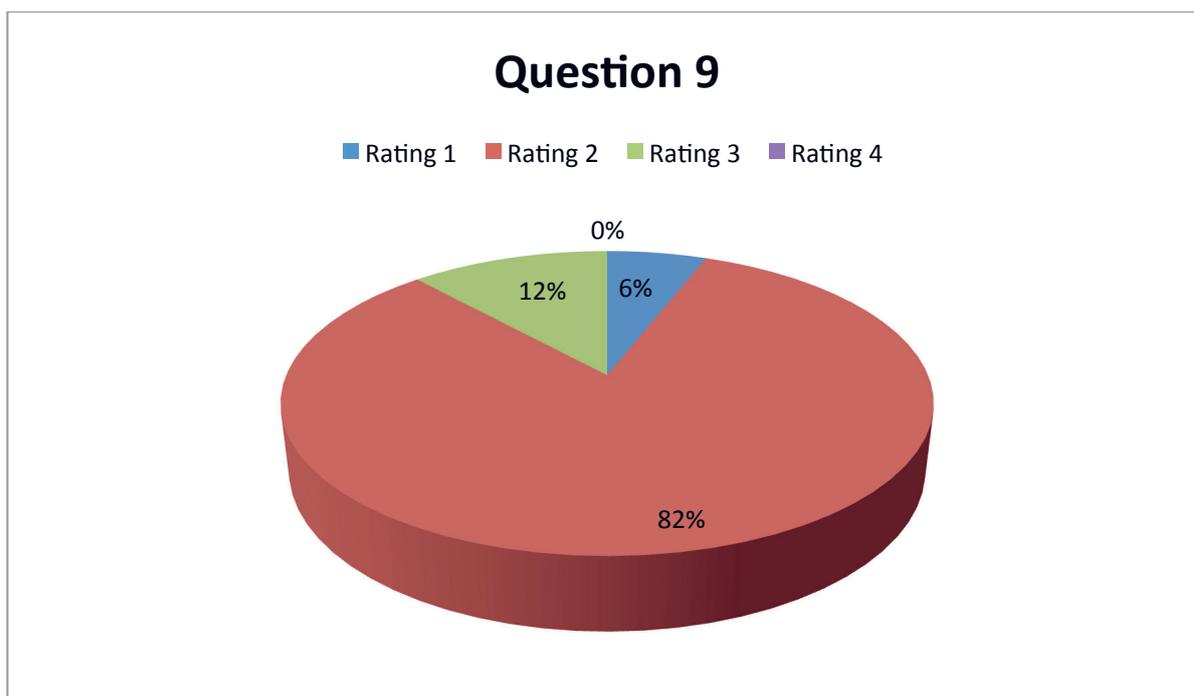
50% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that Ofsted’s main objective is to ensure schools conform to national education policies and initiatives and a further 25% of the respondents strongly disagreed e.g. ‘No. Conformity was never what it was about, despite some teachers assuming it was’ [R.7]. 19% agreed with the statement e.g. ‘I should think this is true. The changes on the inspection framework usually reflect government policy’ [R.10] and a further 6% (1 response) strongly agreed.

**Commentary**

The additional comments indicated that respondents may have interpreted this as a 'political' question because responses to the previous questions (5, 6 and 7) indicate that inspectors believed that their role was to improve schools through inspections. Responses to this question appear to reinforce that inspectors hold a corporate belief that their job was to improve schools and not to ensure that schools conform to national policies e.g. *'Strongly disagree. Ofsted's main purpose is to help raise educational standards and pupils' achievement' [R.11]; 'No...Ofsted is not a government policeman. However, if the government gives Ofsted a particular project/brief/aspect to report on, then it has a statutory obligation to do so' [R.14].* In contrast to the views of respondents, recent research carried out by Jones and Tymms (2014) indicates that Ofsted appears to have a number of roles, one of which is 'ensuring compliance with national regulations' (p.316) This view is also portrayed by Jeffrey and Woods (1998) and it is a generally held view in schools that Ofsted's role is to ensure that schools conform to government agendas and initiatives.

**9. There are typical features in the way inspectors carry out their work that have created a recognizable inspection culture.**

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
1	14	2	0



**Summary**

82% agreed and 6% [1 response] strongly agreed [88%] that there are typical features in the way inspectors carry out their work and that these features have created a recognizable inspection culture e.g. *'I do hope so. Professional dialogue, humanity, rigour, objective judgements based on clear evidence and sound professional judgements' [R.6]; 'Mostly true' [R.7]; 'In some ways yes as we have to follow an inspection schedule' [R.11].* Two respondents [12%] disagreed e.g. *'There is variation and this is reflected in some judgements one sees and practices one hears of' [R.2]; 'In my experience, the tone of inspections can be very different from school to school' [R.14].*

## Commentary

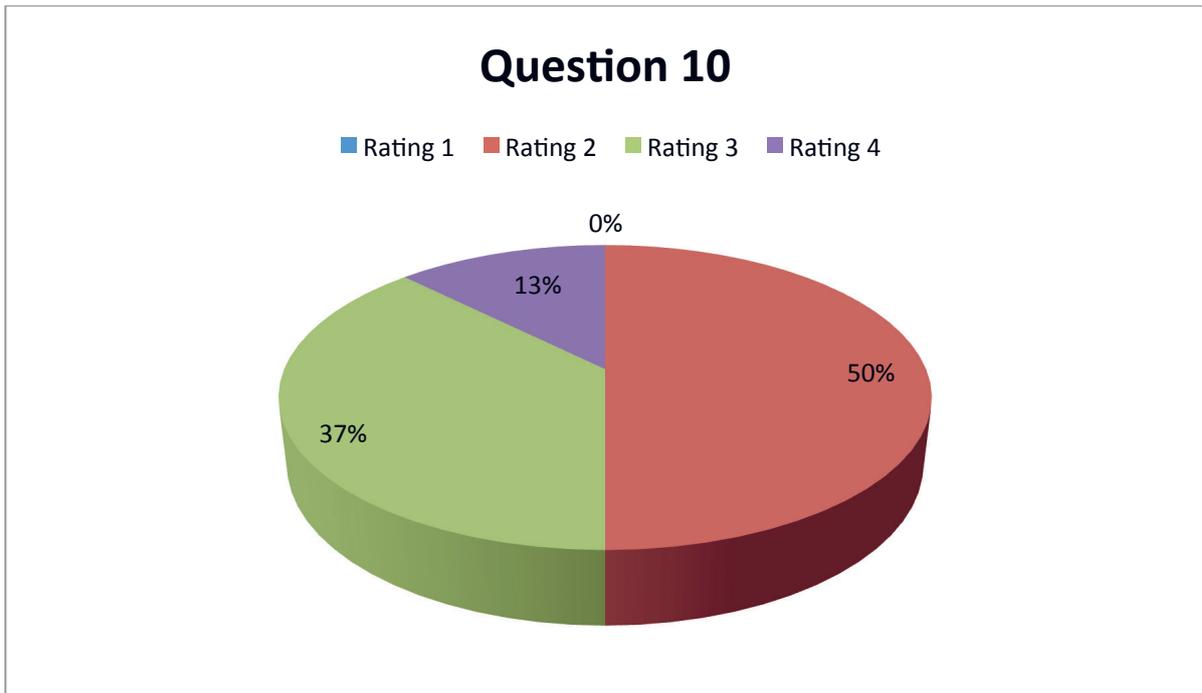
A large majority of respondents agreed that there were typical features in the way inspectors carried out their work and that these features had contributed to creating a recognizable inspection culture e.g. *'Collecting and collating information has made some uniformity inevitable' [R.15]*. According to Lipsky (1980), routines are important because they help to simplify tasks and they make tasks more manageable. However, Lipsky argues that a 'high degree of routinization may dampen the tendency to differentiate among clients' (1980, p.121). This perspective was reiterated in some of the inspectors' responses e.g. *'The framework ensures that this is the case. Little deviation from this is possible' [R.17]*. Here there is a suggestion that inspectors have established 'typical' and 'recognizeable' features to their work that support their inspection routines. Another perspective related to the commercial nature of the inspection process e.g. *'The inspection providers cause the culture with stupid restrictions and that is also true of HMI. E.g. forever changing formats, insisting on the en rule...The providers have cut the payment for inspecting and it has become a commercial venture so people cut corners e.g. replicate previous inspection outcomes' [R.3]*.

Some respondents said that while they believed inspectors did not cut corners during inspections to get everything done (see responses to question 4) they indicated here that the routines that have been established help them to manage the many facets of the inspection process e.g. *'We are human (most of us) and we tend to work in routine and familiar ways, and embrace social patterns. Therefore, there are bound to be typical features in our work and this*

*is presumably a good thing, providing the common features are good ones'* [R.12]; *'Collecting and collating information has made some uniformity inevitable'* [R.15]. The 'typicality' of the inspection process may also be a feature that helps to socialise new inspectors into Ofsted's 'corporate culture' (Morgan, 1997), helping to shape 'the way we do things round here' (Deal, 1985). Equally, the 'typicality' of the way inspectors carry out the process may be something that attracts some teachers and headteachers to become Ofsted inspectors because their values are in accordance with those of Ofsted.

**10. There is considerable variation in the way in which inspectors carry out their work.**

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
0	8	6	2



**Summary**

None of the respondents strongly agreed but 50% agreed that there is considerable variation in the way in which inspectors carry out their work e.g. *'There is very noticeable variation' [R.1]; 'In my opinion 'yes' based on my own experiences of inspection' [R.11]; 'I would agree' [R.12].* 37% disagreed and 13% strongly disagreed that there is variation in the way in which inspectors carry out their work e.g. *'Not in my experience... [R.6].*

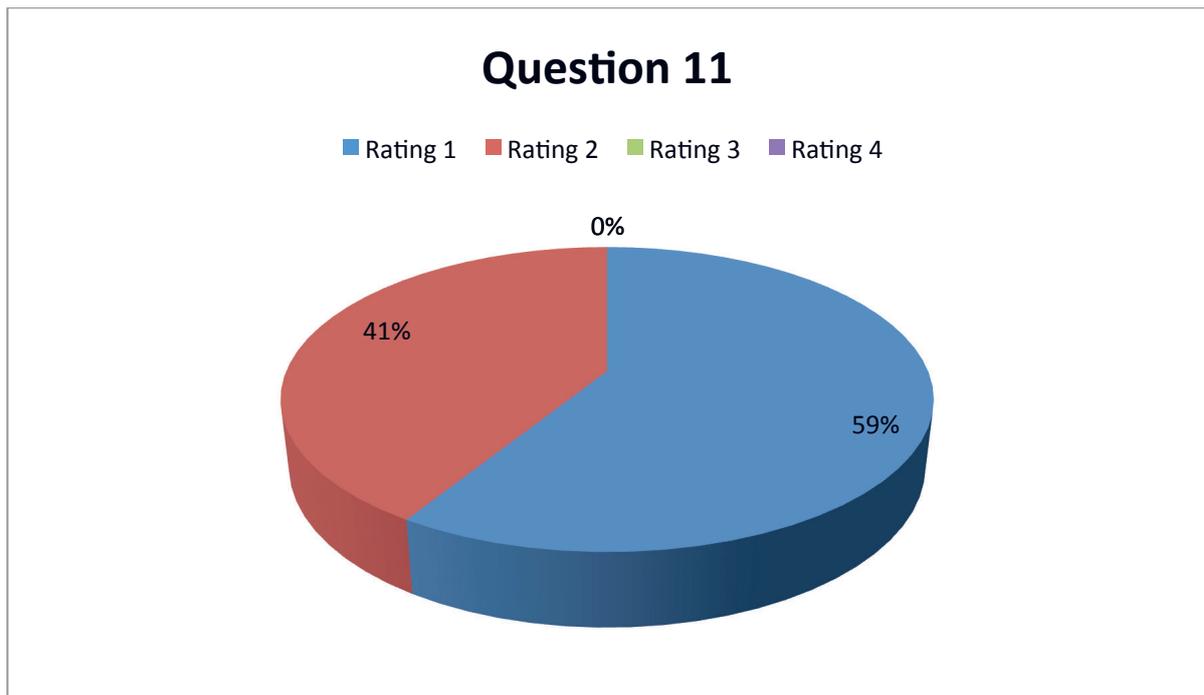
**Commentary**

The responses to this question were evenly split and reflect inspectors' experiences. Some respondents, while commenting that variation takes place, also suggested that this does not indicate a flaw in the system e.g. *'There is variation...quite considerable...but this does not mean that the system is flawed'* [R.14]. Respondents appear to suggest that any variation within the process appears to be attributable to individual inspectors going about their work in different ways but working within Ofsted's inspection criteria e.g. *'Most inspectors tend to produce similar judgements. You have to allow flexibility. The key thing is, of course, how much latitude inspectors use when applying the framework'* [R.12]; *'Only evident in my experience in the variation you get in individuals'* [R.13]; *'Some inspectors are more flexible than others so there are differentiated outcomes'* [R.17]. Here respondents appeared to imply that flexibility in the way inspections are carried out is acceptable as long as it takes place within the guidelines provided by Ofsted e.g. *'The objective remains the same, and there are clear guidelines and principles that act as limiters on individuals that are inclined to maverick ways'* [R.14].

Respondents may be suggesting that something of a balancing act is at work during inspections, in that inspectors follow the inspection guidelines but with an expectation that a degree of flexibility may also occur when gathering evidence within the parameters of the process. Variation may reflect inspector style but is also likely to occur because of the nature of human interaction during inspections. Although responses here do not conflict with those of Q.3 or Q.9, there are perceived differences between a process which is seen to be 'consistent' (Q.3) by inspectors and one which has 'typical features' (Q.9).

**11. It is essential for inspectors to establish a close working relationship with the headteacher and staff.**

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
10	7	0	0



### Summary

59% of the respondents strongly agreed and 41% agreed that it is essential for inspectors to establish a close working relationship with the headteacher and staff e.g. *'Absolutely key to success for pupils' [R.3]; 'Impossible to do the job well without that' [R.7]*. In the table there were 0 responses for disagree or strongly disagree.

### Commentary

While all respondents affirmed that it is important for inspectors to establish a close working relationship with the headteacher and staff of schools, a minority of additional responses suggested that it was not essential e.g. *'Helpful but not*

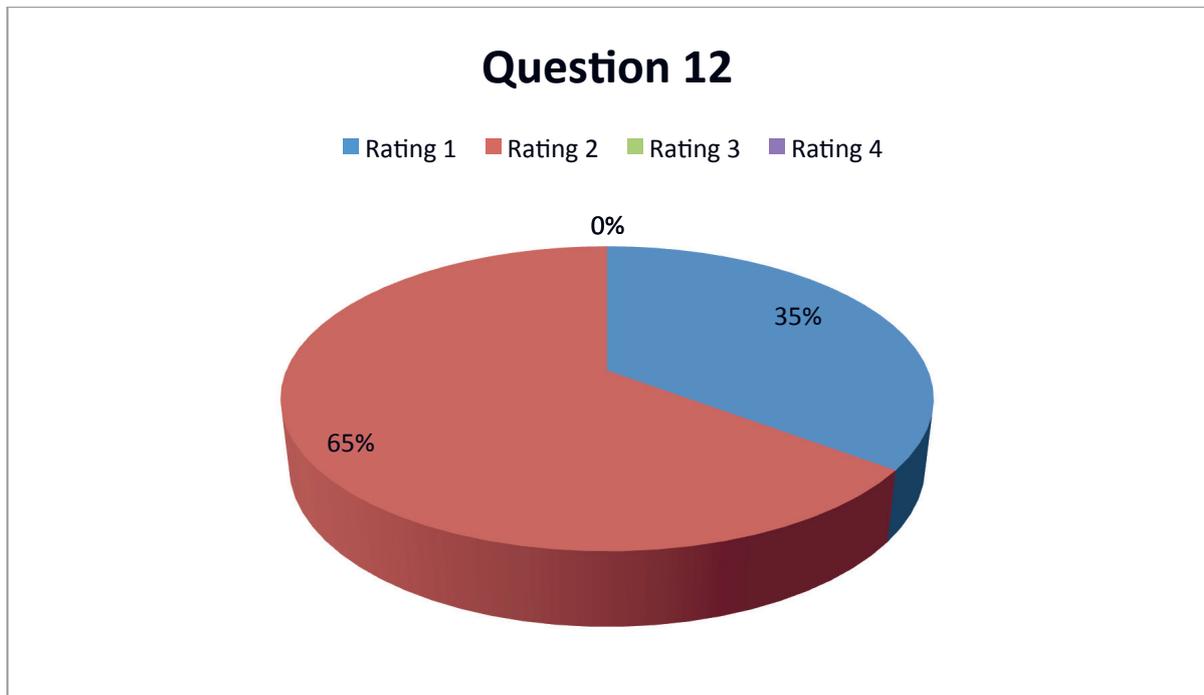
*essential*' [R.17]; '*not essential but extremely beneficial to the process*' [R.12]; '*It should be a professional working relationship which is based on a clear understanding of the separate role as well as those aspects that are complementary*' [R.2]. This indicates that different inspectors attribute different degrees of importance to forming positive relationships with schools and (similar to responses to Q.10) may operate in untypical ways. Where inspectors do not perceive this to be *essential*, it may indicate that this group adheres more closely to Ofsted's inspection criteria than inspectors who consider close working relationships with schools to be essential to successful inspections. Those that indicated the need for close working relationships are perhaps a group of inspectors who mediate their work, taking into account each school's context, more than others. There is no evidence in this research to support that those inspectors who said that the formation of close working relationships are *not essential* adhere more closely to Ofsted's criteria than those who reported that close working relationships are *absolutely key*. This may be an important issue to pursue in future research.

Morgan (1997) argues that 'mechanistically structured organisations have great difficulty adapting to changing circumstances because they are designed to achieve predetermined goals; they are not designed for innovation' (p.28). The Ofsted inspection process has been designed around criteria and principles that inspectors achieve a set of predetermined goals and forming a '*close working relationship with the headteacher and staff*' is not necessarily one of them. Despite this, respondents indicated that this is essential for a successful inspection e.g. '*Yes this is crucial to facilitate a collaborative inspection process*' [R.4]. In research carried out by Jeffrey and Woods (1998) an inspector

commented: 'There's the danger you might offer advice and you mustn't offer advice, but we all do it off the record you know – "you don't have to take notice of what I'm saying" but...'. (p.45). It would seem that the working relationship between headteacher and inspectors is important because it may help to facilitate a degree of mediation of the management of the process and reduce tension during inspections.

## 12. Ofsted inspections have improved the quality of education in schools.

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
6	11	0	0



### Summary

65% of the respondents agreed and 35% strongly agreed with the statement that Ofsted inspections have improved the quality of education in schools e.g. ‘*Certainly in primary schools*’ [R.6]; ‘*Very clearly in my view*’ [R.14] and ‘*Undoubtedly as far as special schools are concerned*’ [R.15]. One respondent commented ‘*I’m not wholly sure. Curricula and teaching methods have become more diverse.*’ [R.12]. There were 0 responses for disagree or strongly disagree.

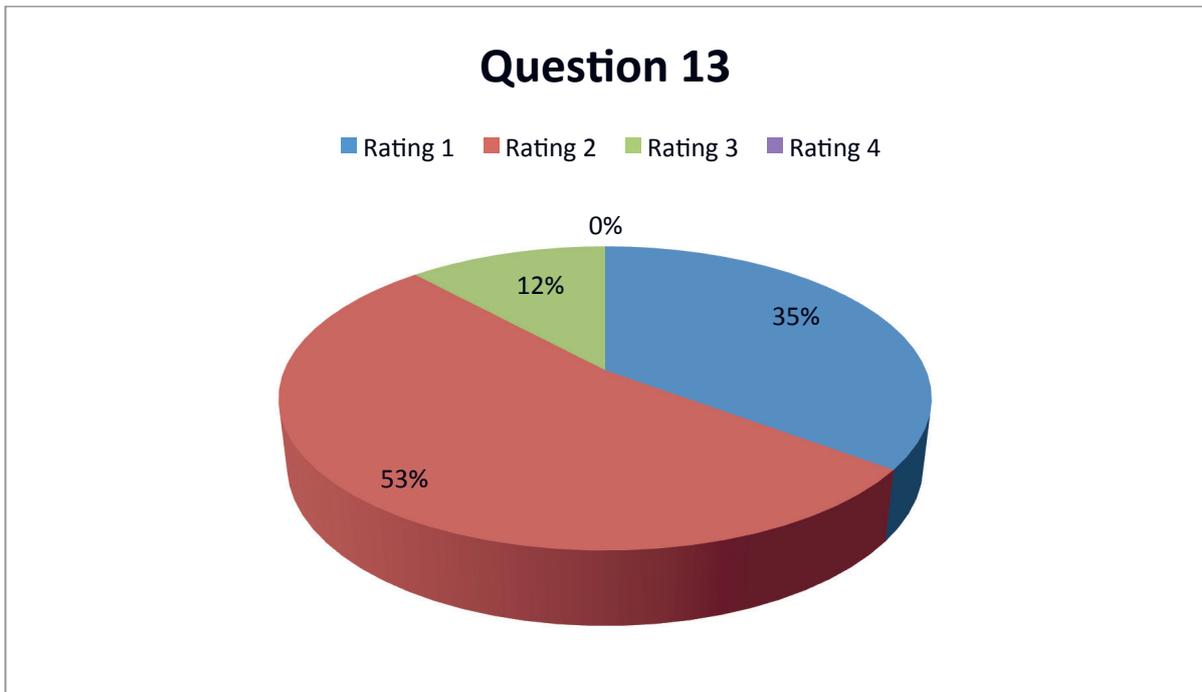
### Commentary

Question 12 may have some overlap with question 5 (*The Ofsted inspection process has made a significant contribution to individual schools and their*

*improvement agendas*). This question asks about the degree to which Ofsted inspections have improved the 'quality of education' in schools rather than focusing on 'their improvement agendas'. Despite the strong numerical affirmation from respondents about Ofsted inspections having improved the quality of education in schools, other features were also identified that have improved schools alongside Ofsted e.g. *'Not on their own...attitudes have changed, thinking has sharpened and outcomes are better'* [R.2]; *'Alongside some other developments, including the improvements to teacher training and teachers' own improving professionalism have made the real difference'* [R.7]; *'Curricula and teaching methods have become more diverse'* [R.12]. One respondent commented that while the quality of education in schools had been improved by Ofsted inspections an impact had been felt in other ways e.g. *'Overall but at some cost to the broader, wider curriculum and opportunities for extended learning in some schools'* [R.17]. Another reported: *'Yes but there is still a minority of awful headteachers who should not be allowed to be in a school. It takes a lot of effort to get rid of these people and local authority people are not very good at it'* [R.3]. This respondent appears to hold an opinion that Ofsted inspections should be used as a tool to identify and get rid of weak headteachers.

### 13. Ofsted inspections have raised standards in schools.

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
6	9	2	0



#### Summary

While 53% of respondents agreed and 35% strongly agreed with the statement that Ofsted inspections have raised standards in schools, additional comments suggested that not all respondents believed that this was exclusively attributable to Ofsted: e.g. *'Schools have worked hard to meet better defined criteria and improved provision has supported the rise in standards' [R.2]*; *'This is without a doubt true in my mind but only because of a range of other aspects including the NC [National Curriculum] and the continuing support from education and pedagogical experts in schools, LAs and elsewhere' [R.10]*. 12% [2 responses] disagreed e.g. *'Not Really' [R.12]*.

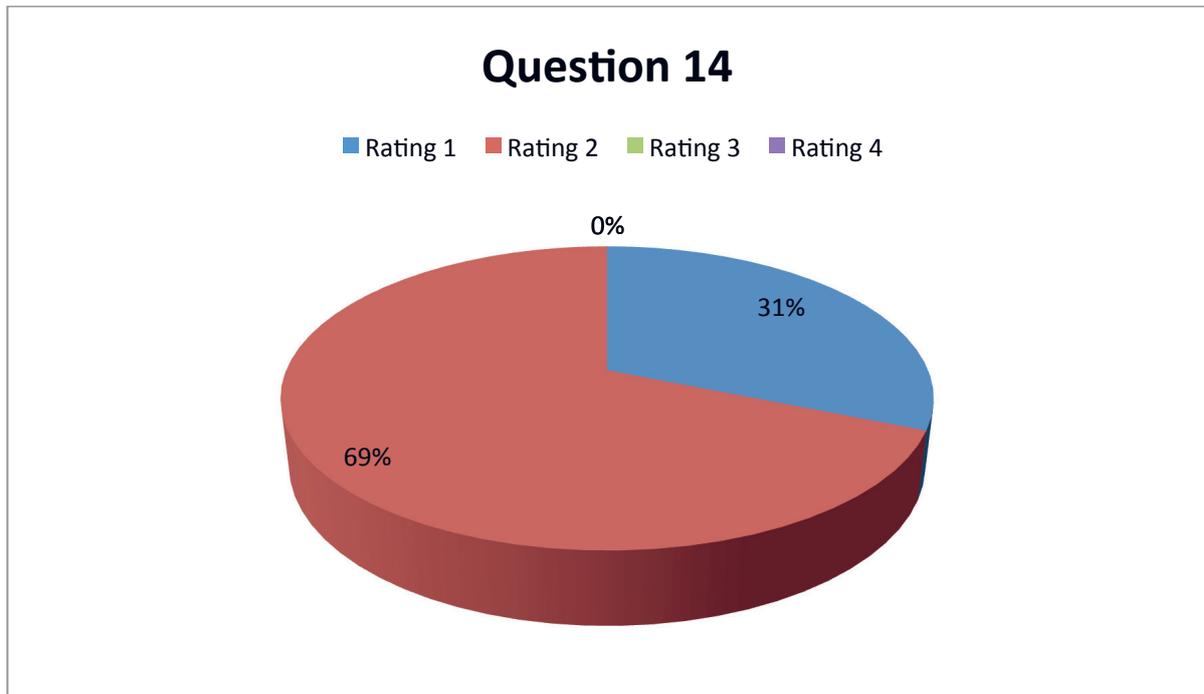
## Commentary

While the very large majority of respondents said that they believed that Ofsted inspections had raised standards in schools a degree of variation was found in the written responses from individual inspectors e.g. *'My understanding is that test results often fall in the year after an inspection'* [R.1]; *'In some schools. It depends what is meant by standards, exams, behaviour, attitudes, staff well-being, learning culture'* [R.3]; *'Certainly in primaries...there is a lot less inadequate teaching than there was'* [R.6]. One respondent said that they felt that standards had been raised but not because of inspection alone e.g. *'not on their own'* [R.2];

Interpretation of the term 'raising standards' may reflect the dichotomy shown by inspectors as to the degree to which they believed inspections have solely raised standards in schools and whether there are other factors that have influenced this. While respondents appeared to hold an opinion that inspections had raised standards, research carried out by Jones and Tymms (2014) suggest that there is insufficient evidence to say that there is 'a causal link between inspections and school improvement' (p.328).

## 14. Ofsted inspections are good for schools.

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
5	11	0	0



### Summary

69% of respondents agreed and 31% strongly agreed that Ofsted inspections are good for schools e.g. *'In general they are. Initially they shone light into dark corners and challenged established mediocrity' [R.2]; 'Only in a very few cases have inspections not been' [R.7]*. There were 0 responses for disagree or strongly disagree.

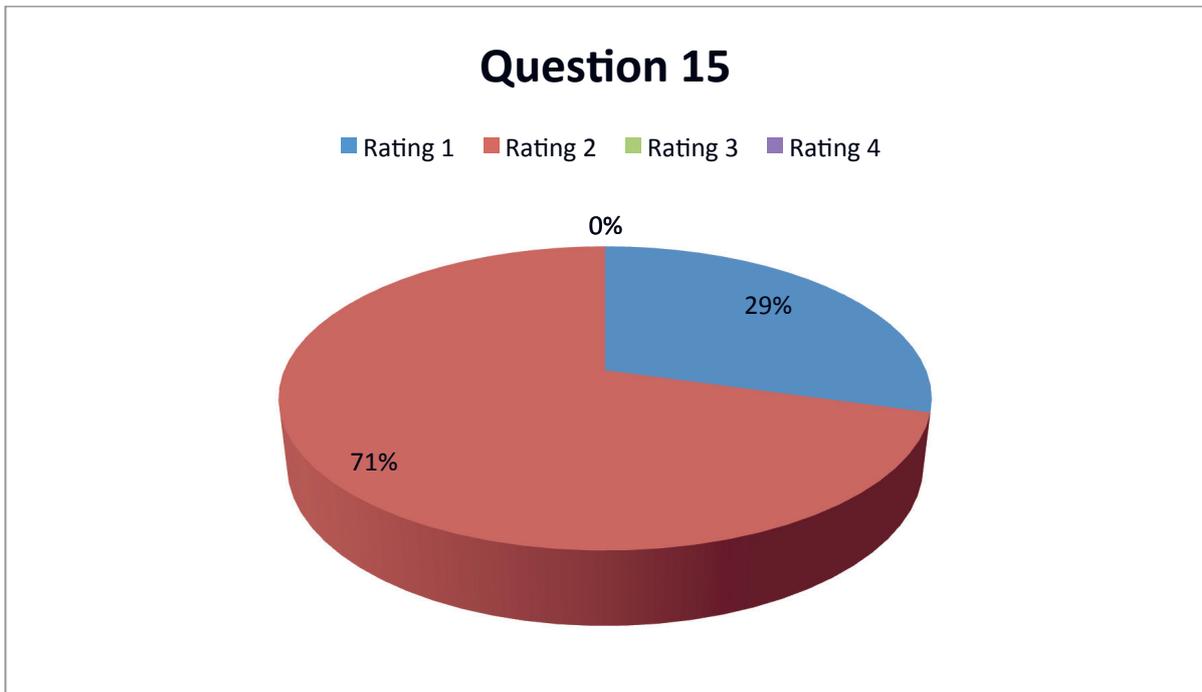
### Commentary

Respondents were wholly affirmative in their belief that Ofsted inspections were good for schools. This may be a predictable view from a self-selecting group who have invested time to become inspectors and who believe in the work they do. The additional comments provided reasons why they believed inspections

were good for schools e.g. *'They can be, as much to validate good practice as anything, although there are still many schools that need a regular challenge to keep up to scratch'* [R.6]; *'they have improved quality and standards in education'* [R.9]; *highlight areas for improvement* [R.11] and in some schools give teachers *'a confidence boost and "pat on the back" in recognition of their efforts to ensure pupils receive a good or even high quality education'* [R.11]; *'Definitely, External evaluation against national criteria etc. is essential'* [R.14]. However, there were few references as to how respondents viewed the impact of inspections on schools: *'...the experience of going through an inspection as a school is not generally viewed by schools as being 'good for them'* [R.9]; *'There are some schools and Ofsted teams that pile unnecessary pressure on schools'* [R.10]; Most of the comments supported Ofsted's official line, reinforcing the perceived need for school inspections, which in turn validates a belief amongst inspectors that inspections make a positive contribution to school improvement (see responses to Q.5, 12 and 13).

## 15. Inspectors use their common sense when inspecting schools.

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
5	12	0	0



### Summary

71% of respondents agreed and 29% strongly agreed that inspectors use their common sense when inspecting schools: *'All good ones do' [R.7]; 'Most do..!' [R.10]; 'The vast majority do but common sense has to be set against inspection requirements' [R.14].* There were 0 responses that strongly disagreed or disagreed. However additional comments offered interesting points: e.g. *'You are assuming common sense may be common. Most inspectors seem to use common sense when applying the framework, but common sense is powered by capabilities, experience and knowledge' [R.12].*

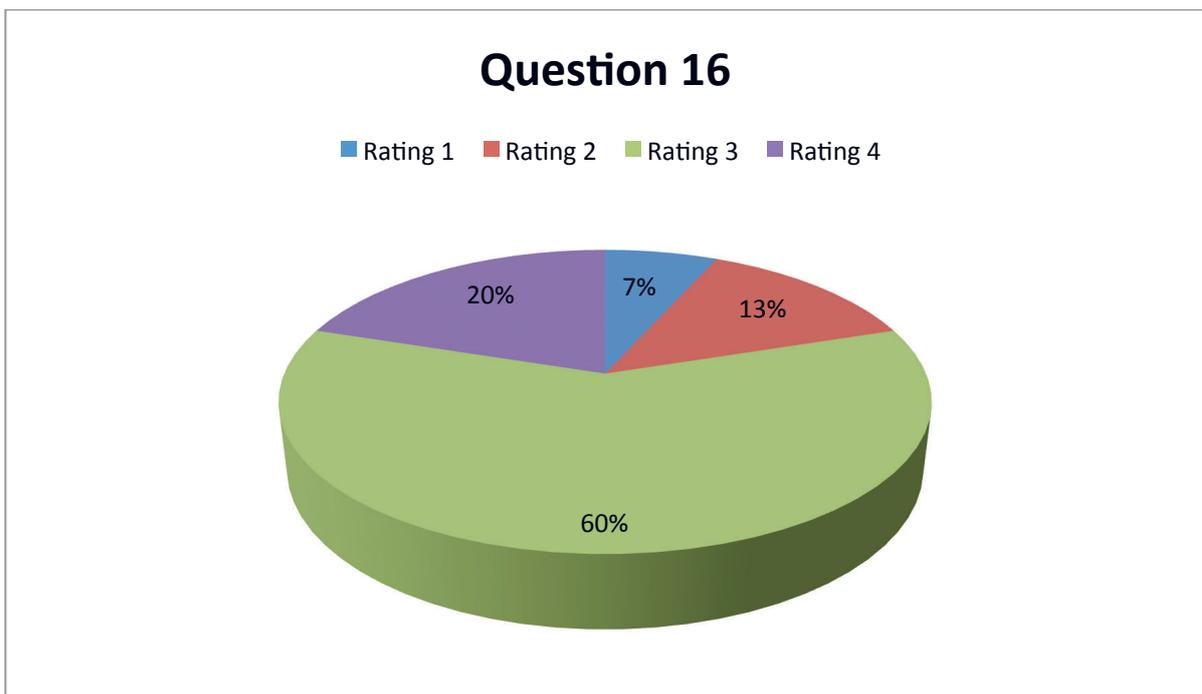
### Commentary

All respondents indicated that inspectors used their 'common sense' when inspecting schools. However, patterns were appearing amongst the additional responses, reflecting the way inspectors perceive the work they do. Respondents appeared to suggest that common sense or professional judgement was required when inspecting different schools because e.g. *'we are always looking for "best fit" and the bigger picture. The evidence has to be there, obviously, but so does experience and professional judgement'* [R.6]; *'professional judgement is renamed as common sense as is experience of how schools work and function, and pupils learn'* [R.13]. The implication seems to be that 'common sense' equates to 'professional judgement' and the basis for this is inspectors' experience of how schools work.

Some respondents explained that they perceived their work in terms of applying the Ofsted criteria flexibly in the best interests of schools e.g. *'they [inspectors] need to take schools with them and this means modifying the approach to establish the best professional working relationship'* [R.2]; *'My experience is that no lead inspector or HMI goes into a school looking for a 'bad' outcome. Inspections are fair and leads [lead inspectors] have always made absolutely sure that schools have a fair chance to defend what may be an outcome that is less than expected'* [R.9] (see responses to Q.9, 10 and 11). This appears to indicate that some respondents believed that a degree of mediation was acceptable. However, some suggested that introducing a level of discretion into the inspection process in this way created variation e.g. *'Yes they do but this results in them moving away from the Ofsted guidance (inconsistency), which in some instances lacks common sense. So is that good or bad?'* [R.1].

**16. Inspections would be more meaningful if inspectors had more freedom to interpret 'The Evaluation Schedule for Schools' as they use and apply it.**

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
1	2	9	3



### Summary

60% of the respondents disagreed and a further 20% strongly disagreed with this statement e.g. *'Not advisable. There is sufficient flexibility in the interpretation of the framework already. Once you allow more freedom, you begin to lose consistency and probably, accuracy' [R.12]*. 13% of the respondents agreed and 7% [1 respondent] strongly agreed that inspections would be more meaningful if inspectors had more freedom to interpret 'The Evaluation Schedule for Schools' as they use and apply it e.g. *'Good inspectors*

*do' [R.7]; 'This needs further discussion as I am not sure if 'freedom to interpret' is a good thing. Everyone does this already – but within the criteria' [R.10].*

### **Commentary**

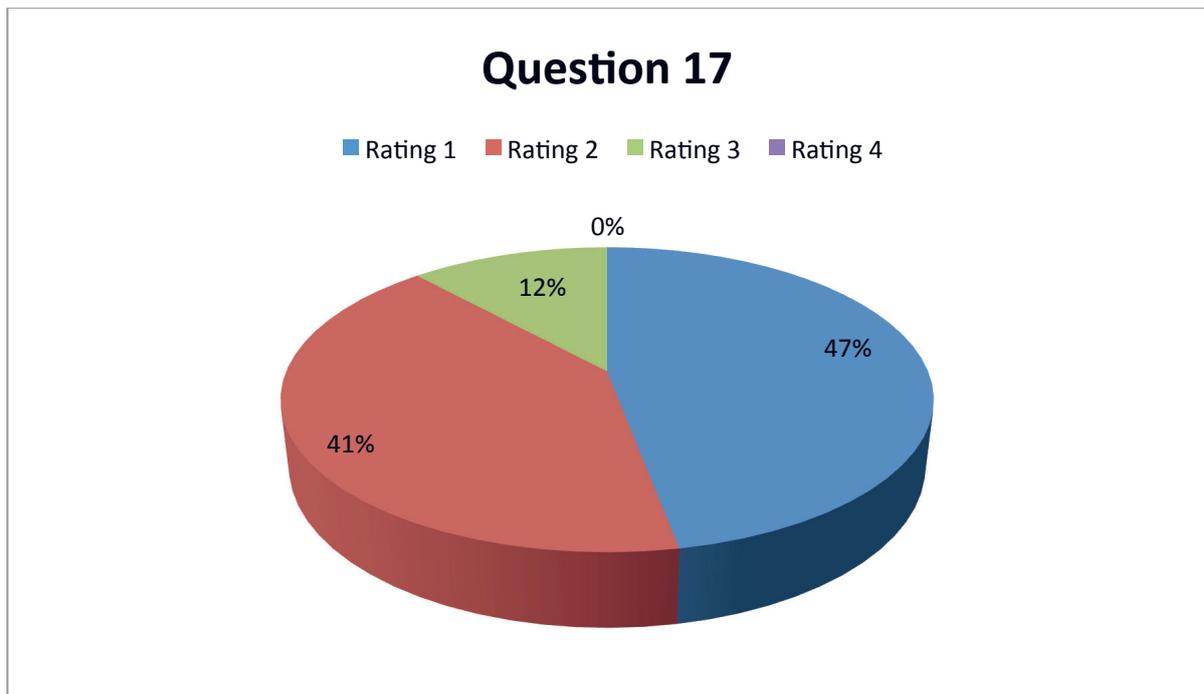
This question is something of a continuation from Q.15, in that a minority of respondents confirmed that they do believe inspectors used their common sense, often expounded as 'professional judgement' (based on their skills, knowledge and experience), when they inspected schools. However, a large majority disagreed with this idea. In the additional comments, concerns were raised by some respondents about having more freedom because they appeared to indicate that this would lead to mitigation in the process e.g. *'Huge variation would ensue' [R.15]; 'It would become less meaningful if there was more "latitude"...inspection has to be within a set of national parameters and there has to be as much consistency as possible' [R.14].* This suggests that inspectors follow the inspection framework criteria and consider more freedom to interpret within the process to lead to inconsistency e.g. *'I think that this would lead to inconsistency and therefore lack of equal opportunities' [R.2]; 'No monitoring system will work if "interpretation" is built into the programme' [R.17].* Ofsted's expectation is for inspectors to apply the inspection criteria in a consistent manner, following Ofsted's code of conduct for inspectors and to make judgements fairly based on evidence. A large majority of respondents indicated that in their belief inspectors endorsed this expectation. In doing so it seems reasonable to assume that inspectors' values appear to be closely aligned to those of Ofsted. These responses appear to conflict with those of Q.10 (pp.136-137) and Q.15 (pp.147-148). Responses to those questions supported inspectors using their common sense during inspections and they

reported variation in inspection practice but here respondents indicated that 'more freedom to interpret' would not help Ofsted inspections.

However, a number of respondents indicated that interpretation was happening already e.g. *'Everyone does this already – but within the criteria'* [R.10]; *'Inspectors use and apply the code as fairly as possible but Ofsted always state that we should use our professional judgements in all situations'* [R.11]. In fact the *School Inspection Handbook* encourages inspectors, when making judgements to *'... draw on the available evidence, use their professional knowledge and consider the guidance in this document and, in particular, the grade descriptors for each judgement'* (Ofsted, *School Inspection Handbook*, 2013, paragraph 100 p.24). However, a negative perception was held by a minority of inspectors who presented a view that interpretation had crept into inspections because they believed that the process was flawed e.g. *'What is needed is a better/fairer (not totally driven by results) and realistic system which is applied rigorously. The present flawed system, which is mitigated by some people applying common sense, is not ideal'* [R.1]; *'The current schedule sometimes leads to judgements that make no sense. To a point it can be possible to fudge things'* [R.5]. These additional comments [R.1 and R.5] begin to allude to the existence of a minority group of inspectors whose values are not wholly in alignment with all other inspectors or the values of Ofsted.

### 17. Inspecting schools is an enjoyable experience for me.

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
8	7	2	0



#### Summary

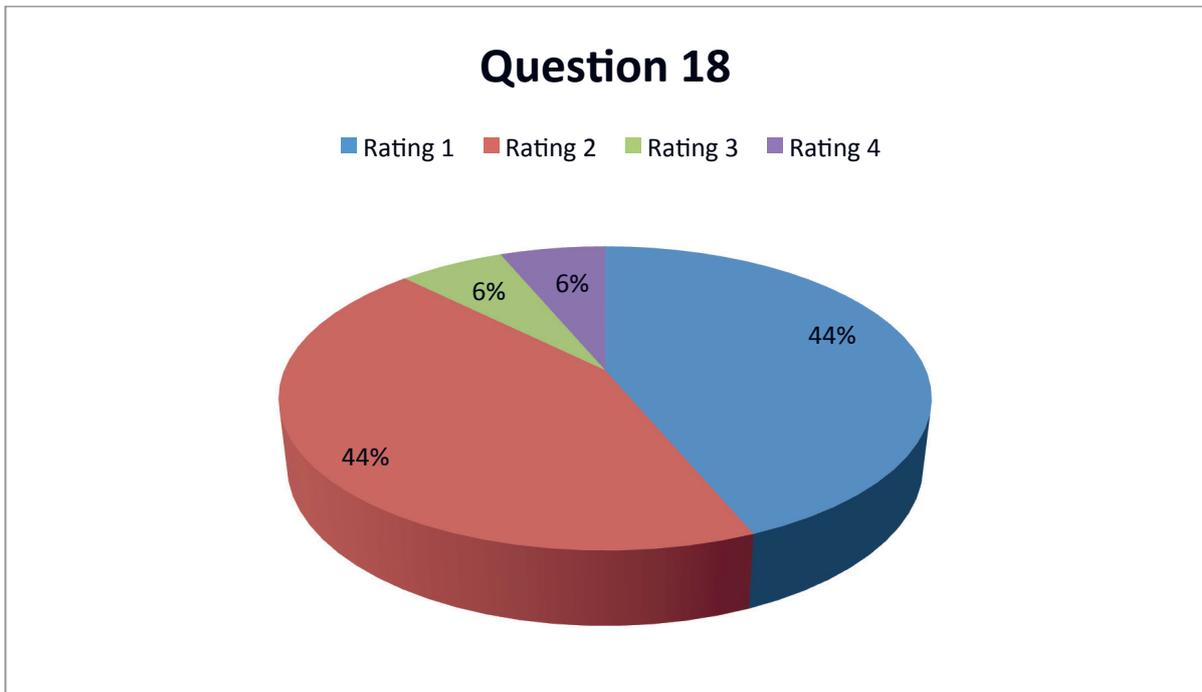
47% of the respondents strongly agreed and 41% agreed that (for them) inspecting schools was an enjoyable experience. *'It is a privilege and responsibility to contribute to the well-being of children' [R.3]; 'Very much so' [R.6]; 'I believe and know that I am making a difference for pupils either confirming what the school is doing for them or by identifying why the school is not giving pupils what it is their right to receive' [R.13].* Two (12%) of the respondents disagreed with this and there were 0 responses for strongly disagree.

## Commentary

Additional responses supported the major group, endorsing that respondents enjoy inspecting schools. They acknowledged that, at times the work was *'hard work but professionally satisfying'* [R.2] and *'it is a bit of a grind at times'* [R.12]. Respondents said that satisfaction and enjoyment were often linked to local level deployment and the way in which the lead inspector managed the inspection rather than the inspection process itself e.g. *'This will depend on the lead inspector's management and planning'* [R.8]. Their reports of enjoying inspection work related closely to their belief that inspections were helping children. Others valued the process because they were learning from the experience of inspecting different schools e.g. *'Yes especially through the direct observations of how each school operates within their unique context'* [R.4]; *'I have met some lovely dedicated and committed people'* [R.15].

## 18. My values influence the way I inspect schools.

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
7	7	1	1



### Summary

44% of respondents strongly agreed and a further 44% agreed that their values influenced the way they inspected schools: *'Of course – I wouldn't do it otherwise'* [R.10]; *'They must for all inspectors'* [R.11]. 6% (1 respondent) strongly disagreed and a further 6% (1 respondent) disagreed with the statement.

### Commentary

Inspectors said that their values were aligned to Ofsted and the inspection process. However, they provided their own interpretations of values and perceptions about the nature of values which differed between the respondents. Some respondents appeared to consider their values in terms of their

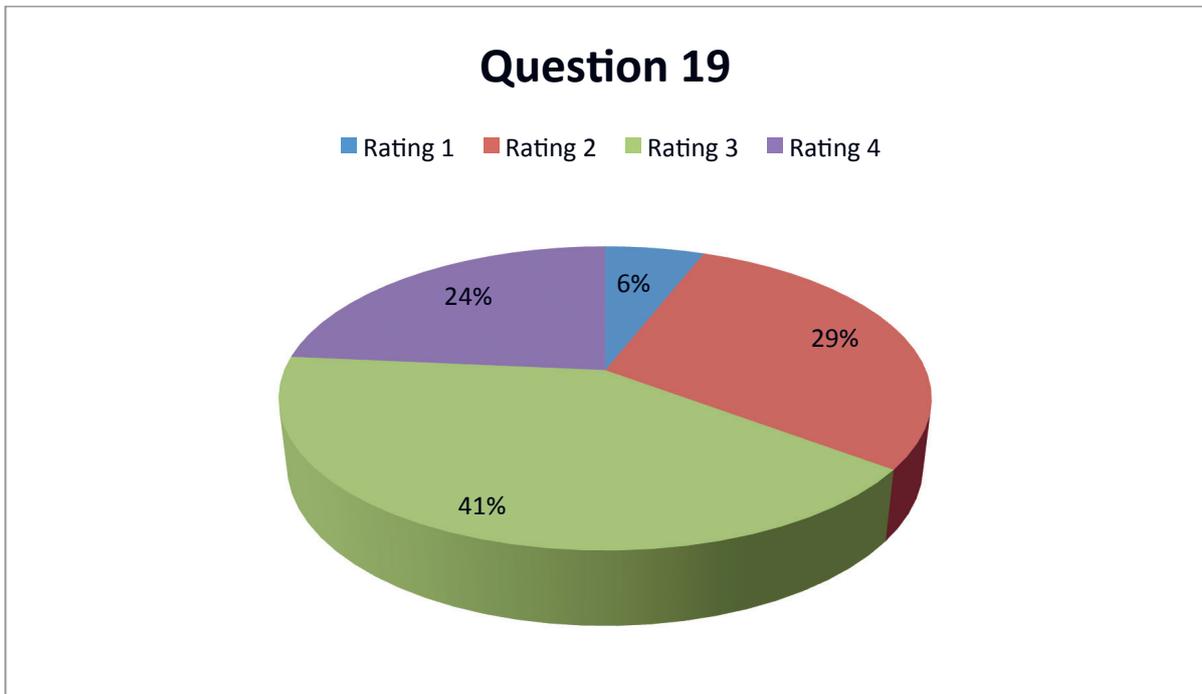
educational ideology in wishing to help young people e.g. *'I want all children to get the best chance possible so that is my underlying value' [R.2]* and *'As I believe in giving young people the best provision possible, then I want to see that happening' [R.7]*. Other respondents interpreted the notion of values in terms of the way that they conducted themselves within Ofsted's inspection requirements e.g. *'Within the framework and requirements of the schedule. I try to empathise with the school and put staff at their ease so they do well' [R.3]*; *'They don't influence the way that I interpret the schedule but they do influence the way I conduct myself within schools' [R.9]*. One respondent commented it is about *'treating people the way I would expect to be treated' [R.15]*.

A minority of respondents appeared to have interpreted values in terms of their opinions or prejudices. This group said that they believed that their values should not influence the way in which they applied the inspection criteria or the way in which they conducted themselves e.g. *'Of course I bring my own concerns for the well-being and education of children to bear. Any prejudices I may have are kept firmly in check as I have to match the evidence to the inspection criteria' [R.6]*; *'All inspectors bring something of themselves. It's impossible not to. I strove to keep my values out of the equation but they inevitably seeped out on occasion. We are not machines' [R.12]*. This group of inspectors suggested that while their values were in alignment with those of Ofsted they also hold a range of educational perceptions, principles or opinions, which may not always be in agreement with those of Ofsted or the schools they are inspecting. From what they reported they try not to allow individual *'prejudices'* or bias to influence their judgements. Here, as in other comments, respondents seemed to suggest that the process of inspection is one of human

interaction and understanding e.g. *'We are not machines' [R.12]*. From their educational experiences, respondents also empathised with schools and with Ofsted e.g. *'I'm an ex-HT [headteacher] as an ex-HMI [Her Majesty's Inspector]. I've had it done to me, as well as doing it to others. I believe I still understand the pressures and challenges of managing teachers and children...and I try to allow that understanding as much room as it can have whilst not impinging on what inspection should be: frank and fair' [R.14]*.

## 19. Elements of the Ofsted inspection process conflict with my values.

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
1	5	7	4



### Summary

41% of the respondents disagreed and 24% strongly disagreed with the statement that elements of the Ofsted inspection process conflicted with their values e.g. *'I never allow it to' [R.10]; 'No conflict with 'values' at all. On the contrary: Ofsted is founded on admirable values, of equality, diversity, fairness, rights as well as responsibilities' [R.14]; 'Don't think so otherwise I wouldn't have kept going for so long' [R.15]. 29% agreed with the statement and 6% (1 respondent) strongly agreed.*

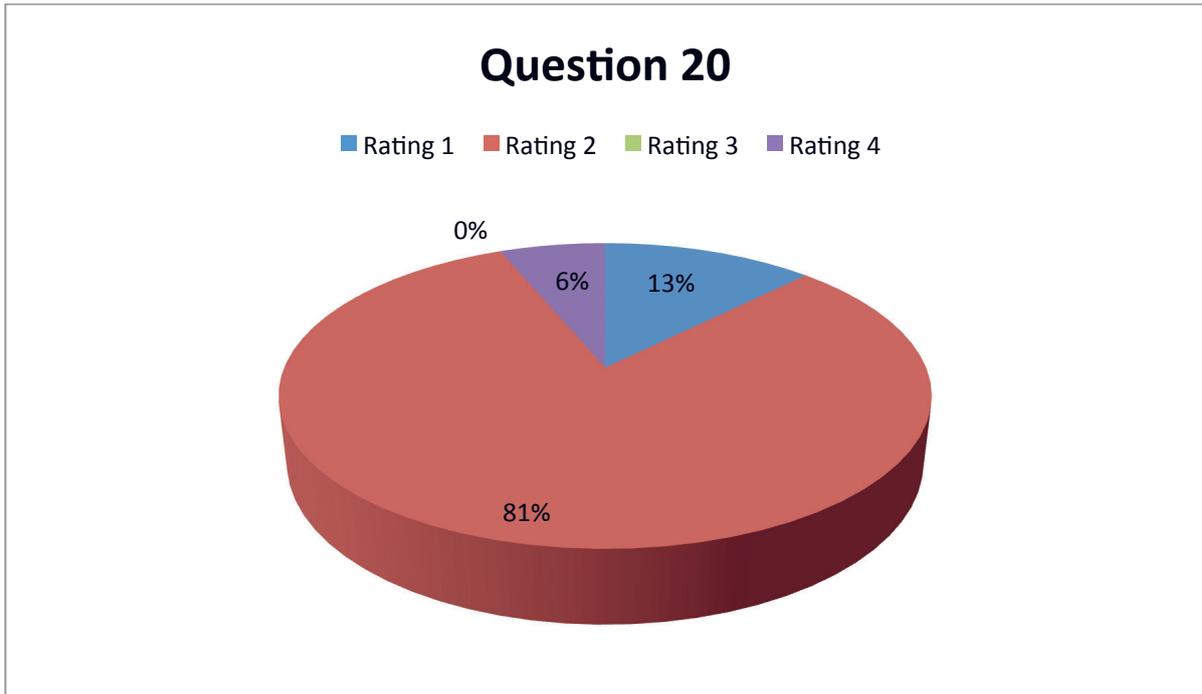
### Commentary

Q.19 is a continuation of the theme begun in Q.18. A majority of the respondents indicated that there was no conflict between those implicit within

the Ofsted inspection process and their own values. However, a number of additional comments referred to their perceptions about problems or flaws with the practicalities of the inspection process (e.g. time constraints within the tariff and degrees of bureaucracy) rather than any conflict with Ofsted's values e.g. *'I would like more time to deliver a more rounded judgement but recognise the constraints on the public purse'* [R.2]; *'Not really. The administrative element is a pain because it is commercially driven'* [R.3] and *'Any inspection process is going to have limitations, largely due to time constraints. Conflict is too strong a word to agree with. If I didn't think inspection was necessary and sometimes valuable I wouldn't do it'* [R.6]. While the sample was a very small one and may not be representative of the views of the national inspection team, responses seem to indicate that the values of these inspectors tended to be in alignment with those of Ofsted. However, one respondent may be representative of a minority group of inspectors who reported the need to present themselves in a way that was somehow different to the majority of inspectors e.g. *'In so much that I have a very open and transparent personality and don't wish to intimidate or scare anyone during interviews and this is often how inspectors are perceived'* [R.8].

**20. The Ofsted inspection process takes into account each school's culture and individuality.**

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
2	13	0	1



### Summary

81% of respondents agreed and 13% strongly agreed that the Ofsted process takes into account each school's culture and individuality e.g. *'Yes, of course. It's something you sense as soon as you walk through the door' [R.6]; 'Yes it really does – or should do!' [R.11].* 6% (1 response) of respondents strongly disagreed and there were 0 responses for disagree e.g. *'Yes, in theory, but not usually in practice' [R.12].*

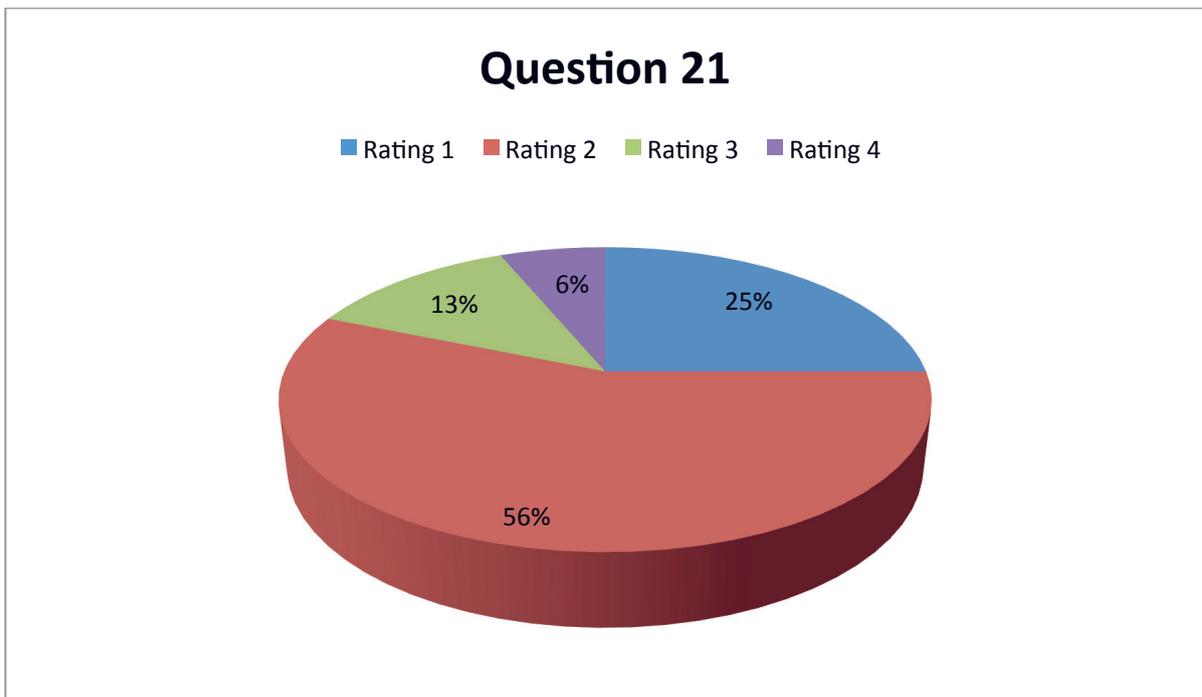
### Commentary

Respondents overwhelmingly reported that they believed that inspection takes into account each school's culture and individuality. However, there was

variation within some of the written responses e.g. *'It can do but this is up to the human influence...I know it doesn't always happen'* [R.10]; *'The report format does/did not encourage free and frank description of the school's individuality'* [R.12]; *'To some extent'* [R.15]. Others commented that the inspection process can take a school's context and individuality into account e.g. *'Can take into account. There is room for flexibility here'* [R.13]; *'The latest framework is much more of a joint process between head and the inspection team which enables the school to promote their culture and individuality'* [R.9] but *'sometimes inspectors have little or no experience of working in the contexts they are inspecting e.g. 100% multi ethnic groups or schools with high deprivation'* [R.17]. Here the last respondent appears to indicate that a lack of experience in terms of knowledge about context, ethnic mix or socio-economic background may impede an inspector's understanding about the extent of a school's functioning, provision and student/pupil progress.

## 21. The Ofsted inspection process takes into account each school's values.

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
4	9	2	1



### Summary

56% of respondents agreed and 25% strongly agreed with the statement that the inspection process takes into account each school's values e.g. *'Well, yes, otherwise the system is failing them. On the other hand school's values should be fairly similar'* [R.12]. 13% disagreed and 6% (1 response) strongly disagreed with this.

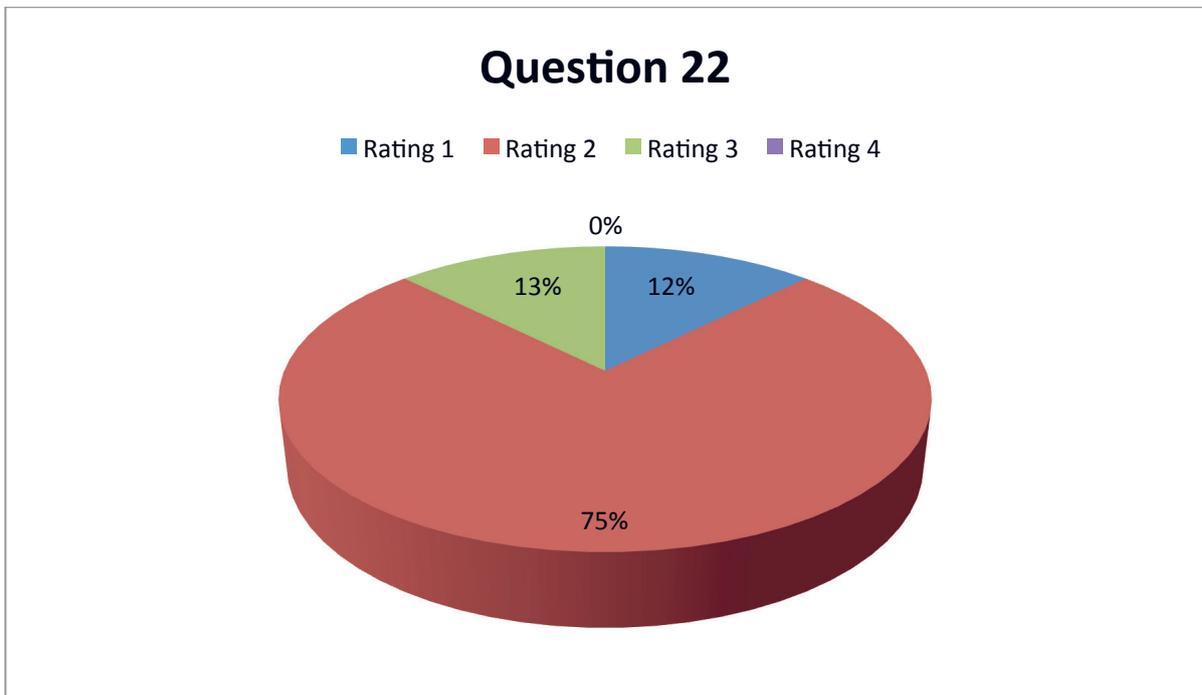
### Commentary

Respondents said that during inspections they believed that inspectors were *'sometimes'* [R.17] able to capture the unique educational context of each school and that there should be shared values between schools e.g. *'the*

*assumption of the framework is that there should be shared values' [R.6]. Other respondents said that they believed that some inspectors lacked experience in this area which, they perceived could have an impact on how well inspections take into account each school's values e.g. 'It should do but not always due to human error and lack of enough wide reaching experience of inspectors' [R.10]; 'It can do – sometimes inspectors have little or no experience of working in the contexts they are inspecting e.g. 100% multi ethnic groups or schools with high deprivation where they have never experienced this type of school' [R.17];. Respondents explained that the degree to which this occurs may be dependent on (a) the human element, i.e. the experience of individual inspectors, their interpretation and ability to mediate or (b) school context isn't considered to be a prime inspection activity and given the restrictions of time within the allotted two-day inspection tariff, may not always be fully explored by inspectors. A minority of responses suggested that there was no need for inspectors to take the values of each school into account during inspections because the 'School Inspection Handbook' does not identify this as a primary aim of inspections e.g. 'Ofsted is about quality and outcomes for children, the outcomes clearly set out in all the guidance. Whatever values a school may espouse, it is the outcomes that matter' [R.14].*

## 22. Inspection is an objective process

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
2	12	2	0



### Summary

75% of respondents agreed and 12% strongly agreed that inspection is an objective process e.g. *'It is a national process that gathers and weighs evidence and makes judgements against clear criteria'* [R.2]; *'Criteria are clear and transparent'* [R.7]; *'It has to be evidence based and rightly so'* [R.13]. 13% [2] respondents disagreed because in their view inspections are carried out by human beings, which involves them e.g. *'interpreting evidence'* [R.11] and *'As much as it can be, given that human beings are not machines'* [R.6].

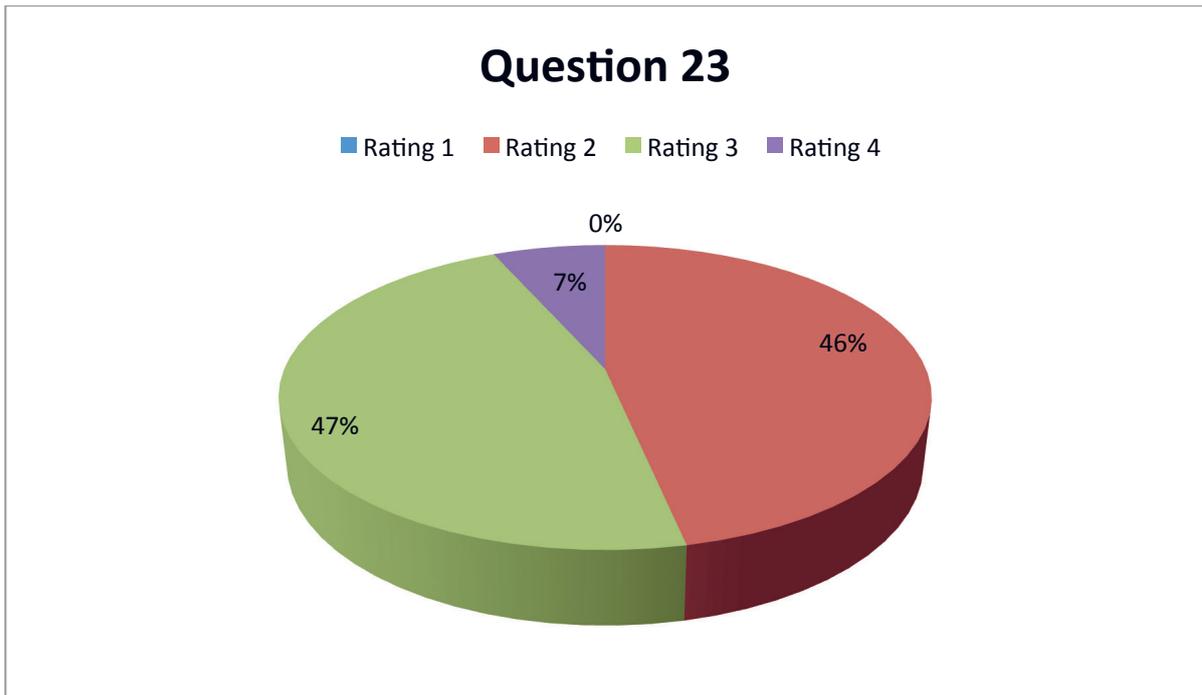
### Commentary

While the numerical data supports respondents' beliefs that inspections are objective, additional written responses provided a number of reasons as to why

this may not always be the case. They reported that they believed that inspectors systematically applied the inspection criteria each time but added reasons why the process may differ from school to school e.g. *'Yes, but not purely. It can't be. It is not a perfect science' [R.12]* and *'Given the potentially terrible consequences for schools of "failing" many schools get better inspection results than they deserve. It is a largely objective process but not totally' [R.1]*. Here there are perceptions that it is not a fully objective process because human beings carry it out e.g. *'The inspection judgements are made through gathering and interpreting evidence and also through discussions there has to be a subjective element [R.11]'*; As well as the pragmatic reasons provided, a minority of respondents suggested that inspections cannot be an objective process because each inspector makes judgements based on their evaluation of the evidence as they apply the inspection criteria e.g. *'In so far as there are given criteria but it is delivered by individuals with varying degrees of experience, understanding and detachment' [R.3]* and *'...there has to be an element of professional judgement...'* [R.14] (which respondents perceived to be similar to using their 'common sense' in Q.15).`

### 23. The Ofsted inspection process and inspectors create unnecessary tension in schools.

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
0	7	7	1



#### Summary

46% agreed that the inspection process and inspectors create unnecessary tension in schools e.g. *'Given the nature of the task this is to some extent inevitable' [R.1]; 'The process is bound to create some tension. Nothing wrong with that, ...there's accountability in most spheres of life, quite rightly. So it's not 'unnecessary'. There may be some inspectors that create more tension than they intend, and I may have done that myself at times. However, I/we try hard not to...it's difficult, if you have to ask probing questions...there is a necessary tension, but there is, sometimes, unnecessary tension' [R.14].* However, 47%

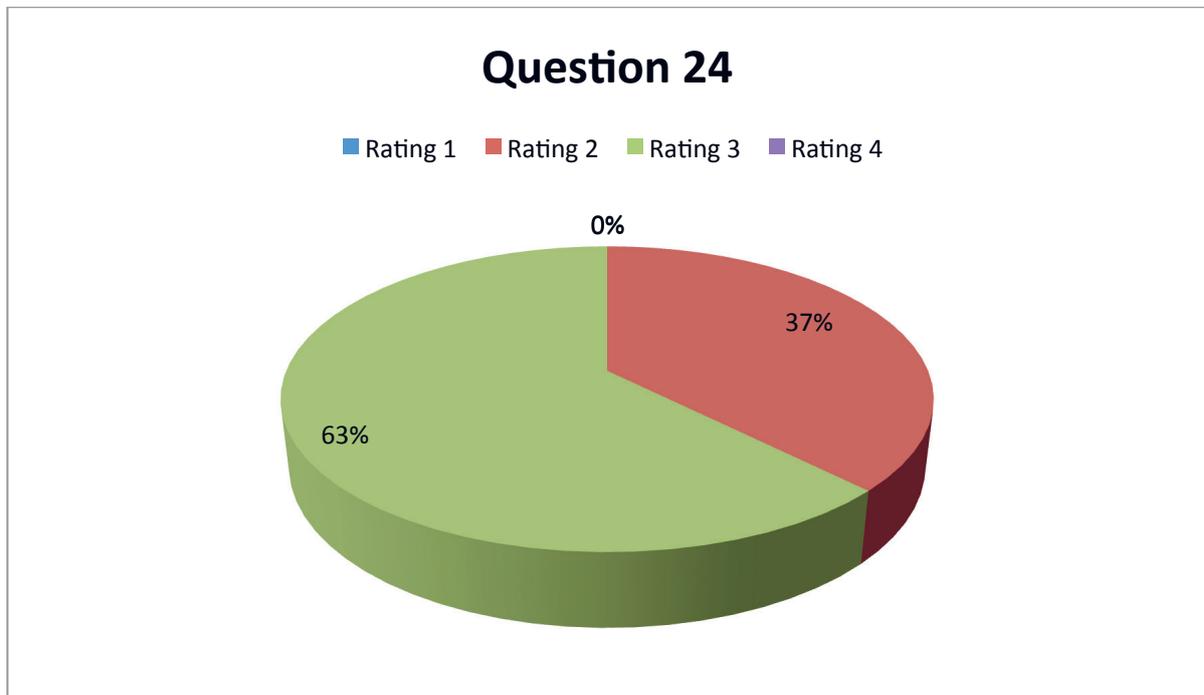
disagreed and 7% (1 response) strongly disagreed with this statement e.g. *'I've not experienced that. I have heard stories of such however'* [R.7].

### **Commentary**

Given the nature of the divided results respondents may have interpreted the question in different ways. There are two components to the question, which are linked. The question asked respondents to consider whether the Ofsted inspection process and inspectors create 'unnecessary tension'. A number of additional responses indicated that respondents were focusing on 'tension' rather than 'unnecessary tension' e.g. *'The process does create tension because schools want to do well but this is not unnecessary tension. Teams I have worked on have always gone out of their way to put schools at their ease during an inspection'* [R.9]. Where respondents acknowledged that there may be some 'unnecessary tension' they suggested that this was caused by the schools themselves and not by inspectors or the inspection process: *'It's not the inspectors that create the unnecessary tension, it's the teachers doing themselves no favours. Tension is not always a bad thing if it tightens things up to where they should be'* [R.6]; *'I think that nowadays most of the unnecessary tension is created from within schools, from insecurity among leaders and/or staff'* [R.12]. Respondents also reported that they believed that human influence was also a contributory factor in the creation or diffusion of tension e.g. *'That depends on the people involved but also on the outcome'* [R.3]; *'It can do but I hope it certainly doesn't when I lead inspections as I go out of my way to be friendly and approachable during inspections and the odd joke always goes down well'* [R.11].

## 24. Ofsted inspectors are perceived negatively in schools.

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
0	6	10	0



### Summary

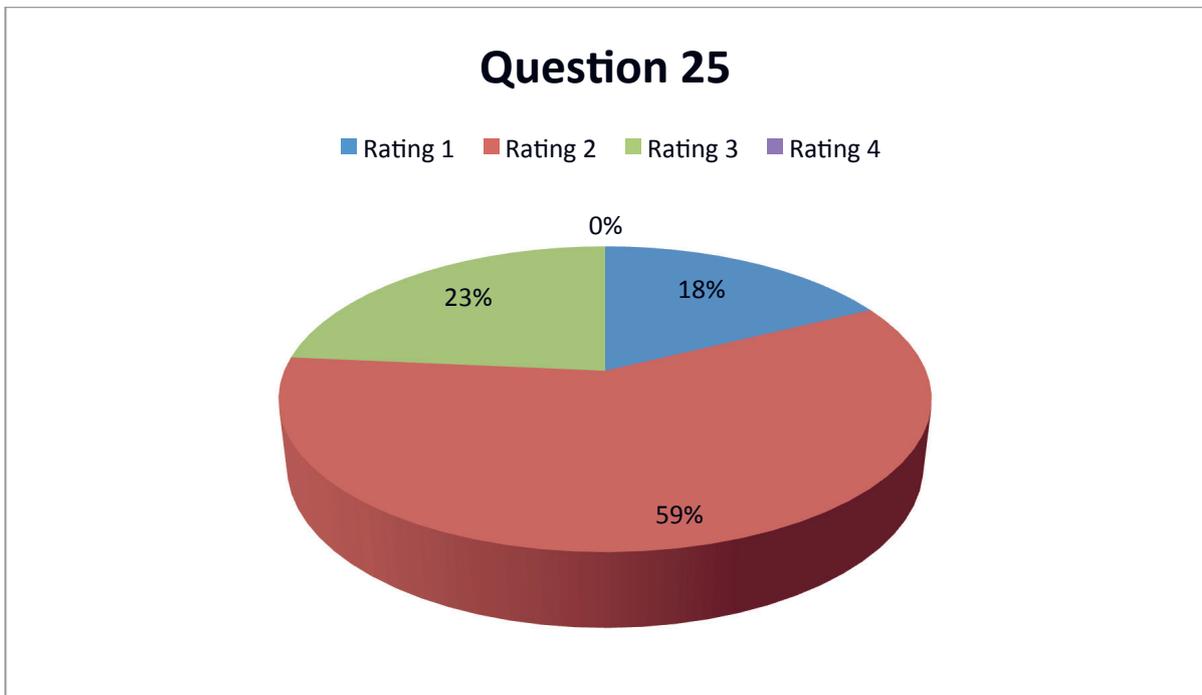
63% disagreed that Ofsted inspectors were perceived negatively in schools e.g. *'Not always' [R.4]; 'Not in my experience, not after two days in a school. Most say it has been helpful' [R.6]; 'After the inspection we have had many, many comments stating that staff were put at their ease and inspection was viewed positively. It was done with them and not to them' [R.13].* 37% of respondents agreed with the statement that Ofsted inspectors were perceived negatively in schools e.g. *'This is to some extent inevitable' [R.1]; 'Very often especially those schools who feel they (wrongly) have no further need to improve...and those who have not got an accurate self evaluation. There is sometimes a justified negative perception when the team is not the best!' [R.10].*

## Commentary

A number of reasons were provided in the additional comments to support both the 'agree' or 'disagree' stances. Similar to the responses to Q.23, individual respondents said that they did not believe that inspectors were perceived negatively in schools. One respondent referred to post inspection survey outcomes that e.g. *'show a rising degree of satisfaction with the process'* [R.2]. Similar to responses to Q.23, some respondents said that where inspectors were perceived negatively it reflected schools' negativity towards inspectors e.g. *'[it] is more about the culture of the school than inspectors who they have never met until they arrive'* [R.3]; *'By some schools. Are these the schools which would come out badly?'* [R.15]. and *'Schools interpret other schools' [inspection] outcomes based on subjective views and this can cause tension and denial about of their own school's outcomes'* [R.17]; *'Often in schools where the leadership has not had a good impact on provision, where teacher turnover is high thus disadvantaging all in that community and resources are unfairly distributed is that the case'* [R.7] and where schools do not have *'an accurate self-evaluation'* [R.10].

## 25. Ofsted has increased conformity and compliance in schools.

Rating			
1 Strongly Agree (blue)	2 Agree (red)	3 Disagree (green)	4 Strongly Disagree (purple)
3	10	4	0



### Summary

59% of respondents agreed that Ofsted has increased conformity and compliance in schools and a further 18% agreed e.g. *'Schools now comply better to statutory requirements e.g. Child Protection.'* [R.2]; *'Yes in a good way. Safeguarding, health and safety, management structures etc, all have a positive impact on children'* [R.6]; *'To some extent yes, but generally in good ways'* [R.14]. However, 23% disagreed with the statement e.g. *'Whether a particular teaching style or slavish adherence to a particular curriculum, these are not OFSTED constraints. We are looking for what is effective, not a specious conformity'* [R.6]; *'Not really'* [R.11].

### Commentary

A large majority of survey responses supported Ofsted having increased conformity and compliance in schools and most of the additional comments reinforced this perception e.g. *'Very important especially in regard to health and safety and safeguarding [R.3]*. Increased conformity and compliance was seen to be a good thing by some respondents, particularly regarding conformity or compliance to child protection, safeguarding and health and safety issues. One additional comment identified that legislation beyond Ofsted has influenced conformity in schools e.g. *'legislation outside the framework has done this [created conformity] more than inspections alone' [R.9]*.

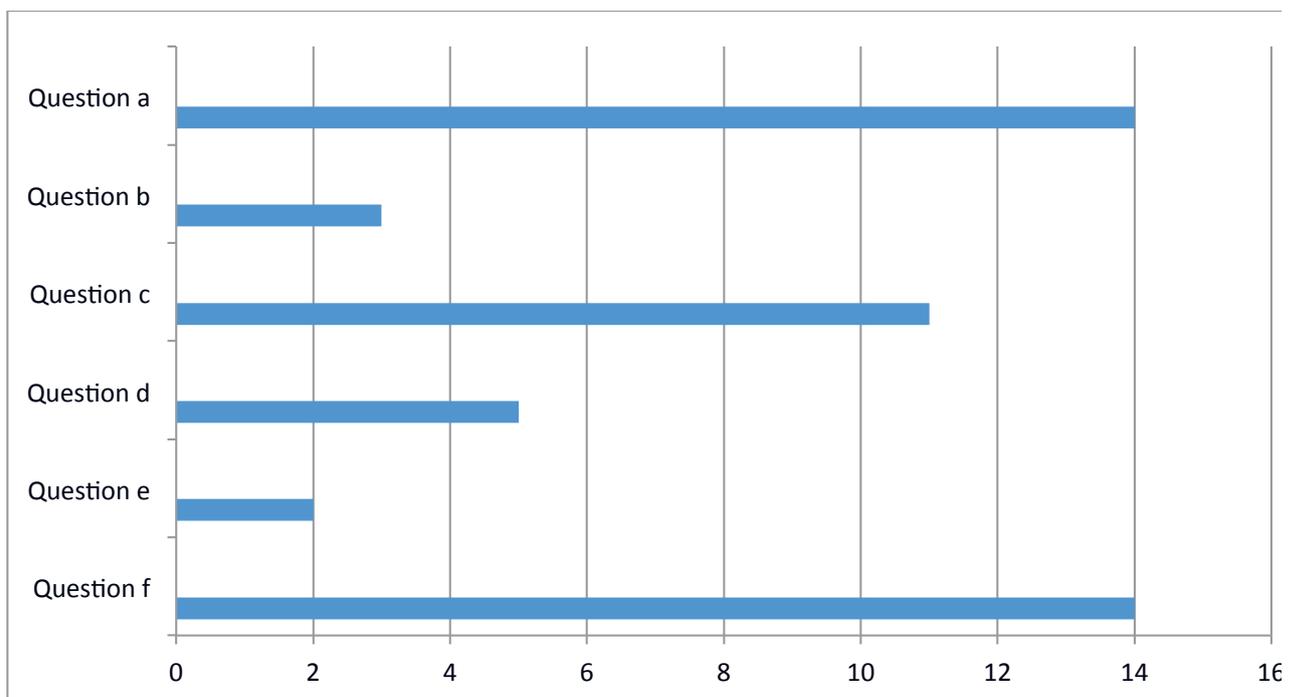
A number of additional comments provided a more negative perspective about the impact of inspections on conformity and compliance in schools: *'I think it has restricted creativity in many cases' [R.10]*; *'There are still some schools who are enterprising and exciting' [R.15]*. There were also mixed responses from individuals e.g. *'In terms of things such as safeguarding then – yes. In terms of applying some researched principles of what works for pupils e.g. AfL [assessment for learning] – also yes. In terms of standardizing lesson plans, teaching styles, having a timed three part lesson – definitely no' [R.13]*.

## Additional Survey Questions:

In the previous twenty-five questions each inspector provided a single response to each question. However, in the additional survey questions respondents were asked to make more than one choice where they felt that more than one component of each question applied to them. As a consequence, the multiple responses to the additional survey questions have not been converted into percentages because this action would cause confusion and contradict the percentages for questions 1 to 25. Consequently, they remain as numerical multiple-choice responses.

### What attracted you to become an Ofsted inspector? (more than one choice could be made)

a) Making a difference to schools and their improvement agenda	14
b) The intensity of the work	3
c) Contributing to the national educational improvement of schools	11
d) Financial Reward	5
e) Power and influence	2
f) Personal Professional Development	14

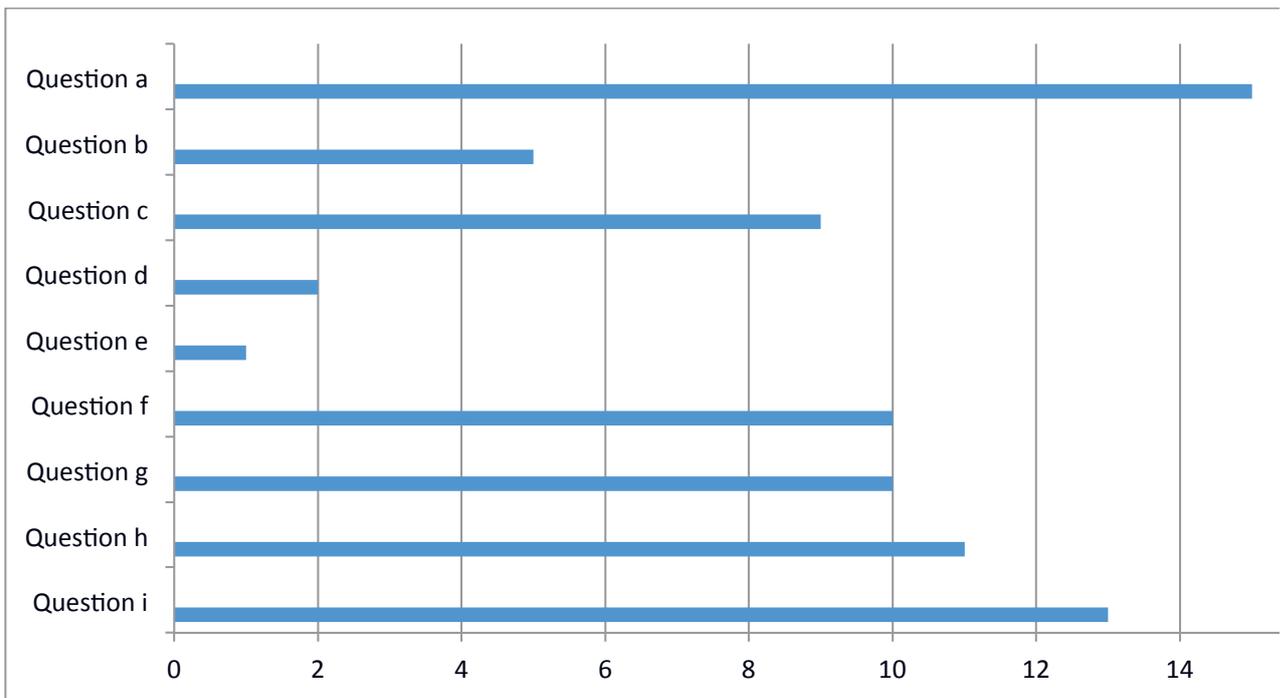


## Summary

Providing respondents with an opportunity to make more than one choice allowed a larger pattern to develop from the statements. For example, the two statements that drew most responses (14 responses each) as to what attracted respondents to becoming Ofsted inspectors was e.g. *'making a difference to schools and their improvement agenda'* and *'personal professional development'*. Low on the list of reasons was e.g. *'power and influence'* (2 responses); *'financial reward'* (5 responses) and *'the intensity of the work'* (3 responses). Additional comments provided by respondents included e.g. *'Supporting schools and ensuring a fair and collaborative inspection'* [R.4]; *'An interest in education'* [R.11]; *'The nature of the work suited my abilities'* [R.12] and *'Making a direct difference to children'* [R.13]. While the majority reported their attraction to becoming an inspector in terms of making a difference to schools and personal professional development, a minority of respondents reported that they were attracted by financial reward, power, influence and the intensity of the work.

### **I find satisfaction in being an Ofsted inspector because? (more than one choice could be made)**

a) I am making a difference to schools and their improvement agenda	15
I enjoy the intensity of the work	5
b) I am contributing to the national educational improvement of schools	9
c) Of the financial reward	2
d) I like the power and influence inspection gives me	1
e) I believe in holding schools to account	10
f) It increases my personal professional development	10
g) I am increasing the professionalism of teachers	11
h) I am improving the quality of education in schools	13



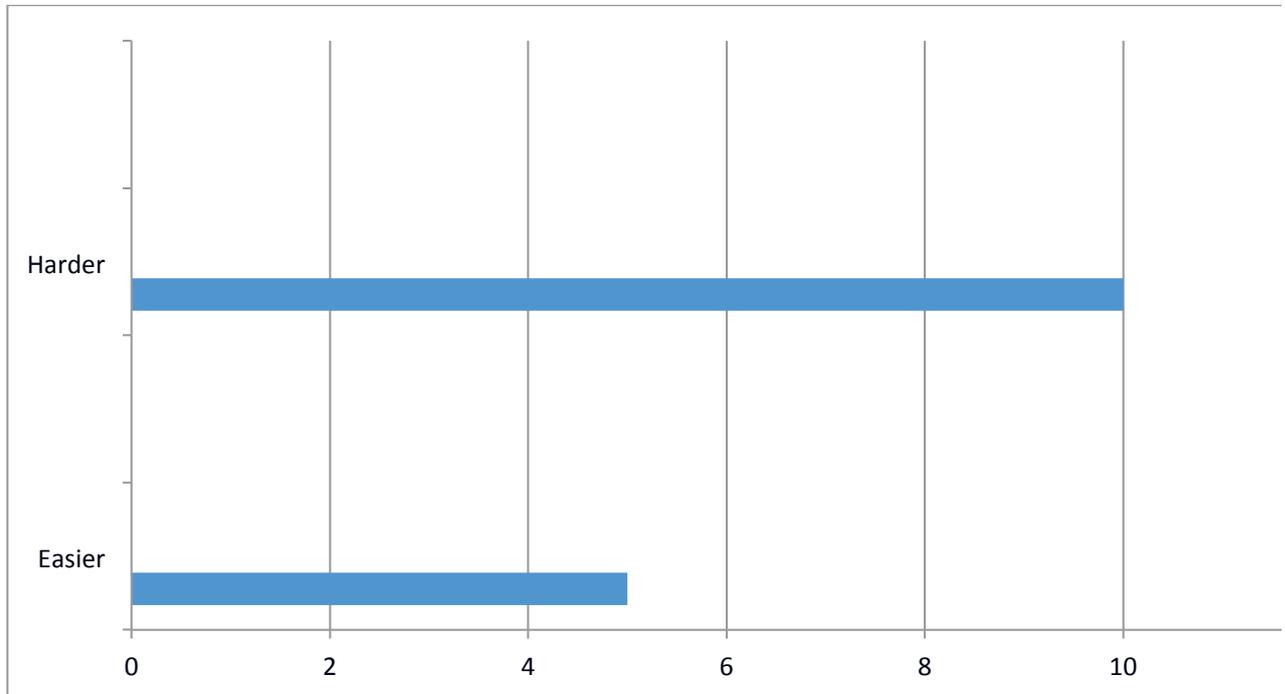
## Summary

The two most popular responses reflected the most popular responses to the previous question e.g. *'I am making a difference to schools and their improvement agenda'* (15 responses) and *'I am improving the quality of education in schools'* (13 responses) Again the most popular responses appear to support that respondents believed that Ofsted inspections were necessary, that they were making a difference to schools and improving the quality of education in schools. Respondents also said that they believed that they were e.g. *'increasing the professionalism of teachers'* (11 responses); *'holding schools to account'* (10 responses). The majority also reported they believed that the process of inspection was increasing their *'personal professional development'* (10 responses). In contrast to the majority of responses, a minority of respondents reported different reasons that gave them satisfaction when inspecting schools. These included e.g. *'power and influence'* (1 response); *'financial reward'* (2 responses) and *'the intensity of the work'* (5

responses). Most respondents reported that in their opinion, Ofsted inspectors were not attracted to the job for personal gain and influence for altruistic reasons (see responses to question 5 above). Inspectors said that they wanted to make a difference to the lives of children in schools and additional comments included: *'I believe that being an inspector does make my job better'* [R.9] and *'I am not sure that Ofsted's values are explicit other than on the website. They are certainly not transmitted enough. As such HMCI, who should be promoting them to all inspectors, does not do this in person and therein lies a problem of leadership, size of Ofsted as an organisation, bureaucracy, politics and money. The Select Committee is right to say that Ofsted is too big. We should never have been required to deal with social aspects of child development and education. Also effectiveness has less to do with up to date practice, whatever that means and more to do with being a life-long learner who is interested in how children learn in whatever context'* [R.3].

**I think that the job of being an Ofsted inspector has become easier/harder over the years?**

a) Harder	10
b) Easier	5



**Summary**

Responses were 2 to 1 in favour of the job of an Ofsted inspector having become harder over the years. Those who said that the job had become 'harder' reported: *'the pace is far too high, particularly on the first day'* [R.1]; *'The time allocation and reduced remit makes decisions at the extremes more difficult to evidence'* [R.2]; *'The time is too short to do it thoroughly'* [R.3]. Lack of time was the most cited factor for the job appearing harder [R.2, 3, 6, 9]. *'I think the job of being an Ofsted has become harder because the same amount of work and fewer days and working alone in some schools'* [R.15].

Some respondents provided reasons for the job becoming easier in terms of: *'the reports are not as long'* [R.10]; *'the process has become familiar to all'*

[R.12] and more than one response indicated that 'experience' has helped to make the job easier [R.6, 8 & 12]. Other responses indicated that the job is 'much the same (neither easier or harder) [R.5] and 'Neither. It's always challenging' [R.16]. One lengthy additional response provided a number of underlying reasons as to why the job of inspection had, for them, become more difficult e.g. *'The time is too short to do it thoroughly. The demands of the providers are little to do with improvement rather than their finances. Training is not rigorous enough. There should be an examination to check competence. There are too many changes to the process and too little understanding of child development by politicians. This makes it exams driven which is not a full measure of progress. However, judging qualitative matters like happiness, fulfilment, self-esteem, giftedness, kindness, potential is highly subjective and depends on a person's values and own experience. It [Ofsted inspection] is probably as good as it can be given the constraints and it is certainly better than no system [R.3].* R.3's lengthy additional response to this and the previous question may place her in a minority group of inspectors who do not share the values of the majority of Ofsted inspectors.

**What aspects of the Ofsted process conflict with my personal professional values?**

The majority of additional responses (8 from 15) reported that there was no conflict between their personal professional values and the Ofsted process e.g. [R.2, R.9, R.14 and R.16]. One respondent indicated that there was no conflict because: *'not much since there is little scope for changing such a mammoth QA process' [R.3].* One additional comment included a range of reasons as to why there was conflict between their personal professional values and the Ofsted

process e.g. *'The central manipulation of targeting schools for inspection in an underhand way; The number of inspectors who are "passed [sic] their sell by date" and are out of the loop in current experiences of schools; Some inspectors who are "power crazed"; Inspection teams who arrive early each day giving wrong messages to schools about work-life balance' [R.10].* Along with R.3's responses to previous questions, R.10 may also be part of a minority group of inspectors who do not share the values of the majority of Ofsted inspectors

## **Discussion**

The responses to this small small-scale survey may or may not fully represent the views of Ofsted's National team of inspectors. In general, the data and additional responses from this survey support that the majority of inspectors form part of an objectivist group, whose values are generally aligned with those of Ofsted. They enjoy inspecting schools because they believe Ofsted inspections improve schools.

There are a number of key themes that can be drawn from this chapter:

1. Outcomes from the questionnaire survey suggest that respondents fall into two different groups. Generally, respondents in the major group appear to a large extent to have embraced Ofsted's objectivist epistemology and corporate values. They are a self-selecting group and, having undergone training and development by Ofsted did not appear to be very critical of a process they have elected to join. Respondents in this group suggested that Ofsted's model of inspection was the right one by which to inspect schools. They reported that they enjoyed inspecting because they considered that they were making a difference to schools

because inspections were helping to improve educational standards and the quality of education for pupils. In this way their values were aligned with those of Ofsted and they were comfortable with Ofsted's requirements of them as inspectors. Within the context of working together as inspectors it would appear that a degree of socialisation occurs which further helps to reinforce the 'corporate culture' (Morgan, 1997) and the 'professional identity' (Banks, 2004) of Ofsted.

2. The questionnaires also support there being a small subgroup of inspectors whose values appeared not to be as closely aligned to those of Ofsted as the majority of respondents. This may be due to a degree of disillusionment amongst some inspectors on a number of issues [*e.g. R.3, p.174, 176 and R.10, p.177*], the fundamental underlying reasons for Ofsted and the impact of inspections on raising standards in schools. However, the perceptions of this sub-group may also result from the changes that have been made to the inspection process over time *e.g.* an expansion of inspection activities within the same allotted time. More research into this area would be required to fully understand the nature of the perceptions of this sub-group.
3. While those in the major group said that they enjoyed their work and held the same values as Ofsted regarding inspection work, respondents also appeared to be pragmatists who rationalised the nature of their work. They reported that a degree of mediation of the management of the inspection process occurs as inspectors interact with other human beings, taking into account different schools and their contexts as they apply a national inspection framework. Respondents also said that they

believed that to ensure the process worked successfully in different schools, inspectors were required to quickly form relationships with school leaders and teachers. However, the nature of using discretion in their work to achieve Ofsted's objectives, which are set within a limited time frame, may introduce a degree of subjectivity into, what is expected by many to be an objective process. The impact of this may create variation within the process and raise further questions about the validity of Ofsted inspections being a systematic, consistent and objective process.

From those who responded to the questionnaires, four respondents were selected to be interviewed further. The following chapter analyses their responses in relation to the major research question: *To what extent, do inspectors values influence the inspection process?* and SRQ4: *What are Ofsted inspectors' perceptions of how they engage with this process?*

## Chapter 5

### **Evidence gathered from interviews relating to inspectors' perceptions of their work.**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter analysed the questionnaire responses from seventeen respondents relating to the main research question: *To what extent, do inspectors' values influence the inspection process?*

In Chapter 4 a number of key themes were drawn from the questionnaire results:

The inspection process was largely perceived by respondents to be objectivist because it has a clearly defined structure, which if followed closely, was believed to lead to accurate judgements and secure conclusions based on evidence. Within the *School Inspection Handbook* (2005a) and *School Inspection Framework* (2005b) Ofsted has not only defined the inspection criteria but has also prescribed a process through which inspections should be carried out. The Ofsted process therefore, was seen by most respondents (major group) to hold a number of truths about how inspection could help schools to improve and through their responses, the majority of respondents appeared to embrace Ofsted's core principles and shared its values. This was further reinforced through a strong corporate culture based on 'thick trust' (Uslaner, 2002) and a shared understanding about the way in which the inspection process should be carried out. Ofsted inspectors in this majority group appeared to accept that the process of inspection involves a degree of

standardization. According to Morgan (1997) 'Standardization and integration are achieved through professional training and the subtle acceptance of key operating norms rather than through more direct forms of control' (p.51). The major group suggested that Ofsted's model of inspection was the right one by which to inspect schools. They reported that they enjoyed inspecting because they considered that they were making a difference to schools because inspections were helping to improve educational standards and the quality of education for pupils. In this way their values were aligned with those of Ofsted and they were comfortable with Ofsted's requirements of them as inspectors.

The values of the major group appeared to be aligned to those of Ofsted in that they believed the process to be beneficial for schools and they enjoyed inspecting schools. Some respondents reported that they engaged in a degree of mediation of the management of the inspection process when inspecting schools.

From the questionnaires there also appeared to be a small minority of inspectors who disagreed with the responses made by the majority of respondents. Differences of opinion amongst inspectors may reflect a degree of dissatisfaction caused by changes to the inspection process, for example the perception that there has been an expansion of inspection activities within the same allotted time tariff. The degree of variance in the strength of association between the subgroup of inspectors and Ofsted's values may have transpired because of their inspection experiences relating to their perception of the efficacy of Ofsted's model of inspection in relation to school improvement. More

research would be required involving a larger sample to gain a clearer picture and to fully understand the values of this subgroup.

Chapter 5 therefore continues to focus on sub-research question 4: *What are Ofsted inspectors' perceptions of how they engage with the process?* Within the context of SRQ4 this chapter will evaluate the responses from interviewees and consider the extent to which Ofsted inspectors say that they mediate the management of the process or mediate Ofsted's values. Predictably, outcomes from the interviews are likely to endorse the survey responses from inspectors in Chapter 4. Further indicators as to the nature of a minority group of inspectors may also appear.

The semi-structured interview approach allowed respondents to talk freely about their work, with prompts or additional questions from the researcher being used to facilitate depth or expansion. Pertinent themes to this research are drawn from the transcripts and the responses are presented as the main points from individual interviews from which similarities and differences can be drawn. While the number of interviews was too few to draw generalizable features, the responses from each interviewee provide a deeper insight into the views of these Ofsted inspectors, their values and their perceptions about how they engage with the inspection process.

Only four individuals volunteered with whom it was possible to carry out the research and they were all female. The views of this convenience or opportunity sample of four interviewees includes three from the major group, (interviewees

1, 2 and 3) whose values appear to be in line with those of Ofsted and one (interviewee 4) whose values do not entirely fit with those of the major group. Interviewing more male inspectors may have produced further interesting data. However, I was only able to interview those questionnaire respondents who were available, accessible and who volunteered to be interviewed. Interviewing more representatives from the minority group would also be an area for further research.

## Interviewee 1

### ***What were your main reasons for becoming an Ofsted inspector?***

The interviewee believed that inspections *'are good for schools'*, that *'Ofsted is a positive feature with regard to school improvement'* and that *'inspectors have got the best interests of schools at heart.'*

### ***To what extent do inspectors' values relate to those of Ofsted?***

The interviewee considered that the values of Ofsted, the values of inspectors and her values *'are the same...because all those parties want to have the best outcomes for children. Which is why I feel that over the course of being an inspector I was convinced that it was the right process.'* The interviewee said that she believed Ofsted was a positive process with regard to school improvement and acknowledged that *'you want them [schools] to come out of the inspection thinking that was brilliant because I know what we are doing well but I also know where we need to go.'* She expressed an opinion that some people in education, working in schools hold a view that *'they [inspectors] have already made their minds up before they came in and they just went through the process to make sure they were right.'* The interviewee continued by stating that *'if the inspector doesn't understand the school's context and also the headteacher doesn't necessarily understand the context of the framework as much as they should and haven't presented the evidence then it causes conflict'*. The implication here seems to be that some headteachers may not be convinced that inspection is 'right' for them because they have a perception that inspectors hold preconceived ideas and that some inspectors do not fully understand individual school contexts. The interviewee acknowledged that for

an inspection to be meaningful, then both sides need to understand the other's context.

***To what extent have you experienced conflict between your values and those of Ofsted?***

On a personal level the interviewee said that she had not experienced conflict between her values and those of Ofsted or between inspectors working in teams during inspections. *'I was fortunate to work with a good lead inspector and a good team that were used to working together as well.'* The interviewee suggested that *'one of the good things about the framework is that it is a common framework that everyone can follow'* but acknowledged that *'within the context of Ofsted there are people who do have different values...who come to judgements in a different way'* but *'I think it is important to trust the process and to trust the people that you are working with.'* Here, she appeared to be saying that while her values were in tune with those of Ofsted there are a number of inspectors who emanate from different backgrounds and who hold different values but during an inspection *'we are all on the same side.'*

***In what ways do you influence the inspection process?***

The interviewee said that she was able to *'engage with people quite quickly'...I'm confident now in being able to spark up a conversation and engage a person... that shows I'm interested in them...it's experience.* The interviewee suggested that developing professional integrity was important to establish a positive relationship with someone from the school during an inspection. She said that despite the inflexible structure of the inspection architecture, through a degree of adjustment to the management of the process, an element of flexibility can occur when people work together in different

contexts. *'It's knowing the right questions to ask and asking thematic questions rather than asking each specific question like a list'*. The interviewee said that having experience of asking questions was important to acquiring the required answers. An experienced inspector has *'all the key mechanisms in [their] head, so that you can pull them out and play them when they are needed... you cannot script it'* but to do this effectively *'you have to know the framework back to front and inside out.'* The interviewee argued that building trust during the inspection process was important because headteachers still see inspection as *'a fearful process because you know that you can live or die by it if you go into a category [serious weaknesses or special measures]'*. Ofsted does not provide guidance to inspectors on how to build trust during an inspection but the interviewee considered that the ability to build trust develops from experience. *'The more experienced you are the more skills you have to draw on...so that someone sits with you and actually explains what their school is about.'* In this way, she appeared to be suggesting that a degree of negotiation of the process takes place to accommodate different people and contexts but that this did not impinge on Ofsted's objectives or actual judgements. Within this grey area, the interviewee implied that she was able to apply her personal skills and experience in a flexible way to mediate the management of the inspection process and that this was done to *'secure the best possible outcomes for the school'*.

***To what extent do you think shortage of time contributes to inspectors cutting corners?***

The interviewee considered that it was important to use all of the time available to gain an accurate picture of the school but that choices sometimes had to be

made, particularly '*...if it becomes the paperwork versus the people, then I suppose that's when it's harder...then you are bound to be cutting corners because your end product is to get the report done rather than making sure that the process was right.*' Here she appeared to suggest that some inspectors cut corners during an inspection because they believe that the most important part of the inspection is the end product (the report), rather than the overall process for the school.

Where choices are made during an inspection, to follow inspection trails based on preliminary hypotheses about the school, a variety of approaches may be adopted to secure the necessary evidence to enable inspectors to make accurate judgements. In this context inspectors may apply flexible methods which could involve a degree of mediation of the inspection process. However, this interviewee had suggested that conflict could arise between inspectors' values where corners were cut to secure the '*end product*' [the report] rather than to make sure that the process was '*right for the school*'. Her response seemed to indicate that where inspectors had possibly applied their own interpretation of the inspection process, making choices to select what was important to them, then mediation of Ofsted's values occur.

***To what extent do you think inspectors mediate their work in schools and what strategies do they use?***

The interviewee was clear in her acknowledgement that inspectors '*definitely*' mediate their work. While inspectors need to '*know the framework back to front and inside out*' they '*also need to negotiate the questions I think.*' She suggested that mediation of the management of the process takes place to

enable inspectors help *'to get the best possible outcomes for the school'*. The interviewee had already acknowledged that there was 'no script' for inspection questioning or the way in which questions ought to be asked. The interviewee said that effective mediation of the process comes from having *'educational experience'* balanced with *'inspection skills...I have got more experience of negotiating with people and knowing how to make people feel positive about an experience that they might need to work hard at.'* She also commented that *'relationships'* were important: *'The whole job of being in education is about relationships...and that counts for inspectors as well.'*

***Is the Ofsted inspection process objective or subjective?***

Following from the previous question the interviewee's opinion was that inspection is an objective process but that it also contains elements that are subjective and she gave an aspirational viewpoint that *'It has to be [objective] because...that's the purpose of the inspection, to have an objective view. It's about gathering evidence and knowing what potential looks like. However, '...it isn't an exact science! It's a framework. So it's objective against the framework ... but in a sense it has to be interpreted...that's where the subjectivity comes in'*. Here the interviewee's response intimated that the degree to which inspectors use professional knowledge to interpret the inspection framework during an inspection involved a degree of unconscious mediation of the process but did not necessarily involve mediation of Ofsted's inspection objectives. She suggested that while the basis for each inspection begins with the Ofsted inspection criteria but inspectors are different and each school is different. In this way school context along with the human element of inspectors appears to create a degree of variation in the process. *'it depends on how much*

*experience somebody's had ...to be able to make a subjective judgement in an objective way.'*

***To what extent are Ofsted inspections consistent in practice?***

The interviewee argued that *'the [inspection] framework ... is a common framework that everyone can follow'* and the structure of Ofsted inspections is objective *'because that's the purpose of the inspection, to have an objective view'* based on the weight of evidence. However, she suggested that the inspection process could be inconsistent because of the way in which individual inspectors apply the framework in different contexts based on their prior educational and inspection experience. Here she provided an example to support this claim: *'if you've not had a lot of experience of children who have got English as an additional language you may see it [the school] as doing brilliant things here but actually in another context you'll see children who speak English as an additional language that achieve much higher'*. She followed this up by saying that it is important for inspectors to understand the school's *'context'*.

The interviewee also provided an example whereby inspectors had gone the extra mile to write a clear and helpful report for a school. A different inspection team *'might have given them [the school] a different outcome but they might also have given them not as much direction.'* She pointed out that this particular school was in challenging inner city circumstances and pre-inspection indicators were not good as *'results were below floor'* [national benchmark at end of Key Stage 2]. However, *'the ethos of the school was brilliant'* and the relationship between headteacher and inspectors was positive from the start. At the beginning of the inspection the headteacher had greeted the inspection team *'in*

*a really friendly way* [with] *'here come the three musketeers'* and from that moment the relationship was bonded.' She suggested that the headteacher and the inspectors *'worked together'* and as a result of the positive relationship between headteacher and inspectors, as well as the the school's context, the interviewee indicated that inspectors wanted to provide the school with clear direction. *'The report was just brilliant... it didn't go on about all sorts of other things. It just went to the nub'*. Mediation of the process in this example appears to have taken place because of the positive relationship that was established between headteacher and inspectors early in the process and the way in which inspectors appeared to want to assist the school and its challenging context. Mediation of Ofsted objectives may also have occurred because inspectors held general perceptions about the challenging inner-city context in which the school operated and wanted to help it to improve through providing it with more direction than that which was usually afforded to schools during an inspection. The interviewee also indicated that inspectors' personalities and experience are important when inspecting schools: *'I've got more experience of working with people and negotiating with people and knowing how to make people feel positive about an experience'*. Despite claims that Ofsted inspections are consistent and objective these examples seem to indicate that inspectors' prior educational experiences and knowledge of context, their personalities and relationship with headteachers in schools all influence the degree to which inspectors mediate the management of the inspection process.

### **Summary and Discussion:**

This interviewee was both a practising Ofsted inspector and Local Authority School Improvement Partner. She acknowledged that her values and those of

Ofsted were closely matched and that in her experience it was rare to find conflict between inspectors' values and those of Ofsted because everyone wanted the best outcomes for children. The degree of alignment between the interviewee's values and those of Ofsted indicated that this inspector perceived her values to be in alignment with those of Ofsted and she believed that through her inspection work she was helping to improve the quality of education for pupils. The certainty with which the interviewee believed that inspections were good for schools because *'it is the right process'* to help schools to improve also reinforces her objectivist position as someone who is carrying out 'good' work for the government.

The interviewee perceived inspection to be an objective process in that it is evidence based, requiring inspectors to follow and apply a common inspection framework in a uniformly recognised way. However, she also acknowledged that inspection *'isn't an exact science'*, and it was open to interpretation by individuals at school level. Within this context, the interviewee made a strong case that it was important for inspectors to build trust in schools and develop positive relationships with staff to enable accurate professional judgements to emerge. Developing a positive relationship also opens the door to dialogue and negotiation between inspectors and the school. In this way, she believed that inspectors *'definitely'* mediate their work. While the interviewee stated that her values were closely aligned to those of Ofsted, an acknowledgement was made that the degree by which some inspectors mediate the inspection process in schools may contribute to inconsistent inspection practice.

The interviewee argued that inspectors do not *'make a judgement without the necessary evidence.'* Here she maintained that inspections are a criteria led

and objective process. However, she also argued that a degree of subjectivity occurs as inspectors build relationships, manage their time, negotiate and mediate their work in schools. In this way the interviewee's responses presented something of a dichotomy (and reinforced some of the responses in Chapter 4) in that while inspection is considered to be an objective process, a degree of mediation may occur because it is carried out by human beings. Therefore, while she emphasised that her values were in alignment with those of Ofsted, she held a pragmatic view that the value of inspections to schools and children, involved a degree of management of the process in schools. From her responses it seems that it is at the pragmatic level where human interaction occurs during an inspection that inspectors may influence the dynamic of an inspection. The skills required to inspect a school can be learned through training but personal, communication and empathy skills take longer to evolve: *'So the subjective part of the process is also a very important part.'* Here the interviewee appears to indicate that despite claims that Ofsted inspections are consistent because inspectors follow clearly defined inspection criteria, human influence that occurs within the process contributes to a degree of variation as a result of mediation of the management of the process.

## Interviewee 2

### ***What were your main reasons for becoming an Ofsted inspector and what are your general views of Ofsted?***

The interviewee acknowledged that there were practical considerations for the Local Authority (LA) as to why it was important for her to become an Ofsted inspector. At the time the interviewee was working as a Local Authority Improvement Officer and *'there was an income line within our organisation and Ofsted was one of those areas that we could earn some income from.'* A further key reason for becoming an inspector was to remain up to date with the inspection process when supporting local schools. *'The key bit was for me to be completely updated and in line with what Ofsted was saying because my role was working with patches [areas] of schools and training and developing local authority officers to work with schools, so I needed to be completely up to date.'* She argued: *'Whether people disagreed or agreed with it [Ofsted] and there would have been as many different views of a framework like this as there were people that were experiencing it. It was the currency, and is the currency, of the day and it's by those measures by which schools fail or succeed. They [schools] wanted to know that the people who were supporting them knew what success looked like and also had the facility and the skills to develop any underperformance in their school to bring it up to scratch'.* This response, along with the requirement to bring income into the LA would indicate that the interviewee did not become an inspector because their values were primarily in tune with those of Ofsted. The major motivation here was to generate income and to support the development of local schools.

***How closely do your values relate to those of Ofsted?***

While not acknowledging that his/her values were closely aligned to those of Ofsted, the interviewee said *'I have no problem ethically or morally about there being a measurement system that means everybody has to be up to that level'*

***Have there been any conflicts between your values and those of Ofsted as you carried out inspections?***

The interviewee responded that there was no conflict between her values and those of Ofsted: *'I truly don't think so. I think that is because, I believe the inspection process is about everybody's rights being achieved. The inspection Framework for me is an equality strategy if you like. So I've never had a difficulty with it. I've never come across a headteacher that says Ofsted doesn't help. You ask any headteacher if they haven't used the [Ofsted inspection] Framework to either support or get out a member of staff who is underperforming. They aren't doing it because they think someone is coming to inspect them...they are doing it because they don't want those children to have a poor experience. So no!'*

***What features or strategies do you employ during inspections that influence the process?***

The interviewee said that she maintained a professional approach during inspections and defined professionalism as: *'Professionalism is a composition of technical expertise and behaviours and relationships, all of those things create together professionalism. I don't think you are a high quality professional if you can't communicate with people. You can say people are very intelligent but if they can't teach things to children they can't be good teachers and I would say exactly the same of inspectors. You have to like schools, you have got to*

*like people, you have got to understand the challenges that people are working within to be a fully rounded professional and that's what I would expect.*

***To what extent do you think a shortage of time contributes to inspectors cutting corners?***

The interviewee said that in her experience inspectors 'are true to the [inspection] Framework' but she considered that 'people' [headteachers, senior leaders, teachers] do not like the feeling that 'they are being rushed... then immediately people feel they are on a railroad and this is a process they [inspectors] start and they finish. They are going to be done in two days and so forth.' The interviewee said that if the process is seen by schools to be 'perfunctory' and 'if they don't feel they are being heard' then that has a detrimental effect on the school's inspection experience. She suggested that it was important for inspectors to take sufficient time to speak to people and build relationships. 'The quality of the inspection process is about the relationships that are built'. In relation to the major research question and inspectors' perceptions of how they engage with the process (SRQ4) the interviewee indicated that inspectors do influence the inspection process through the relationships that they build with schools. Mediating the inspection process through building a positive relationship with people and providing sufficient time for them to be 'heard' is seen to have a positive influence on inspections.

***To what extent you think inspectors are true to the 'Framework' [Ofsted Inspection Framework] in the way that they carry out inspections or do you think that there is a degree of mediation going on in schools?***

The interviewee said that she thought that inspectors were true to the inspection Framework and did not deviate from the objectives or the inspection criteria. However, she suggested that where mediation occurred it was in relation to how inspectors carried out their work and managed the inspection process. *'I think they [inspectors] are true to the framework. I think the mediation, or the terminology used for mediation, is more about not what they do but how they do it.'* Here she alluded to a degree of management of the inspection process taking place amongst some inspectors. While acknowledging that *'no monitoring system will work if interpretation is built into the programme'* the interviewee expressed that it was important for inspectors to manage the process by giving headteachers sufficient time to explain about their school. *'That first conversation [between headteacher and lead inspector] is the key conversation. Let's be clear, some headteachers are much more able to articulate about their schools, in a concise and precise manner, than others are. Those people if they feel they are being heard and given the time to say everything on that [initial] phone conversation and talk about the PIB [pre-inspection briefing] in the first place...then they feel that they have been heard and they feel that someone is coming in who is genuinely interested in their school and what is going on.'*

***To what extent do you think Ofsted inspections are objective or subjective?***

The interviewee said *'I think that if I was on a continuum with 0 being subjective and 100 being objective I think it would be 70. We are much nearer the objective than the subjective end.'*

***To what extent are inspectors consistent in the way they carry out their work?***

The interviewee said: *'it's the way people deliver it' [inspection]. It is the human element that causes inspections to be either consistent or inconsistent'*. Here, she appeared to indicate that in her view variation does occur within the inspection process and that this is because of the 'human element' as individual inspectors apply Ofsted's inspection criteria.

**Summary and Discussion:**

The interviewee had recently retired from being an Ofsted inspector. The reasons she gave for becoming an Ofsted inspector were to remain up to date with the process of inspection to help local schools and it was also a method by which the Local Authority could generate income. The interviewee acknowledged that she entered education to help to create a *high quality education'* and asserted that for people to *'get the best out of the [education] system'* there needs to be a system of measurement. As a result of this the interviewee perceived that there was no conflict between her values and those of Ofsted. The interviewee suggested that *'no monitoring system will work if interpretation is built into the programme'*, that inspectors are *'true'* to the Framework and that the process of inspection was more objective than it was subjective. However, she also indicated that where mediation occurred it was in terms of how inspectors carried out the process because the Framework *has to be applied within the context of the school.'* The interviewee argued that building trust at the beginning of inspections was important to their success and to be an effective professional an inspector needs to be able to *'communicate*

*with people.*' Generally, inspectors were consistent in the way that they carried out their work and they *'have got credibility' in schools*. The best ones were seen to *'care passionately about young people and their opportunities'*. Her opinion was that schools were less fearful of inspections than in the early days of Ofsted because it has now *'become a tighter and slicker operation.'* Both interviewee 1 and 2 appeared to acknowledge that Ofsted inspections were in the main, objective and consistent. However, where variation occurred it was in relation to how inspectors carried out or managed the process of inspection within individual schools, i.e. the human interaction within the process. While the interviewee argued that any interpretation of the Framework would create problems for the consistency of inspections: *'The quality of the inspection process is about the relationships that are built'*. In relation to the main research question: *'to what extent do Ofsted inspectors' values influence the inspection process'*, the interviewee suggested that inspectors' values have little influence over the inspection process because their values and those of Ofsted were in alignment. Where mediation of the management of the inspection process occurs, this appears to be done consciously to build trust and in the best interests of schools but does not conflict with or compromise Ofsted's objectives or values. *'I think they [inspectors] are true to the framework. I think the mediation, or the terminology used for mediation, is more about not what they do but how they do it.'*

### Interviewee 3

***What were your main reasons for becoming an Ofsted inspector?***

The interviewee said: *'I wanted to use my leadership and management skills from school in a different context. I had finished school for a health reason so wanted to do this as a part time alternative'*. She continued: *'I certainly thought that it might challenge me, which it has. Also at the time I was working for a national training company so it kind of kept me in schools and informed the other work that I was doing. It is challenging in the sense that when you are there [in school] for what is now a day and a half it is very focused and very full on to gather evidence and make judgements and move on. So that's challenging in terms of the speed in which it happens.'*

***(Prompt) Do you think Ofsted has raised standards in schools?***

The interviewee considered: *'That's a really tough question. I don't know is the answer. I think there are some schools who have valued the process even if there are tough messages. Again, I think it's how you carry out the process. I'm not sure whether it's driven school improvement but I think it has raised awareness of things like self-evaluation...and the evidence they [schools] need in order to know what the benchmark is and what you need to do to get to that. So maybe that does raise the game'*.

***To what extent do your values influence the way in which you carry out your work as an inspector?***

The interviewee stated that her values did influence the way in which she carried out inspections but in a positive way. *'I think hugely so! I think things like*

*respecting what the school has done, valuing where they are, what they have done and what they have achieved. The way in which you treat staff when you observe and also the way you feedback to staff is important.'* The interviewee commented that having good *'interpersonal skills'* is a key factor and referred to one senior colleague who used to say *'loose talk costs inspections'*. She continued by saying *'my values influence how I conduct myself and as a result I conduct inspections as I would want to be inspected.'*

***Do you think there are ever any conflicts between your values and Ofsted as an instrument of national measurement?***

The interviewee provided two answers. The first answer related to the formation of inspection teams from people who may never have worked together: *'They call us "car park teams". We do not always work together and we are disparate but what I find amazing for the most part, you suddenly become this harmonious team working together. You pretty well have a core of people who will just get involved whatever and work together to help each other. You have to have that corporate "face" when you move out into the school that you are working as a team. People [inspectors] have different ways of working but I don't have experience of many clashes of personalities'*. She further added that inspectors have different educational experiences and sometimes they bring their own experiences to bear, which may not be appropriate to the context of the school. *'We all come with different experiences but it is about how you use that experience to make judgements but the overriding factor has to be how does this school fit in and which descriptor does it match?'* The interviewee continued by saying: *'People do bring their own experiences to bear in meetings. That's when it's often well this happens in my school'* or *'That may be*

*fine in Birmingham but actually in Devon we need to look at what is happening in Devon.'*

The second answer provided by the interviewee relating to conflict focused on the issue of shortage of time. *'If you have got a meeting with the deputy to talk about professional development you've got twenty or twenty-five minutes and they come in armed with fifty thousand files and that is a challenge because you've got to really explain that the questions I'm going to ask are very focused based on hypotheses and trails and we may not go through all of those files but I always finish by saying we have got five minutes and is there anything in those five minutes you really want to point out as being special about the school. So that's the challenge...getting it all done within the time'.*

***Are there any specific personal features or strengths that influence the way you inspect schools?***

She observed that her personality was a: *'critical factor'* because during an inspection *'you have got a quarter of an hour to build relationships and that fifteen minutes can just do or die inspections.'*

***(Prompt) What methods do you employ to build trust with schools?***

She said *'developing professional friendliness'* is a key factor to the success of an inspection. *'It's about getting staff to relax because they are not going to perform at their best if they are terrified. So the messages you give in that key [first] meeting are going to be the messages that really influence how the staff are going to react. I also think that it's about convincing staff that actually you are looking for what the school does well. That's a message that I certainly give. Yes, we are looking at maybe what you could do to improve...to help you but it's*

*also about showing us what you can do...and if we are not seeing it please tell us. She pointed out that 'constant dialogue throughout' inspections is important to secure their success.*

**Do you think that inspectors at times cut corners because of time?**

The interviewee considered that inspection is challenging *'in the sense that when you are there [in school] for what is now a day and a half it is very focused to gather evidence and make judgements and move on. So that's challenging in terms of the speed in which it happens'*. However, she affirmed that she did not cut corners because *'I would worry about it. I make sure that every time I leave school I have fed back to everybody or at least got an answer from them saying I don't want feedback because I think that's important. Do inspectors cut corners? I don't think that they do, I don't think that they do intentionally.'* While *'getting it all done within the time'* was considered to be a challenge it also *'sharpens the focus.'*

**(Prompt) If they do cut corners can you think of any areas where they may cut corners?**

The interviewee acknowledged that variation in the inspection process may occur because of the way different people approach the job. The interviewee contemplated that corners may be cut *'on the preparation. Some colleagues, as team inspectors not leads, are better prepared than others. That might be because of pressures of other work. They are rolling in from something they have done the day before. So that might be one. I don't know where else people would cut corners. You get feedback from every inspection. So from my point of view, and my pride, I wouldn't want to get a negative feedback. So therefore*

*that's what drives me to do it absolutely as I should have done. But we are...not the same'.*

### **Do you think the Ofsted process is objective or subjective?**

She perceived inspection to be an objective process because inspectors have to follow guidelines and apply best-fit descriptors. *'The objective bits are following the Ofsted Evaluation Schedule looking at descriptors, looking at the evidence you have got and comparing it and best-fitting it. The subjective bits are when people or inspectors bring in 'this happens in my school', and that can often happen with serving headteachers and I don't think that's good.'* Here the interviewee was referring to inspectors who are also practicing senior leaders, making inappropriate comparisons about schools they are inspecting with their own schools.

### **To what extent are Ofsted inspections consistent in practice?**

The interviewee suggested that there is some variation between schools' inspection experiences *'because we are all different personalities and we all bring different strengths which is the strength of having a team.'* She explained this further: *'My strengths are not in data analysis but I've got some colleagues that I work with who are supreme at that but don't like maybe interviewing children.'* Here she indicates that the potential for variation and inconsistency is harboured in the way individuals go about their work and as a result of the different experiences they bring to the inspection process. This is similar to the responses provided by interviewees 1 and 2.

### **Summary and Discussion:**

Until recently the interviewee had been a senior leader in a high school. She wanted to become an inspector because it was a challenge but it also provided flexible opportunities for her to work on a part time basis and to enhance her skills as an educational trainer. The interviewee said that inspection was an objective process because inspectors follow the Ofsted Evaluation Schedule and use the inspection descriptors to gather evidence and make *'best fit'* judgements. However, she also asserted that there was a subjective element in the process. She claimed that this could be seen in the way that individual inspectors adopted different ways of working and used their prior educational experiences to make comparisons between schools. The interviewee suggested that inspectors should read the school's self evaluation form (SEF) to gain contextual understanding of the school and *'all those factors that contribute to make that school unique.'* From her experience, the interviewee considered that inspectors did not cut corners during inspections and, despite acknowledging that there were subjective aspects of the Ofsted inspection process they do not mediate their work in schools. This is because the process has to be true to the inspection framework and descriptors: *'otherwise it [the report] will never get through QA'* [internal quality assurance].

Personal values were seen to be *'hugely'* important to the way that inspectors carry out their work. Valuing the school, its achievements and *'the way in which you treat staff is important.'* However, the interviewee did not specifically comment on whether there was any conflict between her values and those of Ofsted as an instrument of national measurement. The interviewee acknowledged that the major *'challenge'* was in *'getting it all done within the*

*time*' but that inspectors get on with the process of inspection and provide a corporate *'face'* that everyone is *'working as a team.'* Similar to responses made by interviewee 4, she believed that inspectors' personalities were *'critical'* in the inspection process to build relationships, trust and to *'get staff to relax because they are not going to perform at their best if they are terrified.'* She suggested that there may be variation between schools' inspection experiences, which could lead to inconsistencies within the process. This is *'because human beings carry it out and we are all different personalities.'* As suggested by interviewees 1 and 2, this appears to endorse that variation occurs within the inspection process as a result of the human element. She indicated that constant communication and dialogue between inspectors and the school were important to the success of an inspection. The interviewee did not provide a comment as to whether she believed Ofsted inspections had contributed to greater conformity in schools but considered that schools *'have become used to it [inspections]'*.

## Interviewee 4

### ***What were your main reasons for becoming an Ofsted inspector?***

The interviewee said that she had trained to become an Ofsted inspector because she *'wanted to have a bit more flexibility'* in terms of when she worked. She also indicated that working as an inspector helped her professional development because through accrued knowledge from inspections she was able to use her *'big-picture knowledge I have about schools'* to help to improve other schools. While acknowledging that she wished to use the experience of being an inspector to assist schools and her professional development, a further reason provided was to change Ofsted from within to reduce the *'fear'* of inspection she believed some teachers experienced. *'One of the things that I wanted to have an impact on was changing the face of Ofsted. I know it would be very drip-feed but that fear of Ofsted coming [in schools], and that feeling of disdainment to being judged is so rife, particularly in a lot of London schools, I wanted to slowly have an impact on it in a positive way.'* Here, she reflected that when she became an Ofsted inspector her friends said *"Oh God you have gone over to the other side!"* In answer to this statement the interviewee said that she could *'almost justify'* becoming an Ofsted inspector because her priority was *'the children, that's the fundamental reason why I do this work.'* In adopting a more *'human'* approach to inspection the interviewee said that her values, knowledge and professional integrity helped her to *'build rapport'*, enabling her to become a more effective inspector. She perceived that the strength of this approach was that it helped her to gain a better contextual understanding of teachers and schools. *'You don't have to give hard messages just because they*

*are there. For me it's about formulating the key areas for development rather than what the person has done wrong...this can be even better if you do this.'*

These were quite different reasons for becoming an inspector to those provided by Interviewees 1, 2 and 3 and close to the views of some of the questionnaire responses from the minority group in Chapter 4. A supposition that can be made from this is that the interviewee wanted to become an inspector for several reasons:

- She acknowledged that Ofsted *'raises the bar for a lot of schools and it's a national measurement'* by which schools are judged. She said that she could justify becoming an Ofsted inspector because she wanted to improve education for children. *'Children have a right to a very good education and it is a teacher's responsibility and the school's responsibility, to ensure that they develop as they go...it's [Ofsted] like a safety net'*.
- She also recognised that the inspection process, as implemented by some inspectors, historically created *'fear'* amongst teachers and she wanted to change *'the face'* of Ofsted from within by adopting a more *'human'* approach to inspection. She acknowledged that changing her approach in some way would require her to consciously mediate the management of the inspection process to create rapport with teachers.
- To use her values, professional integrity and personality enabled her to build positive relationships with teachers. However, mediating her role in this way may also bring her close to compromising some of Ofsted's

rules and code of conduct criteria to *'evaluate objectively, be impartial and inspect without fear or favour'* (Ofsted, 2014b, p.24).

- Based on her experience of inspection (as a teacher and inspector) and her perceptions about inspectors' attitudes, interviewee 4 provides evidence to suggest that she may be part of a sub-group of inspectors who want to change the Ofsted process from within.

***To what extent do inspectors' values relate to those of Ofsted?***

The interviewee offers different reasons as to why she inspects schools and her approach to school inspection appears to be securely rooted in her personal values and experience of inspections. Along with the major group of inspectors, she said that she carried out inspections because she believed school inspections were beneficial for children's education and for school improvement. In common with the major group of survey respondents and interviewees 1, 2 & 3, interviewee 4 primarily subscribes to Ofsted's perspective that the inspection process raises educational standards. Here, she indicated that there was no conflict between her values and the regulatory side of Ofsted because she believed that *'all children have a right to a very good education'* and a *'regulatory process'* is necessary *'so that schools know how well they are doing'* and furthermore, *'I think that inspection raises standards.'*

However, in contrast to this, and from the interviewee's experience of inspections as a teacher, senior leader and inspector she proposed to change the *'face'* of Ofsted from within the inspection process because she held a belief that for some teachers school inspection was a frightening business. Here she cited that some inspectors with whom she had inspected schools presented as

being arrogant, wanted *'to be in charge and powerful'* and maintained an attitude that inspection was a *'punitive'* process and *'we are going to come and tell you what you have done wrong'*. Here the interviewee said that she did not agree with an inspection approach that made people feel *'nervous and agitated right from the start'*. She argued that empathising with the school and sensitively applying the inspection process contributed to putting people at their ease. *'The mechanics between different people are important. How people behave is important and using language in a right way is important to get what you want and to build rapport and trust'*.

Paradoxically, while subscribing to a view that there was no conflict between her values and those of Ofsted, the interviewee argued that she would not change her values to accommodate those of Ofsted because *'fundamentally your values guide how you want to be perceived...my values in terms of my professional integrity, organisation, knowledge and development about education enables me to be an effective Ofsted inspector.'* The interviewee provided a persuasive argument that while Ofsted is an organisation that has created documents which form the basis for school inspection *'Ofsted is not a process. It is a group of people'* who hold different perceptions, *'some are subjective, some are objective'*. Here the interviewee appeared to suggest that while working within Ofsted's orthodox parameters during inspections a degree of mediation was likely to occur because the process is based on human interaction.

To conclude, the interviewee affirmed the need for a regulatory body that inspects schools because she perceives the process to be beneficial for children and their education. While this was a main reason as to why she continued to inspect schools, she also perceived a need to '*change the face*' of Ofsted to reduce the fear experienced by some teachers. Consequently, she was prepared to work within the inspection process to challenge Ofsted's values and its orthodoxy through a degree of conscious management of the mediation of the process. While rationalising her membership of Ofsted on the basis that she believed inspections do improve education for children, she also held views that are likely to place her within a sub-group of inspectors whose values and motives are not fully aligned with those of Ofsted or the majority of inspectors.

***Are there any times when you find that there is a conflict between your values and the regulatory side of Ofsted?***

The interviewee suggested that it was necessary for there to be '*some sort of regulatory body. There has to be some sort of measurement so that schools can know how well they are doing*'. The response appears to demonstrate that the interviewee believes that there is no conflict between her values and those of Ofsted in relation to Ofsted's regulatory purpose in schools. However, as indicated in previous responses, from her experience of inspections at a procedural level there appears to be some jarring between the interviewee's values and those of other inspectors she has encountered.

***In what ways do you influence the inspection process?***

The interviewee said that her personality played a large part in the way that she comported herself during inspections. '*Personality and building rapport is what is going to form the relationship with you and the school at the offset. It doesn't*

*matter how you might work through it later on, if the first impressions are not as positive as they should be, you could get the school's back up and you could get people feeling nervous and agitated right from the start. Even difficult messages can be given and listened to if the rapport is right from the beginning.'* The interviewee continued by adding that she had witnessed the negative impact of other inspectors she had worked with: *'Unfortunately I have watched some situations where people [inspectors] have gone head on with their Ofsted superiority and have damaged the relationship before starting the inspection. Where that has happened it has made it more difficult for everyone in the team to win the school over.'* This appears to indicate that the way in which some inspectors choose to behave and comport themselves during inspections can have a negative impact on schools. Her belief in this matter indicates that the controlling manner adopted by some inspectors induces fear and negativity amongst some teachers. This supports the questionnaire responses [Q.23] in which 47% of respondents agree that the inspection process creates unnecessary tension in schools. The interviewee said that building rapport with teachers was important and *'understanding whether they are angry or whether they are fearful.'* This response fits with the interviewee's first answer in which she stated that one of her goals was to change *'the face of Ofsted'*. Here the interviewee appeared to suggest that she applied a degree of mediation when inspecting schools to build a relationship and rapport with teachers and that this is done to put teachers at their ease and in the best interests of the school. The interviewee reflected on her own behaviour during inspections: *'As team inspector I smile. I'm real and modest in the way I carry myself. I think it is important to acknowledge, even through body language and*

*the way you think, what you are thinking. You know teachers pick things up that you are grateful to go into someone's lesson and that you acknowledge when you are leaving with a "thank you".'*

### **Do inspectors mediate their work in schools...developing a more human relationship?**

The interviewee considered that: *'when I go through a lesson I will explain to the teacher, who it might be their first inspection or it might be their first Section 5 inspection, I'll say this is what we [inspectors] are looking at, this is what we have to use and this is what this says. Right from the off, I'm acknowledging to them that they are part of this analysis as it were'*. Here the interviewee's response is similar to that of interviewee 1 in which she appears to consciously mediate the management of the process in order to help individual teachers or schools.

### **Do you think inspectors cut corners on inspection?**

The interviewee observed that she didn't believe that inspectors cut corners: *'I haven't seen that. I don't know if it was done in the past but I think they can't afford to cut corners because if they haven't got enough evidence it [the report] will come back on them from the reader [Quality Assurance Reader] or they will get a complaint from the school. People wouldn't complain if it was outstanding I suppose. But then if it was outstanding and it was brought down by the reader then that might be a complaint. It's a natural process for people to want to be safe and that doesn't exclude leads. I think what it does is that it pushes leads to ensure that there is a secure evidence base.'*

### **Do you think Ofsted is a subjective or objective process?**

*The interviewee argued: 'I think Ofsted is not a process. It is a group of people. Some are subjective, some are objective, some have been there for too long and others need to understand the process that headteachers have to go through when people come from outside to make judgements about their school. I think it is a changing scenario.'* This is an interesting point because the interviewee appears to be reflecting upon different inspector types that she has inspected schools with. She is applying her experiential knowledge of school leadership to make an observation about the degree to which inspectors do not understand how much impact they have in schools. The previous three interviewees also originated from educational senior leadership backgrounds but did not interpret objectivity and subjectivity in terms of the impact that inspectors' actions have in schools. Acknowledging that Ofsted *'is a group of people'* and *'it is a changing scenario'* indicates that perhaps opportunities exist for degrees of mediation to occur which leads to variation within the inspection process.

### **To what extent are Ofsted inspections consistent in practice?**

The interviewee stated that consistent practice was dependent on the *'inspector and the lead. Some people want to play safe and stick to every word. Some people actually look at the big picture.* The interviewee commented that the reason some inspectors stick to the framework is *'fear...fear of being criticised or fear of being reprimanded. Obviously no one likes to be complained about so what they try to do, and this is my personal view, is stick to the words [inspection framework]...It is not sticking to the words that matter...the way you communicate.'* This interviewee's perceptions exposes an interesting dichotomy amongst inspectors. On the one hand they exercise control and power in

schools while at the same time are fearful of being criticised or complained about. Furthermore, the interviewee was reflecting on their particular inspection style and their belief that having a positive, flexible approach leads to a developmental experience for schools and reinforces the probability that a degree of mediation of the inspection process takes place.

### **Summary and Discussion:**

Until recently the interviewee had been a senior leader in a London high school. She was a relatively new inspector and she had also experienced inspections as a teacher and subsequently as a senior leader.

The interviewee provided specific reasons as to why she could '*almost justify*' becoming an Ofsted inspector, which was because she perceived that the process exists to improve educational standards for children and that '*children have a right to a very good education.*' Furthermore, '*There has to be some sort of measurement so that schools can know how well they are doing*'. These reasons for why she became an inspector are comparable with interviewees 1, 2 & 3. The interviewee did not believe that Ofsted had added to conformity in schools or that inspectors cut corners during the process because of Ofsted's quality assurance mechanism.

Interviewee 4 acknowledged that inspections benefitted schools and because of this her values were in alignment with those of Ofsted. However, she provided a number of comments that criticised the nature of Ofsted's work in schools because she had witnessed individual inspectors creating unnecessary fear amongst teachers. Here, the interviewee's values were not in alignment with the values of those inspectors because she observed '*there is a lot of arrogance amongst some inspectors particularly, in my experience, male and over sixty-*

*five retired [educationalists who are] inspectors who have done the job for years and therefore know what to do. They don't understand why things have changed!* Rather than reject the Ofsted inspection process, interviewee 4 decided to engage with it for the purpose of making small but subtle changes from within, applying a *'drip-feed'* process. To achieve this, she argued that her personality and values were key components in changing perceptions of fear of inspection in schools, building up rapport and trust amongst teachers.

The interviewee argued that while Ofsted had created objective structures, procedures and criteria by which schools are inspected, these features do not define the process of inspection. She suggested that the inspection process is defined by the way in which inspectors apply the inspection procedures and comport themselves in schools. In this way inspection appears not just to be a mechanical application of the Ofsted Framework because *'Ofsted is a group of people'* who hold different perceptions, *'some are subjective, some are objective'*. Interviewee 4 gave a considered opinion that the reason teachers hold negative perceptions of Ofsted inspections is because of their experiences of the way that inspections have been carried out by some inspectors. From her own experience, the interviewee provided examples to justify how the inspection process was able to unofficially benefit schools through teachers being given thorough and helpful feedback from inspectors. Personality, open body language and the ability to communicate effectively were perceived by her as essential inspector attributes to build rapport as well as trust in schools and in this way fear and anger amongst teachers were likely to be reduced. Here the interviewee gave an indication that for inspections to be fully effective a degree of conscious mediation of the management of the process is required in which

inspectors acknowledge that it is important to build rapport and trust in schools. Therefore, the success of the inspection process relies on the human interaction between inspectors and teachers.

Chapter 6 provides an analysis of similarities and differences between questionnaire responses and interviewee commentary. It also explores similarities and differences between the interviewees. Chapter 6 analyses the evidence to investigate whether there is a minority group within the body of Ofsted inspectors who endeavour to make changes to the process from within. The next chapter therefore continues the exploration of the extent to which inspectors mediate the management of the inspection process and the impact of mediation of their mediation on the validity and objectivity of Ofsted inspections.

## Chapter 6

### Analysis of key findings

The previous chapter analysed the responses from four interviewees relating to the major research question: *To what extent, do inspectors' values influence the inspection process?* This chapter will draw together and appraise key findings from the questionnaire responses in Chapter 4 and outcomes from interviews in Chapter 5. This will be done to establish whether similarities or differences exist regarding inspectors' perceptions of how they engage with the inspection process and the degree to which they perceive that they influence inspections.

### Part 1: Analysis of findings from questionnaires.

#### (a) Inspectors and their satisfaction in their work

88% of respondents reported that they enjoyed inspecting schools e.g. *Respondent 3 (p.152), R.6 (p.152) and R.13 (p.152)*. From the multiple choice additional survey questions respondents were asked to provide reasons for the attraction to becoming an Ofsted inspector. Fourteen additional responses were provided which indicated that they wanted to make a difference to schools and their [schools] improvement agendas (*p.171*) and a further eleven responses supported that they wanted to make a contribution to the national agenda for school improvement (*p.171*). Fourteen respondents said that they did it for their own personal professional development (*p.171*). One respondent commented that: *'They are hard work but professionally satisfying'* *R.2 (p.153)*. Two respondents said that they became inspectors because they had a predilection for power and influence (*p.171*); five said they did it for financial reward (*p.171*) and three said that they were attracted by the intensity of the work (*p.171*).

When asked to provide reasons as to why they *continued* to inspect schools. Fifteen respondents said that the main satisfaction in *doing the job* derived from a perception that they were making a difference to schools (p.172); thirteen said that they believed that they were improving the quality of education in schools (p.172); eleven said that they believed they were increasing the professionalism of teachers and ten respondents said that they continued to inspect schools because they considered that it was increasing their personal professional development (p.172). One respondent commented: *'I believe and know that I am making a difference for pupils, either confirming what the school is doing for them or by identifying why the school is not giving pupils what it is their right to receive'* R.13 (p.152). Ten respondents said that continued to inspect schools because they believed in holding schools to account; two said they did it because of the financial reward and five said that they enjoyed the intensity of the work. One respondent said that they liked the power and influence connected with being an inspector (p.172).

There were strong convictions amongst respondents that inspectors were carrying out valuable school improvement work and therefore they were part of a group that was making a positive contribution to the national education agenda. From the responses there also appeared to be a degree of altruism in the way that they perceived their role because power, influence and financial reward were the least reported aspects that they said gave them satisfaction. The responses also seem to support that they believed that that their role as inspectors was more associated with improving schools rather than holding them to account. Almost all of the reasons given by respondents as to why they

thought inspecting schools was important were in alignment with Ofsted's view of why inspections are necessary. While a minority of respondents said that they liked the *power and influence* that inspection gave to them, this does not in itself mean that they are in a minority group because they could also, along with others, believe that they are improving schools or contributing to the national educational improvement agenda. However, when considering this response alongside others, i.e. *enjoying the intensity of the work* there are some indications beginning to emerge that a minority of respondents inspect (or have inspected) schools for different reasons to those held by the major group.

### **(b) Inspectors' values**

While a large majority (88%) reported that they believed their values influenced the way in which they inspect schools e.g. *R.2 (p.155)*, *R7 (p.155)*, *R.10 (p.154)*, *R.11 (p.154)* and *R.15 (p.155)*, one respondent explained their position in these terms: *'They don't influence the way I interpret the [inspection] schedule but they do influence the way I conduct myself in schools and with staff I have contact with'* *R.9, (p.155)*. While this respondent indicated that their values were consistent with those of Ofsted, they also indicated that the human interaction that takes place between teachers and inspectors was influenced by the respondent's values. It is entirely likely that different inspectors, while applying the Ofsted's model in a systematic way and within the parameters of the inspection criteria, will conduct themselves differently based on their values and the nature of the situation that they find themselves in. Other respondents endorsed this perspective: e.g. *'We are not machines'* *R.12 (p.156)* and the process is about *'treating people the way I would expect to be treated'* *R.15 (p.155)*. There may be a high degree of similarity between the reasons why

inspectors carry out the work, based on altruism, enjoyment and a desire to improve schools and their values may be entirely consistent with those of Ofsted. However, 'the way we do things around here' may differ because of the context in which they find themselves and the people that they interact with. A small minority (two respondents) said that their values did not influence their inspection work because they had interpreted values in terms of prejudices which they then explained that they tried to keep out of the inspection process e.g. *R.6 (p.155)*.

A majority of respondents (65%) reported to there being no conflict between their values and those of Ofsted e.g. *R.10 (p.157)*, *R.14 (p.157)* and *R.15 (p.157)* reported that they '*wouldn't have kept going for so long*' had there been a conflict between their values and those of Ofsted. However, a minority of respondents suggested that they believed that there were flaws in the inspection system relating to time constraints and the need to complete administrative tasks e.g. *R.2 (p.158)*, *R.3 (p.158)* and *R.6 (p.158)*. The conflict reported by this group related to their perceptions of systemic flaws within the inspection process, which does not endorse that there was also conflict between their values and those of Ofsted. Therefore, it can be concluded from the responses that some inspectors consider that their values influence the practicalities of inspection work by the way in which they conduct themselves and interact with others but that there was little conflict between their values and those of Ofsted.

**(c) What inspectors say about inspection in relation to schools' values, individuality and culture**

94% of respondents indicated in the survey that they believed that Ofsted inspectors took schools' cultures and individuality into account during inspections e.g. *R.6 (p.159) and R.11 (p.159)*. However, a minority indicated that this was not always the case e.g. *'Yes in theory, but not usually in practice' R.12 (p.159) and 'To some extent' R.15 (p.160)*. Respondents provided procedural and experiential reasons as to why they thought that inspectors did not take schools' culture and individuality into account e.g. *'The report format does not encourage free and frank discussion of the school's individuality' R.12 (p.160) and 'sometimes inspectors have little or no experience of working in the contexts they are inspecting e.g. 100% multi-ethnic groups or schools with high deprivation' R.17 (p.160)*. The first reason suggests that schools' individuality and culture may not be priorities in the reporting process but the second reason indicates that the respondent believes that some inspectors have little or no experience of the socio-economic, ethnic make up of schools that they have been directed to inspect. However, while Ofsted inspections were not primarily designed to take account of schools' culture and individuality, some respondents reported that in so doing they perceived that the inspection process was enhanced because they said that by doing so it allowed schools to showcase and *'promote their culture and individuality' R9 (p.160)*.

Furthermore, a minority of respondents reported that because of the standardised nature of the inspection process and the time limitations within the tariff, there were few opportunities available to inspectors to take into account schools' individuality or culture. One respondent reported that, from their experience, where it did happen it was because of individuals and their *'human*

*influence*' but they also reported that *'it does not always happen'* R.10 (p.160). Some respondents said that while it is not a primary inspection objective, some inspectors mediated the management of the inspection process, taking school's context and individuality into account because in so doing they considered that it helped to illustrate and portray schools' diverse contexts.

A large majority (81%) of Respondents reported that they believed that Ofsted inspectors take into account schools' values during inspections (p.161). They said that they believed this to be important because e.g. *'otherwise the system [inspection] is failing them [schools]'* R.12 (p.161) and *the assumption of the [inspection] framework is that there should be shared values'* R.6 (pp.161-162). Similar to their responses to schools' culture and individuality, respondents provided a degree of advocacy that in their view inspectors *'can'* and *'should'* take a school's values into account during inspections e.g. *'It should do but not always due to human error and lack of wide reaching experience of inspectors'* R.10 (p.162). However, respondents reported that in their experience this was not a consistent part of the inspection process because it was not a prime inspection objective e.g. *'Ofsted is about quality and outcomes for children, the outcomes clearly set out in all the guidance. Whatever values a school may espouse, it is the outcomes that matter'* R.14 (p.162). Within this response there seems to be a suggestion that where inspectors stray from the 'outcomes' model of inspection set out in the 'guidance', a degree of variation or mitigation could occur which may be seen as incompatible with Ofsted's objectives. However, those advocating the importance of taking a school's values, culture and individuality into account during inspections may not always hold conflicting

values to those of Ofsted. These respondents appeared to hold a belief that schools benefited from inspections where inspectors attempted to build a positive relationship with schools and when they tried to understand the values, culture and individuality of schools. Implicit within the responses there also appears to be a degree of recognition that inspectors are able to gain contextual understanding of schools without necessarily straying outside of the parameters of the Ofsted inspection process

#### **(d) Mediation and objectivity**

Respondents said that they believed that Ofsted inspections were an objective process with 87% of respondents affirming this in the survey e.g. *R.2 and R.7 (p.163) and R.13 (p.163)* noted *'It has to be evidence based and rightly so'*. However, while inspectors said that they believed in the importance of making judgements based on the evidence that they gather, the process may not be fully objective. A minority of additional written comments indicated that respondents also held a belief that the process was not fully objective because human beings carried out the work, using their *'professional judgement'* to interpret evidence e.g. *'In so far as there are given criteria but it is delivered by individuals with varying degrees of experience, understanding and detachment'* *R.3 (p.164); R.6 (p.163); R.11 (p.164); R.14 (p.164) and R.12* noted that *'It is not a perfect science'* (p.164).

While a majority of respondents held a view that Ofsted inspections were objective, all of the respondents indicated that they believed that inspectors used their common sense when inspecting schools e.g. *'All good ones do'* *R.7; R.10 and R.14 (p.147)*. Some additional comments suggested that *'common*

sense' could also be interpreted as *'professional judgement'* R.13 (p.148) and that this was *'powered by [their] capabilities, experience and knowledge'* R.12 (p.147). While respondents reported that they believed inspections were objective, they also suggested that a degree of professional discretion occurred within the process. Where discretion was applied respondents reported that they believed this was done in the best interests of schools because e.g. *'they [inspectors] need to take schools with them and this means modifying the approach to establish the best professional working relationship'* R.2 (p.148) *along with R.6 and R.9 (p.148)*. Without compromising Ofsted's objectives and working within its value system, the notion of applying professional discretion was perceived by some inspectors to be acceptable because it enabled them to work flexibly through mediating the management of the inspection process. However, introducing a level of discretion was also considered by some to have mitigating consequences because by doing this it contributed to a degree of inconsistency e.g. R.1 (p.148); R.14 (p.147) and R.12 said *'Once you allow more freedom, you begin to lose consistency and probably, accuracy (p.149)*.

In contrast to those respondents who suggested that a degree of discretion, flexibility or mediation of the management of the process was in some way helpful, a majority of respondents (65%) said that they believed that for Ofsted inspections to be consistent it was essential for inspectors to systematically replicate their work during each inspection. Individuals provided further information to support this perspective e.g. R.5 (p.120); R7 (p.120) and R.10 said *'I think this is essential – keep to criteria and ensure that there is parity across all inspection teams (p.120)*. A small minority of respondents said that

they believed that it was not necessary for inspectors to systematically replicate their work during each inspection e.g. *R.3 (p.121)* and *R.15* said that while it was important for inspectors to be able to *'get information to ensure consistency, they may find it or get it in different ways'* (p.121). Here the respondent appears to say that the objective of the Ofsted process is to gather evidence to enable inspectors to make consistent and secure judgements. However, the response also indicates that the methodology surrounding the gathering of evidence may vary. In this way, a degree of discretion and mediation in the inspection process was not only acceptable but considered by some inspectors to be helpful to their work e.g. *'a school is a living organism and not a piece of machinery'* *R.6 (p.121)*. In this respect respondents said that the process of inspection should take account of a school's circumstances and individuality. One respondent said: *"Replicate" implies an automaton-type approach, which would not be appropriate. Good inspectors take account of circumstances, seek to work with schools as individual institutions and to take account of school requests, whilst at the same time seeking to be fair and impartial'* *R.14 (p.121)*. Responses appear to be divide respondents into two groups. The majority said that they believe that inspecting schools was an objective process and that to remain consistent it was important to systematically replicate procedures. However, another group of respondents also appeared to believe that the inspection process was objective but they also held a view that a degree of mediation of the management of the process was permissible, which did not compromise the objectivity of inspections and was done in the best interest of the school e.g. *'If you mean use the schedule and framework consistently, following systematic approaches is important. Of equal*

*importance is the professional is the professional approach of treating schools as individual institutions and using professional judgement to arrive at fair outcomes' R.7 (pp.120-121).* Inspectors reported that while working within the parameters of the inspection framework, they were still able to carry out their work in different ways within individual schools e.g. *'this is not a formulaic process and given the number of variables then effective inspections depend on [inspectors] experience not knowledge only' R.3 (p.121).*

A small majority (53%) of respondents reported that they believed that inspectors do cut corners during inspections to get everything done in time and individuals provided further information that supported this view e.g. *R.11 (p.122), R.14 (p.123).* Contained in a minority of additional responses is a perception that there may exist a minority of inspectors who need to be carefully managed by lead inspectors because they deliberately overlook key aspects of the inspection process or ignore them completely e.g. *'those not efficient enough or who do not plan well enough may attempt to cut corners, but any good lead inspector will stop that' R.7 (p.123).* The respondent appears to believe that where corners had been cut, it reflected a degree of laziness rather than human error: e.g. *'Occasionally, team members tried to skimp aspects of the evidence gathering but I did not allow this and did not work with them subsequently' R.2 (p.123).*

A number of respondents said that because Ofsted inspections are e.g. *'highly pressurised'* [activities], *'it is inevitable that inspectors face decisions about the allocation of their time. They may not always be able to spend the time they*

*may wish on some aspect of the evidence' R.14 (p.123).* Respondents reported that they believed that inspectors are faced with making choices due to time limitations e.g. *R.6 (p.122), R.11 (p.122) and R.13 (p.123).* In this way, the degree to which inspectors use discretion during inspections is similar to the choices faced by *Street-Level Bureaucrats* (Lipsky, 1980) in their decision-making due to limitations of time. The element of enforced decision-making due to a perceived shortage of time could indicate that the inspections may be altered in different ways as inspectors mediate the management of the process. However, a large minority of respondents (47%) indicated that they had never experienced inspectors cutting corners during inspections e.g. *R.9 (p.122-123) and R.10 (p.123).*

Here respondents appeared to be divided into three different groups. The largest group reported that they believed that inspectors do cut corners because they have to make choices within the inspection process. Their perception is that the inspection tariff was restricted and the consequent time constraints experienced by inspectors led to varying degrees of mediation or mitigation of the process. However, where mediation occurred in this context it was generally perceived by respondents to be done in the best interests of the school. A second smaller group indicated that they had no experience of inspectors cutting corners during inspections. However, a third group of survey responses reported that they believed that a minority of inspectors did cut corners if they could get away with it because they were lazy or to make the work less onerous for them e.g. *'The providers have cut the payment for inspecting and it has become a commercial venture so people cut corners e.g. replicate previous*

*inspection outcomes R.3 (p.134) and 'Aspects of the inspection/evidence which are not deemed essential will inevitably need to be 'cut'' R.14 (p.123).*

### **(e) Typicality and variation in inspections**

88% of the respondents expressed a belief that there were typical features in the way inspectors carried out their work, which in their view had created a recognizable inspection culture. The data also supports the view that inspectors considered this to be a positive feature of the process e.g. *R.6; R.7; R.11 (p.133); R.15 and R.17 (p.134)*. One respondent expressed a view that they believed that inspectors worked in *'typical'* ways because human beings *'tend to work in routine and familiar ways and embrace social patterns'* *R.12 (p.134)*. However another respondent gave a gloomy perception of the inspection process by suggesting that the commercial side of Ofsted had created some negative features e.g. *'The inspection providers cause the culture with stupid restrictions and that is also true of HMI, e.g. forever changing formats, forever insisting on rules R.3 (p.134)*.

While almost all of the respondents reported that they believed that inspections contained typical and recognisable features, when responding to Q.10 half of the inspectors said that they believed that there was some variation in the way that inspectors carried out their work e.g. *R.1; R.11 and R.12 (p.136)*. However, a number of respondents suggested that the *'guidelines and principles'* of inspection *'act as limiters on individuals that are inclined to act in maverick ways'* *R.14 (p.137)*.

A large majority of respondents (80%) said that they believed that inspectors did not require more freedom to interpret the *'Evaluation Schedule for Schools'* as they applied its criteria because more freedom within the inspection process would lead to a loss of consistency: e.g. *R.2 (p.150); R.12 (p.149); R.14 (p.150) and R.15 (p.150)*. While one respondent commented that *'no monitoring system will work if "interpretation" is built into the programme'* *R.17 (p.150)* a minority of responses supported the perception that inspectors did use their professional judgement or a degree of discretion when applying the criteria e.g. *R.10 (p.150)*. A further minority of inspectors said that in their view the inspection system was flawed because, where mitigation was accepted, they considered that it contributed to insecure inspection judgements e.g. *R.1 and R.5 (p.151)*.

**(f) Inspectors perceptions of the role of inspection in school improvement**

Inspectors provided a cogent and united view in Q.14 that Ofsted inspections were good for schools with 100% of the responses endorsing this perception e.g. *R.2 and R.7 (p.145); R.6; R.11 and R.14 (p.146)*. This was further endorsed in Q.12 with 100% affirming that they believed Ofsted inspections had improved the quality of education in schools e.g. *R.6 and R.15 (p.141)*. Furthermore, in answer to Q.5, 97% of the responses supported that inspectors believed that the Ofsted inspection process had made a significant contribution to schools and their improvement agendas. Individuals provided additional information to support this e.g. *R.6 (p.125); R.14 (p.126) and 'This is the most important reason for inspecting schools' R.11 (p.125)*. 88% of respondents considered that inspections had raised standards in schools e.g. *R.2 (p.143) and R.3 (p.144)*. Despite a majority of respondents reporting that they believed Ofsted inspections had raised standards and that they had improved the quality of

education in schools, some additional responses said that these factors were not solely attributable to Ofsted e.g. *R.2 (p.144) and R.10 'This is without doubt true in my mind but only because of a range of other aspects including the NC [National Curriculum] and the continuing support from education and pedagogical experts in schools, LAs and elsewhere' (p.143)*. Additional comments indicated that some respondents doubted the majority viewpoint that inspections had raised standards in all schools e.g. *'In some schools. It depends what is meant by standards: exams, behaviour, attitudes, staff well-being, learning culture' R.3 (p.144) and 'Not really' R.12 (p.143)*.

As a consequence, the perception of the majority of inspectors appears to be in keeping with Ofsted's view that inspections have a positive impact on raising standards and improving the quality of education in schools. Accordingly they were considered by respondents to be good for schools. However, a minority group also speculated that in their view improvements to the quality of education and standards were the result of a broader range of school improvement initiatives of which Ofsted was one.

#### **(g) Inspectors and their awareness of how they are perceived in schools**

A majority of the respondents (63%) said that they believed that inspectors were not perceived negatively in schools e.g. *R.4; R.6 and R.13 (p.167)*. However, 37% of the respondents disagreed with this premise and provided their reasons. *R.10* encapsulated this in the quality of the inspection team e.g. *'There is sometimes a justified negative perception when the team is not the best' (p.167)*. Another respondent's view was that *'given the nature of the job this is to some extent inevitable R.1 (p.167)*. This statement appears to reflect the

level of anxiety that Ofsted inspections create in schools, particularly in those schools e.g. *'which could come out badly'* R.15 (p.168). This is because should a school be placed in Special Measures by Ofsted inspectors then this has a detrimental impact on teachers' morale and perhaps on their future job prospects.

The survey data indicated that 46% of the respondents believed that inspectors create unnecessary tension in schools. However, in their additional comments respondents reported that where tension occurred it was their belief that it was not inspectors who caused this but that it emanated from fears and insecurity within schools e.g. R.6 and R.12 (p.166). One respondent reported that perceptions of negativity were: *'more about the culture of the school than inspectors who they [teachers] have never met until they arrive'* R.3 (p.168). Here respondents' comments appear to overlook the impact that they as inspectors have in schools and, because they believe that they were doing good work, respondents seem to have rationalised schools' negativity in terms of it existing within weaker schools rather than in all schools e.g. *'Very often, especially those schools who feel they (wrongly) have no further need to improve...and those who have not got an accurate self evaluation'* R.10 (p.167); *'By some schools. Are these the schools which would come out badly?'* R.15, (p.168). 19% of respondents said that they had *heard* of situations where inspectors were too harsh in schools but they believed that they were not the cause of creating unnecessary tension e.g. R.7 (p.166), R.10 (p.168) and R.17 (p.168). This is interesting because inspectors appear to hold a perception that in the general professional culture of Ofsted, they had *heard* of situations

whereby inspectors had created tension in schools but that they did not e.g. *R.7 and R.9 (p.166)* and *'It can do but I hope it certainly doesn't when I lead inspections as I go out of my way to be friendly and approachable during inspections and the odd joke always goes down well'* *R.11 (p.166)*.

Additionally, a minority of respondents offered a view that a degree of tension was a necessary part of the process because this is a requisite of schools being held to account e.g. *R.1 (p.165) and R.9 (p.166)*. *'The process is bound to create some tension. Nothing wrong with that...there's accountability in most spheres of life, quite rightly. So it's not "unnecessary"'* *R.14 (p.165)*. What can be extrapolated from their responses is that most inspectors appeared to believe that they were doing good work and to a large extent tried not to create tension in schools. They appeared to justify the presence of tension in terms of it being a necessary part of the inspection process by which schools were held to account. Where there was tension it was perceived by respondents to have been created by teachers in schools, particularly those schools where there were weaknesses.

All of the respondents indicated that in their view it was essential for inspectors to establish a close working relationship with headteachers and staff e.g. *R.3 and R.7 (p.138)*. 12% of respondents said that while they believed that forming a positive relationship was beneficial, they also said that it was not essential to the inspection process e.g. *R.12 (p.149) and R.17 (p.138-139)*. *R.2* noted: *'It should be a professional working relationship which is based on a clear*

*understanding of the separate role as well as those aspects that are complementary' (p.139).*

**(h) Inspectors' perceptions about Ofsted and accountability, conformity and compliance in schools**

A large majority (94%) of respondents indicated that they believed Ofsted's main objective was to hold schools to account for the quality of provision and the standards achieved by pupils/students e.g. *R.10 (pp.129-130) and R.15 (p.130)*. 18% of respondents said that they perceived the role of inspectors was to provide headteachers with an *'objective and professional dialogue and supports them [headteachers] in challenging their staff to aim higher'* *R.6 (p.130)*. Inspections were also seen to provide parents with information and to inform the Secretary of State that minimum standards were being met in schools and to ensure confidence in the use of public money *R.7 (p.129)*. One respondent observed: *"Hold to account" is inappropriate. Ofsted's role is to act as a frank and fair evaluator of quality'* *R.14 (p.130)*.

75% of respondents indicated that they did not believe Ofsted's main purpose was to ensure that schools conform to national educational policies and initiatives. Respondents appeared to have interpreted this as a 'political' question because they seemed to equate the role as inspectors in terms of school improvement through accountability and not in terms of checking schools' compliance with government initiatives e.g. *'No. Conformity was never what it was about'* *R.7 (p.131)* and *'Strongly disagree. Ofsted's main purpose is to help raise educational standards and pupils' achievement'* *R.11 (p.132)*. However, 25% of respondents said that they thought that Ofsted's main

objective was to ensure schools conformed to national education policies and initiatives e.g. *'I should think this is true. The changes on the inspection framework usually reflect government policy'* R.10 (p131).

However, additional comments suggested that respondents viewed the presence of conformity and compliance during inspections to be necessary requirements to protect children e.g. *'Yes in a good way. Safeguarding, health and safety, management structures etc. all have a positive impact on children...We are looking at what is effective, not specious conformity'* R.6 (p.169). However, 23% of respondents reported that they believed that Ofsted had not increased conformity or compliance in schools e.g. R.11 (p.169). Another respondent commented: *'Legislation outside the [inspection] framework has done this [increased conformity and compliance] more than inspections alone'* R.9 (p.170).

### **Summary and Discussion**

The survey responses revealed that inspectors held a broad range of perceptions about Ofsted inspectors and aspects of their work. When considering the major research question, the evidence appears to suggest that most respondents believed that inspectors' values do influence the inspection process because human beings carry out the work. The majority group of respondents also indicated that they enjoyed the work of inspecting schools and they held a common belief that inspections were good for schools. This group also upheld that Ofsted inspections were necessary to hold schools to account, to raise standards and to improve the quality of education in schools. In this way

their general perception was united around a belief that they were doing 'good work'.

From the survey data and additional comments it also seemed evident that respondents believed that their core values were in harmony with Ofsted's inspection philosophy and they held a common perception that there was a need for schools to be inspected. Accordingly, where respondents said that they believed inspectors' values influenced the inspection process they perceived this to be in terms of the way inspectors conducted themselves in individual schools rather than any deviation from Ofsted's objectives. The major group of respondents said that because each school was considered by them to be a unique institution variation in the way that they went about their work was acceptable within the parameters of Ofsted's inspection criteria and objectives. Accordingly, the way in which inspectors varied their approach when inspecting different schools, taking context into account was also seen by respondents to be of benefit to schools. However, the notion of inspections being carried out by human beings who mediate the management of the inspection process and the different ways in which they conduct themselves also opens the door for mitigation to occur within the application of the process which challenges the perception that Ofsted inspections are consistent and objective.

While indications of disagreement in the survey emanated from different respondents, and were not always attributable to the same people, a minority of alternative perspectives were presented for each question. A number of responses from the minority group were critical of the commercial nature of the inspection process, to which respondents believed contributed to 'corners being

cut'. A minority of inspectors also held perceptions of there being too little time to carry out the work and that the work also contained onerous administrative tasks. While respondents recognised that inspections caused tension and anxiety amongst teachers, their view was that this was caused within schools rather than by inspectors. A minority of respondents also held a view that tension was an acceptable part of the process of holding teachers to account through school inspection. Furthermore, while the majority group indicated that they believed that inspections took account of schools' values, their culture and individuality, a minority did not agree that this occurred.

While the majority of respondents expressed a belief that Ofsted inspections were objective, consistent and that inspectors systematically replicated their work during each inspection, a minority disagreed that this was the case. The minority group challenged the major group's perception that the inspection process was objective on the grounds that because human beings carried out the work and used their '*professional judgement*' to interpret evidence, then inspections cannot always be objective or systematically replicated. The minority group also said that they believed that some inspectors may cut corners during inspections because they reported that Ofsted inspections were '*highly pressurised activities*' during which inspectors were forced to make choices. Paradoxically, all of the respondents agreed that inspectors used their *common sense* during inspections (equating *common sense* with '*professional judgement*') and half indicated that they believed variation occurred during inspections and this was also as a result of human influence.

In conclusion, it would seem that most inspectors' values are in alignment with those of Ofsted and a majority expressed a belief that they were doing 'good' work, which they enjoyed because they believed it is raising standards and improving the quality of education in schools. While the majority said that Ofsted inspections were objective, consistent and replicable, a minority of inspectors held a pragmatic perspective about inspections which appears to be based on the following premise. Each inspector brings to each inspection their own set of values, knowledge and experiences, which they use to make '*professional judgements*'. At the same time they work with other human beings who are inspectors who may hold similar or different values, knowledge and experiences. Inspectors also inspect different schools which contain people who have their own and perhaps different values, knowledge and experiences to those of inspectors. The majority of inspectors indicated that they believed in Ofsted's values and endorsed Ofsted's philosophy and purpose. However, some inspectors also said that that while working within the parameters of Ofsted's inspection criteria, their values influenced the choices that they made and the way in which they worked. This appears to result in a degree of mediation of the management of the inspection process occurring which for some inspectors is not only permissible but necessary because to these inspectors the use of mediation is seen to be of benefit to individual schools. However, some inspectors, while accepting that mediation takes place, disagree with it because they believe that it introduces inconsistency into the inspection process, mitigating against it.

The major research question asks: *'To what extent do Ofsted inspectors' values influence the inspection process?'* Sub-research question 4 asks: *'What are Ofsted inspectors' perceptions of how they engage with this process?'*

From the survey most of the inspectors said that they believed in Ofsted's objectives and values and that they carried out Ofsted's effectively. The majority of respondents said that they thought that Ofsted inspections were objective and good for schools because they considered that they raised standards and improved the quality of education. As a result of this, their values were largely aligned with those of Ofsted as they applied Ofsted's standardised aims and criteria during inspections.

However, from the survey data a second group of inspectors appeared to have emerged. While this group reported that they believed in Ofsted's values and the process of inspection, they also considered that there was a need to use different methods when inspecting schools to get the job done. This group seemed to work in a pragmatic way. These inspectors appeared to consciously adjust their practice to manage their time, collect data and to build positive relationships in schools. They rationalised the way that they mediated the management of the inspection process in terms of it being in the best interests of schools. In this way while these inspectors believed that they continued to fulfil Ofsted's objectives, the process becomes different each time as a result of mediation and the degree to which individual inspectors make choices within the inspection process. The make up of inspection teams alters from inspection to inspection with some inspectors perhaps working together for the first time.

Furthermore, during an inspection inspectors also encounter staff in schools for the first time. Consequently, the impact of inspectors working together in schools as they interact with each other and teachers is likely to influence the inspection experience for teachers and perhaps introduce a degree of variance into the inspection process. This then raises questions about the nature of standardisation, objectivity and consistency within the Ofsted inspection process which are key expectations for Ofsted.

It is also possible that a third sub-group exists within the national body of inspectors who have different reasons to the major group as to why they inspect schools and who perhaps want to change the process from within.

Part 2 of this chapter will reflect in greater depth some of the issues that have emerged from the interview responses.

## **Part 2: Analysis of findings from interviews.**

The four interviewees were selected from those who responded to the questionnaires and were a sub-set of that group. Through the interview process it was possible to explore in greater depth key factors relating to (a) the research questions and (b) interesting themes that arose out of the questionnaires.

Having emerged from the original surveyed group it was expected that the interviewee responses would largely reflect the survey responses. Furthermore, it was also probable that the values of the interviewees would be in alignment with those of Ofsted. However, a further assumption was that it was possible that some of the interviewees may be from the pragmatic group of inspectors who, while believing in the value of inspections, engaged with Ofsted's processes in different ways, believing, that they mediated their work to help schools. Furthermore, it was also possible that the interviewee group may contain one or more inspectors who disagreed with the Ofsted process in some way and was working to change it from within.

### **1. The values of interviewees and their perceptions of how they engage with the Ofsted process.**

The interviewees provided different reasons as to why they became inspectors and continued to inspect schools (*p.184; p.193; p.199 and p.206*). However, all four held a common belief that inspection was necessary to hold schools to account and to help schools to improve. While their practical reasons for becoming inspectors differed, as did their educational backgrounds, each of the interviewees argued that their values were in alignment with those of Ofsted

and that there was no conflict between their values and those of Ofsted e.g. *Int.1 (p.185); Int.2 (p.194); Int.3 (pp.199-201) and Int.4 (pp.208-210)*. This was because they subscribed to a strong belief that inspections were 'good' for schools e.g. *Int.1 (p.184)*; they helped to ensure that '*all children have a right to a very good education*' *Int.4 (p.208)* and that they addressed '*underperformance*' in schools *Int.2 (p.193)*.

However, their opinions differed in the certainty to which they believed Ofsted inspections had raised standards in schools e.g. Interviewee 4 was convinced that Ofsted had raised standards (*p.208*) while interviewee 3 was unsure about this claim (*p.199*) The interviewees appeared to hold an opinion that Ofsted was able to attract a type of person who engaged with the process because they upheld a belief that Ofsted inspections were helping schools to improve and that they believed that they were doing good work through inspection *Int.1 (p.184)*. As a consequence, the interviewees held a perception that Ofsted was able to recruit people who held similar values to those of Ofsted, that individual inspectors were of the same mind as other inspectors and that they worked within a corporate culture that was contributing to school improvement through inspection.

However, they said that they believed that inspectors did not always apply inspection protocols in the same way. Accordingly, the interviewees argued that it was their belief that the inspection process was not completely objective and that an element of subjectivity occurred due to the nature of human interaction between teachers and inspectors working together in different contexts as well

as between inspectors working together in teams e.g. *Int.1 (pp.188-189); Int. 2 (pp.196-199); Int.3 (p.203) and Int.4 (p.212)*. As well as interviewees suggesting that Ofsted inspections were not completely objective, they also held a perception that a degree of inconsistency was implicit within the process and that this was caused by human interaction and e.g. *'the way people deliver it'* *Int.2 (p.197); Int.1 (pp.189-190); Int.3 (pp.201-202) and Int.4 (pp.213-214)*. While interviewees reported that there was inconsistency in the process, it was also reported that where variation occurred during the inspection process this was done to *'secure the best possible outcomes for the school'* *Int.1 (p.187)*.

Therefore, within the common features, aspirations and expectations that appear to exist amongst inspectors there begins to emerge in clearer detail a profile of complex educators who, by degrees, may not be fully objective or consistent in the way that they inspect schools which contributes to variation in the process. While they said that their values were in alignment with those of Ofsted, what seems to be emerging from the interviews (in clearer detail than in the survey responses) is that inspectors appear to be a group of pragmatists who, while they remain committed to achieving Ofsted's inspection objectives, apply different practical strategies during inspections which they believe to be in the best interests of individual schools. Interviewee 4 speculated that *'Ofsted is not a process. It is a group of people [and] some are subjective, some are objective'* (p.213). This suggests that despite Ofsted's expectation that inspectors should evaluate objectively and impartially, interviewees seem to be suggesting that this is precluded by human interaction and the presence of varying degrees of mediation within the inspection process. In this way,

Interviewee 3 encapsulated the complexity of the inspection process when she indicated that where inconsistencies occurred it may well be '*because human beings carry it [inspections] out and we are all different personalities*' (p.205). What appears to occur is that the inspection framework is the map and inspectors are committed to undertaking the same journey but there appear to be different routes to the destination of completing an inspection.

However, interviewee 4 argued that her values were not in alignment with many other inspectors that she had worked with and who she perceived to be too aggressive in their style of inspecting schools. Consequently, one of her personal goals, as she engaged with the inspection process, was to '*change the face*' of Ofsted (p.210) by the way that she applied the inspection criteria and in the way that she related to teachers. For her it was important to present a more human face, to reduce anxiety and fear that she believed teachers experienced during inspections. This then appears to be a conscious action on the part of this interviewee to apply methods which relate closely to her personal values and to subtly manipulate the inspection process while working within the parameters of Ofsted's criteria. The basis of this was a perception that inspectors that she had worked with created unnecessary stress and anxiety in schools and, accordingly, her view was that inspections would be more beneficial to schools if inspectors operated in a more user-friendly way. What appears to be emerging from the interviewees is that, while inspectors values are generally in alignment with those of Ofsted, human interaction between inspectors and staff in schools leads to degrees of variation in the inspection process. Furthermore, mediation of the management of the process may not be

a deliberate intention of inspectors at the outset of an inspection but appears to be a reaction, perhaps an unconscious one, to context and human interaction. Therefore, the degree of variation in the way that inspectors pragmatically apply the inspection criteria is likely to depend on individual inspectors and the context in which they find themselves. Alternatively, the modification of the process may also be as a consequence of a conscious reaction as stated by interviewee 4 to her negative experiences of inspections.

## **2. The extent to which inspectors mediate the management of the Ofsted inspection process**

The notion of mediation was explored further during the interviews. Here all interviewees reported that they believed that mediation of the management of the inspection process did take place e.g. *Int.1 (pp.187-188)*; *Int.2 (pp.195-196)*; *Int.3 (pp.201-202)* and *Int.4 (p.212)*. Similar to the questionnaire responses, they also acknowledged that where mediation of the management of the inspection process occurred they said that they believed it was done for the benefit schools and teachers. For example, they indicated that inspectors do this to communicate effectively and to frame questions in a flexible way, to build rapport, use their personalities and professionalism to relax teachers, to reduce fear and build trust e.g. *Int.1 (pp.185-186)*; *int.2 (pp.194-195)*; *Int.3 (pp.201-202)* and *Int.4 (pp.210-212)*. All interviewees considered these to be important factors in the way that they influenced the inspection process and that a degree of conscious mediation of the management of the inspection process was a pragmatic necessity to enable them to take into account schools' contexts and to begin to meaningfully engage with the individuals who worked in them. This reflects the survey responses for Q.15 where all respondents said that they

believed that inspectors use their common sense or '*professional judgement*' during inspections (pp.147-148). Furthermore, all interviewees suggested that they had influenced the inspection process through a degree of mediation, and that this took place on a person-to-person basis through the way in which they practically interacted with each other and teachers. However, while they said that they believed that this was done in the best interests of teachers and schools, they said that the degree to which inspectors mediated the management of the inspection process was likely to have an impact on the objectivity of inspections leading to perceptions of inconsistency. This has implications for Ofsted regarding exactly how neutral and unbiased the inspection process can realistically be and it raises questions about the security of Ofsted's advice to inspectors to:

'evaluate objectively, be impartial and inspect without fear or favour'.

Ofsted (2014b, p.24)

Three of the interviewees argued that the inspection process was as objective as it possibly could be and the Ofsted Inspection Framework provided the basis for a consistent standardised process e.g. *Int.1 (pp.188-189); Int.2 (pp.197-198)* and *Int.3 (p.203)*. However, they indicated that because inspections are carried out by human beings a degree of interpretation of the Inspection Framework occurred because e.g. '*it isn't an exact science! It's a framework*' *Int.1 (p.188)* and the process involves human interaction when working with other inspectors, teachers or headteachers e.g. *Int.1 (pp.187-190); Int.2 (p197); Int.3 (pp.201-203) and Int. 4 (pp.213-214)*. Interviewee 4 suggested that the process was by degrees both objective or subjective depending on the experience of inspectors

and the degree to which they tried to understand the extent to which teachers may be fearful of the inspection process (pp.210-213). While all of the interviewees intimated that in different ways they had influenced the inspection process, they said that this had been done for pragmatic reasons and to benefit schools. However, they said that they were less convinced that inspectors deliberately 'cut corners' to complete the work in the allotted time e.g. *Int.1* (pp.186-187); *Int.2* (p.195); *Int.3* (pp.202-204) and *Int.4* (pp.212). While interviewees stated that they did not believe deliberate cutting of corners occurred, they suggested that human beings bring to the inspection process different methods which means that they carry out the process in slightly different ways each time. Consequently, the different methods applied by inspectors may lead to conscious or unconscious mediation of the inspection process. These actions therefore, have an impact on the objective and standardised implementation of Ofsted's aims and are likely to contribute to varying degrees of inconsistency within the inspection process.

### **3. The notion that there are different groups of inspectors.**

The above section considered the extent to which inspectors influence the inspection process through varying degrees of mediation and use of their time to collect evidence. The process of human interaction may result in conscious or unconscious actions within each inspection which contributes in some way to degrees of variation. From the survey responses and interviews there appears to be a major group of inspectors whose values are in alignment with those of Ofsted, who believe that inspecting schools is valuable work because they are making a difference to schools and who, consequently, enjoy the process of school inspection. They also hold a belief that inspections are generally

objective but that a degree of mediation occurs within the process and, where this takes place, it is seen to be for the benefit of schools. Evidence supports the existence of a minority group whose values also appear to be concordant with those of Ofsted but members of this group suggest that they continue to carry out inspections for different reasons than those of the major group, e.g. financial reward as well as perceptions of power and influence they perceived being an inspector gave them. Minority group members were also critical of the inspection process in different ways, e.g. perceptions of there being too little time within the tariff to complete all that was expected of them, which led to corners being cut. Members of this group were critical of the level of administrative tasks and commerciality that they perceived had evolved within the process. This group contained members who believed that some inspectors created unnecessary tension in schools during inspections and some members reported that they were not convinced that Ofsted inspections were the sole contributors to raising standards in schools.

What appears to be noticeable is that within the national body of Ofsted inspectors there is a major group, which contains members who exhibit a high level of satisfaction about working for Ofsted and carrying out inspection work. There also exists a minority group which contains members who for various reasons appear disaffected with the Ofsted inspection process but who nonetheless continue to inspect schools. However, the reasons provided by some members of this group for their continuance appear to be less altruistic than those of the major group. Complexities arise when considering the nature of a minority group because it appears to be more fluid in its construction than

the major group. For example, membership of the minority group was determined by responses to questions and it was not always the same respondent or interviewee who provided responses that placed them in the minority group.

However, evidence from the survey and interviews indicates that there is a further subset contained within the minority group. Here there are individuals who wish to change the inspection process from within. Questionnaire responses provided some indication that a minority group of inspectors appears to exist whose values and beliefs for inspecting schools differ from those of the major group (*Summary: Part 1, pp.234-239*). When considering the small sample of four interviewees, the evidence supports that interviewee 4 held different reasons for inspecting schools than interviewees 1, 2 and 3. She argued that one of her priorities was to try to change the face of Ofsted from within and to reduce the 'fear' experienced by teachers through adopting a more 'human' approach to inspection (*p.207*).

This is because, from her experience the way in which some inspectors engaged with schools during the inspection process had a negative effect on teachers. While working as an Ofsted inspector, interviewee 4 indicated that she wished to change this perception in schools through building positive relationships and rapport with teachers (*pp.210-212*) leading to better trust relationships (*p.215*). Her perception was that through adopting this approach, she would be able to reduce a perception amongst teachers that inspection is a

punitive process (*pp.206-209*) as well as enabling her to be in a better position to understand teachers in their context (*pp.205-206*).

## **Conclusion**

The sample of interviewees was too small from which to draw any generalizable conclusions. However, there appear to be a number of similarities between what interviewees were saying about Ofsted, which resonated with the questionnaire responses and supported the notion that inspectors consciously or unconsciously influenced inspections through the application of their values and the different ways in which they engaged with the inspection process.

The evidence from this research supports that there are perhaps three distinct groups of inspectors who form the core body of inspectors across the country. There appears to be a major group whose values are closely aligned to those of Ofsted and who follow Ofsted's code of conduct without wishing to make significant changes to how the inspection process is carried out. Alongside this major group, there is a minority group who are less satisfied with the Ofsted inspection process than those in the major group but who continue to carry out their job as inspectors and apply Ofsted's inspection objectives. However, there also appears to be a smaller sub-group of inspectors who regularly carry out the work but who consciously seek to change the process from within to make it more user friendly or because their values differ from those of Ofsted. Interviewee 4 firmly represents this group but amongst the questionnaire responses there were others who also fit this group: e.g. *R.3 (p.175 and pp.175-176) and R.10 (p.176)*.

While the architecture of inspection is rigid and contains a number of standardised expectations, the process by which inspections are carried out varies because its application is dependent on the skills, knowledge, experience, perceptions and competence of different inspectors. Questionnaire and interviewee responses provided sufficient evidence to endorse that inspectors believed that they were doing good work and to them the process of inspection appertains to school improvement rather than surveillance or holding schools to account for what they do. All of the interviewees suggested that a degree of mediation was necessary within the human interaction of an inspection because it benefited schools through facilitating positive rapport, building trust and putting people at ease. The degree of mediation reported has implications for the consistency of inspections as perceived by schools and the wider public because despite recruitment, training and development costs, inspections remain inconsistent (see Waldegrave and Simons, 2014). It seems to be the case that some inspectors (as human beings), endeavour to make the inspection process purposeful and tolerable for teachers through their personal interactions, pragmatic inspection strategies and through mediating the management of the process. However, by doing so the risk of reducing the overall objectivity and consistency of inspections increases which contributes to greater variability therein. This therefore compromises the overall impact and integrity of the national inspection process. Respondents and interviewees provided no evidence that they wished to change the principles or structure of inspection. However, they applied personal methods and styles to adapt to the individual context of schools or as a response to perceptions that they held that teachers were fearful of inspectors. In this way, the individual methods and

inspection styles that they adopted while applying the inspection protocols was able to influence the inspection process in various ways. Finally, while Ofsted has created a single centrally defined model for inspection, variation within the process remains because *people* carry it out in schools where they inspect the work of...*other people*.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusions, Limitations to the Research and Recommendations

The previous chapter analysed the outcomes from the research reported in chapters 4 and 5. This chapter summarises the evidence presented and makes some final conclusions on the sub-research questions and the major research question.

#### Conclusions relating to the research questions

##### **Sub-Research Question 1: *What is the nature of the Ofsted inspection process?***

**Background:** Chapter 1 provided a short history of education leading to the creation of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in the Education (Schools) Act 1992. Several sets of circumstances combined during the 1970s and 1980s that paved the way for the emergence of Ofsted. It materialized in part because of economic circumstances alongside a growing perception amongst politicians that educational standards were in decline. A series of 'Black Papers' (Cox and Dyson, 1969a & b and 1970; Cox and Boyson 1975 and 1977) fuelled fears that unless something was done by government, educational standards would continue to slump. The recession that followed the international oil crisis in 1973 also opened a debate as to whether schools were adequately providing value for money and sufficiently preparing a workforce that was able to compete on the international market. In 1976, Callaghan's Ruskin College speech challenged the monopoly teachers had over education and the

apparent 'secret garden of the curriculum'. What followed during the 1970s and 1980s was an increasing apprehension by central government that the two major institutions for monitoring and inspecting schools (LEA and HMI) were underperforming in this role. Therefore there was no national means by which schools across the country could be held to account or by which central government could be regularly informed about standards and quality of provision in schools. The creation of Ofsted provided central government with the instrument by which schools could be held to account for standards and the quality of education they provided. It was also an intention that through Ofsted inspection reports parents were provided with the means to understand the quality of provision and educational standards in the schools that their children attended.

**The nature of the Ofsted process:** Ofsted claims that inspection serves three purposes: to provide information to parents to help them to make choices; It informs the secretary of State for Education as to whether schools are providing an acceptable standard of education, provides confidence in the use of public money and assists accountability; contributes to the improvement of schools. While this may be an accurate description of Ofsted's remit as portrayed by Ofsted, the style and mechanics of inspection has contributed to the creation of a specific image of inspectors and their work.

In the early days of Ofsted HMCI Chris Woodhead imbued fear amongst teachers and headteachers through imbuing the inspection process with his negative views about teachers. Schools have adopted strategies by which teachers remain in readiness for an Ofsted inspection. In this way Ofsted has

influenced the working norms in schools, something which I refer to in the thesis as the Panopticon effect of inspection.

**Sub-Research Question 2: *How do individual inspectors engage with Ofsted processes?***

Several conclusions can be drawn from the research about the ways in which inspectors engage with Ofsted inspections processes.

The majority of inspectors engage willingly with Ofsted's inspection process because they believe that they (and the inspection process) are doing good work which is helping schools to improve. In this way this group hold an optimistic perception about the work that they do. They enjoy the nature of the work and conform to Ofsted's expectations believing that Ofsted has created the right process by which to inspect schools and measure what schools do. While conforming to Ofsted's inspection requirements inspectors are influenced by their values, which in turn influences the way in which they inspect schools. While Ofsted is a highly structured and deterministic strategy it is carried out by human beings and the evidence from this research indicates that the actions of individual inspectors influences the process. Consequently, the degree to which they mediate the management of the process in schools renders the inspection process less objective or consistent than Ofsted believes it to be.

The research has identified a major and a minor group (as well as a sub-group of the minor group) of inspectors. The major group contains inspectors whose values and beliefs are aligned to those of Ofsted, who assiduously carry out the process without dissent or question. Alongside this group there is a small minority of inspectors whose responses differed from those made by the

majority of respondents and interviewees. The membership of this group fluctuates because it is formed from individuals who disagree with some but not all elements of the process. Contained in the minority group, a small sub-group appears to exist comprising inspectors who are disaffected with the Ofsted system and are critical of the way in which some inspectors' conduct themselves. This group say that from their experience, aspects of the Ofsted process conflict with their personal professional values and they express a desire to change Ofsted from within to make it less fearful for teachers. This may involve a degree of mediation of the management of the inspection process in individual schools. The research suggests that this group of inspectors wish to reduce the fear that Ofsted inspectors cause by employing personal strategies that develop trust and rapport between them and teachers.

**Sub-Research Question 3: *What are the best ways of investigating these issues?***

The issues surrounding SRQ2 and SRQ4 were investigated through the multi-methods approach which was explained in chapter 3. A random group of 100 inspectors and retired inspectors were selected to complete a questionnaire and from this sample 17 practising and retired inspectors responded. From this group, a sample, of four inspectors and retired inspectors were selected to be interviewed further.

**Sub-Research Question 4: *What are Ofsted inspectors' perceptions of how they engage with this process?***

Over its lifetime Ofsted has stated that inspections are both consistent and objective (Matthews and Sammons, 2004, Ofsted, 2015, p.21) and that they have contributed to improving schools:

‘Ofsted’s inspection findings should be impartial and rooted in the evidence collected by HMI and other inspectors working on behalf of Ofsted. In this way, Ofsted is able to contribute objectively and distinctively to the evaluation of the quality of educational provision.’

Matthews and Sammons, 2004, para. 12, p.9)

‘This evaluation finds considerable evidence that Ofsted has made a strong contribution to the improvement of providers in all sectors.’

Matthews and Sammons, 2004, para. 475, p.154)

More recently, and ten years from the claims made by Matthews and Sammons, Ofsted’s National Director of Schools has repeated this belief.

‘Whatever our critics say about us, they would be hard pressed to argue that Ofsted hasn’t over time raised expectations across England’s school system [and] lifted the lid on poor practice.’

Claddingbowl, (2014)

Accordingly, inspectors appear to believe that they are doing good work; that their values are aligned to those of Ofsted and they believe that inspections are both consistent and objective. However, This research, based on the perceptions of practising and retired inspectors, has uncovered these beliefs and expectations to be less secure in practice. The major impediment for the inspection process being considered to be objective and consistent is that the process is reliant on human interaction. According to Wilcox and Gray (1996, p.113) it is expected that inspectors follow explicit and specific criteria which

bestows on the process 'procedural objectivity'. This aspires to eliminate personal judgements made by inspectors. However, this research has found that inspectors make professional judgements based on their experience and values which may at times undermine the security of 'procedural objectivity' within the process. The reason for this is that during inspections, choices are made by inspectors, relationships are formed and a degree of mediation occurs which varies amongst inspectors from school to school because schools and their contexts are different. Accordingly, the variability caused by the methods individual inspectors adopt and apply in schools challenges Ofsted's orthodoxy that the inspection process is both consistent and objective.

**Major Research Question: *To what extent do Ofsted inspectors' values influence the inspection process?***

The evidence from the research supports that Ofsted inspectors' values do influence the inspection process. However, the interactive nature of inspectors' values in relation to Ofsted is a complex one from which several conclusions may be drawn. This research has discovered that inspectors carry out the work for different reasons. The majority of people become inspectors because they believe that Ofsted inspections are the right process by which to inspect schools. The evidence supports that most inspectors willingly engage in the work because they believe that through inspecting schools they are doing good work; contributing to raising educational standards and improving the quality of education for young people. As a consequence inspectors develop a common set of skills and their values are compatible and congruent with those of Ofsted.

Chapter two made a case for people's values being in part sculpted by significant others and that they are also absorbed through being part of a corporate culture of an organisation (Morgan, 1997). While Ofsted's values are implicit within the *School Inspection Handbook* and *The Framework for Inspection*, trainers, mentors and experienced inspectors help to reinforce these values by establishing a set of working protocols and expectations. Once training has been completed inspectors are further socialised into the corporate custom and practice of Ofsted by working in close proximity with other inspectors.

Furthermore, HMI and senior inspection managers monitor the quality of inspectors' work through quality assurance and on-site monitoring strategies as well as through analysis of post-inspection questionnaires from schools. There are numerous ways therefore, by which Ofsted is able to overtly and subtly maintain its hegemony over inspectors regarding the integrity of the inspection process. However, the major essence to the success of this is the willingness of the majority of inspectors to conform to Ofsted's 'service ideal' (Banks, 2004) because they believe in the worth of school inspections. While this is the case for the majority, this research has established that a small minority of inspectors are resistant to following Ofsted's 'service ideal' for a variety of reasons.

Within Ofsted's parameters, inspectors are expected to be self-managing individuals and accordingly Ofsted affords them a degree of 'autonomous power' (Bovens, 1998) as they carry out their work in schools. It is at this stage that inspectors' personal professional values emerge to influence the process within the practicalities of carrying out inspections. Consequently, the influence of their personal professional values facilitates a degree of mediation of the

management of the inspection process (pp. 222-228). To begin with, mediation occurs as a pragmatic (conscious or unconscious) reaction to the changing contexts in which inspectors find themselves and is seen by them as acceptable within the inspection process because it benefits schools in some way. Mediation is also a coping response to the apparent time pressures that some inspectors face. In this context, similar to Lipsky's (1980) *street-level bureaucrats*, inspectors find themselves being forced to make choices within the inspection process. Consequently, while Ofsted is a highly structured, deterministic and dictatorial strategy, which relies on 'procedural objectivity', it is carried out by human beings who interact with other human beings. The evidence from this research indicates that despite the majority of inspectors saying that their values are concordant with those of Ofsted, the way that they interact with other human beings as well as their improvised actions in the context of the workplace leads them to make choices and mediate the management of the inspection process which renders inspections less objective or consistent than Ofsted believes it to be.

Alongside the major group there appears to be a small minority of inspectors who, while believing in the value of Ofsted inspections, are less compliant about the process and at times disagree with aspects of it. The membership of this group fluctuates because it is not formed from a constant group of individuals who fully disagree with all aspects of the inspection process. From questionnaire and interview responses disagreement or disaffection within this group varies from question to question. Therefore, the membership of the minority group changes, at times becoming bigger or smaller depending on how individuals perceive their work and respond to the question. The minority group

contains individuals who are carrying out Ofsted's work for different reasons to those of the major group: e.g. because they enjoy power, influence and financial reward.

Incorporated within the minority group, there appears to exist a further sub-set of inspectors who are disaffected with Ofsted because of their experiences as inspectors (R.3 and R.10 appear to be members of this group). Consequently, they are critical of Ofsted's philosophy and the custom and practice by which some inspectors conduct themselves. This group say that aspects of the Ofsted process conflict with their personal professional values and, unlike the major group, express a desire to change Ofsted in some way from within to make it more purposeful to schools and less fearful for teachers. Ofsted promotes that through the recruitment and training of 'fit and proper, competent and effective' (Ofsted, 2012, p.2) educationalists whose values are aligned to those of Ofsted, objectivity and consistency of inspection practice is maintained. Ofsted's claim that inspection is a consistent and objective process remains rooted in a belief that if inspectors apply the inspection criteria in a systematic way then the inspection process will be replicable and 'procedurally objective'. While the research supports that the values of the majority of inspectors are commensurate with those of Ofsted, each inspector brings their own values to each inspection which influences their inspection conduct. Consequently, as they apply a highly structured set of inspection criteria their values influence the choices and the professional judgements that they make. In this way, the research has highlighted that Ofsted's claim that inspection is a consistent and objective process is insecure.

### **Limitations to the research and future research possibilities**

This research utilized a survey approach followed by qualitative interviewing to explore Ofsted inspectors' views about the nature of their work and the extent to which they perceived that inspectors' values influenced the work that they do. The selection process was purposive (Cohen, Lawrence, Manion and Morrison, 2001, pp.104) because participants were from the same niche educational group, that of Ofsted inspectors. The sample was limited because out of one hundred retired and practising inspectors randomly selected from SERCO and CfBT Regional Inspection Providers, only seventeen respondents completed and returned the questionnaire. From this group a convenience sample (Cohen, Lawrence, Manion and Morrison, 2001, pp.102-103) of four retired and practicing inspectors were chosen for further interview. This group lived within reasonable travelling distance to the researcher. In this context, the interviewees who were available and agreed to be interviewed were all female. Whilst the additional comments provided by survey respondents and the interviewees were rich in detail the research produced very little generalizability. However, a degree of 'fuzzy generalization' (Bassegy, 2000) could be used to draw some conclusions about the nature of these groups, their membership and their values.

Future research into this area would require the sample to be expanded so that there was a greater number of survey returns along with an increase in the number of inspectors interviewed. This then would lead to greater confidence in the research findings. The idea that inspectors carry out inspection work for different reasons and the nature of those reasons would also be a fascinating

area to return to. Furthermore, carrying out an in-depth investigation into the nature of the minority sub-group of inspectors who appeared to be either disaffected with Ofsted or who expressed a desire to change the inspection process from within would also be interesting. This could provide greater understanding of the reasons as to why members of this group continue to inspect schools as well as underlying themes of dissatisfaction which lead members of this group to seek change and the extent to which those changes could be achieved.

### **Recommendations**

Ofsted as an organisation and the process by which schools are inspected has evolved from its inception over twenty years ago. However, over that period of time the methodology by which schools are held to account largely remains the same e.g. inspectors visit schools, follow Ofsted's inspection criteria to gather evidence on which judgements are made to grade the effectiveness of schools. Despite changes to the process, which include the introduction of a school self evaluation form; the involvement of headteachers and school leaders during inspection meetings and greater engagement with staff (Revised Framework, 2009), the process continues to be criticised because the changes that have been made to the inspection process by Ofsted benefit Ofsted but not necessarily schools: e.g. 'The present system of self-evaluation prior to inspection was seen as an imposition, limiting evaluation to those aspects deemed important to Ofsted, but not necessarily to the school' (Alexander, 2009, p.338). Furthermore, Waters (2013) argues that: 'The only consistent aspect of an Ofsted inspection is that it is an inconsistent mechanism' (p.128).

Research carried out by Waldegrave and Simons for the *Policy Exchange* (2014) has had a strong influence on Ofsted recently redesigning the process of inspection. Their research was inconclusive about whether there was sufficient validity or reliability within Ofsted judgements (Waldegrave and Simons, 2014, pp.15-16) but they contended that there was an over-reliance on lesson observations and on data amongst inspectors. Furthermore, implicit within their research is a conclusion that by making more changes to the inspection protocols validity, reliability and objectivity will somehow be improved upon. As far back as 1996 Wilcox and Gray (p.126) argued that despite amendments to the inspection process: 'The objectivity and the associated validity problematic cannot be resolved simply by increasing attention to the details of methods and procedures.' Furthermore, the Association of School and College Leaders has called for changes to be made to the Ofsted inspection policy through the adoption of an 'intelligent accountability' model (ASCL, policy paper 86, 2012). This call for change is based on perceptions that Ofsted is an expensive national institution that has established an inflexible inspection format to measure those things that are easy to measure, attainment and progress, without providing due allowance for the contextual, demographic complexities that often surround schools. Evidence from this research has highlighted that despite changes, Ofsted remains a twenty-year old uncompromising methodology based on an internal view that inspection is an objective process and that a single inspection strategy can be applied systematically and reliably to all schools. Through an examination of inspectors' perceptions and experiences this research has begun to explore the extent to which the Ofsted inspection process can be considered to be both consistent and objective.

To facilitate change would require Ofsted to 'listen to' issues and concerns raised by inspectors as well as acknowledging that inspections can never be fully consistent or objective in practice because they are carried out by human beings. The research has begun to investigate the extent to which inspectors say that they mediate the management of the inspection process as well as a number of practical and philosophical issues raised by them e.g. a shortage of time to complete the work; trying to reduce the fear factor experienced by teachers and a mixed perception that Ofsted inspections raise standards in schools. Changes to the process could include revisions to methods, routines and procedures in terms of improving inspection quality to help schools and to reduce perceptions in schools and amongst some inspectors that it remains a punitive approach. This could be accomplished by changing the way inspectors are trained to carry out the work so that they take more account of schools' contexts and their individual achievements. Currently, inspectors focus on schools' outcomes but to gain a balanced overview of achievement in schools it would be necessary for them to make more insightful judgements taking into account qualitative matters e.g. enjoyment, learning atmosphere, self-esteem, fulfilment and happiness.

Another recommendation would be for Ofsted to consider the need for more external research into the nature of the way inspectors engage with the inspection process and the way that they make judgements in different contexts. Explorations into the ways in which human beings, with different value systems, pragmatically apply a highly structured and deterministic inspection strategy across schools in England would illustrate the degree to which the process is dependent on human interaction and influence. This then would

provide Ofsted with a greater understanding of how inspectors carry out their work and the nature of conscious and unconscious influences on the work that they do. Comprehending how individual inspectors conduct themselves during inspections is crucial to the effectiveness and success of the process. As a consequence, rather than Ofsted making changes to the architecture of inspection to try to improve validity and reliability, a comprehensive understanding of the nature of the way in which inspectors engage with the process is pivotal to Ofsted's future success.

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## **Appendices**

## Appendix 1:

### The IFL ETHICS COMMITTEE

#### CONSENT FORM: SURVEYS, QUESTIONNAIRES

I (names)

of (address)

**Hereby agree** to participate in this doctoral study to be undertaken by Mr Doug Lowes

and I understand that the purpose of the research is to explore how significant an influence are inspectors' values in the way they interpret and apply the Ofsted inspection model and mediate between national policy and school contexts? The values and educational experience of Ofsted inspectors may contribute to their inspection practice being more closely aligned to Ofsted inspection policy when they carry out work, or they may be more closely aligned to schools and their contexts and what does this mean for the inspection process and schools?

#### **I understand that**

1. Upon receipt, my questionnaire will be coded and my name and address kept separately from it.
2. Any information that I provide will not be made public in any form that could reveal my identity to an outside party ie. that I will remain fully anonymous.
3. Aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.
4. Individual results **will not** be released to any person except at my request and on my authorisation.
5. That I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study in which event my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from me will not be used.

Signature:

Date:

The contact details of the researcher are: Mr Doug Lowes, Gamal Rigg, Spaunton, Appleton-le-Moors, York YO62 6TR. Tel: 01751 417666. Email: [york.edsolutions@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:york.edsolutions@yahoo.co.uk)

The contact details of the secretary to the IfL Ethics Committee are Mrs J Lison, Centre for Educational Studies, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull, HU6 7RX.

Email: [J.Lison@hull.ac.uk](mailto:J.Lison@hull.ac.uk) tel. 01482-465988.

## Appendix 2: Letter to participants that accompanied the questionnaire

Gamal Rigg,  
Spaunton,  
York YO62 6TR  
October 1<sup>st</sup> 2011

Dear Inspector,

### Ed.D in Educational Policy and Values – the University of Hull

For my Ed.D dissertation I am undertaking a research project focusing on whether the values of Ofsted inspectors influence the way they mediate their role in schools during inspections. The research question is:

*How significant an influence are inspectors' values in the way they apply the Ofsted inspection model and how much mediation takes place in schools when inspectors carry out national policy?*

In general terms, the research aims to explore whether the values of Ofsted inspectors are more closely aligned to Ofsted inspection policy, or whether their values are more closely aligned to schools and their contexts, and what this may mean for the inspection process and schools.

As a practising or retired additional inspector would you be prepared to take part in a short questionnaire (attached). The expected time to complete the questionnaire is no more than 40 minutes. Questionnaires can be returned via email or post by end of October 2011. There is no need to provide your name as responses are anonymous and won't be seen by anyone beyond the researcher. A sample of those inspectors willing to be interviewed further will be contacted in future weeks.

The name of my research supervisor is Professor M. P. Bottery, Centre for Educational Studies, Institute for Learning, The University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull, HU6 7RX.

Should you have any concerns about the conduct of this research project, please contact Mrs J. Lison, Secretary to the Institute for Learning Ethics Committee, University of Hull, Cottingham Rd, Hull, HU6 7RX.

Email: [J.Lison@hull.ac.uk](mailto:J.Lison@hull.ac.uk) Tel No (+44) (0)1482 465988; fax (+44) (0)1482 466137.

Yours sincerely,



T. D. Lowes 01751417666 [york.edsolutions@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:york.edsolutions@yahoo.co.uk)

### **Appendix 3: Semi-structured Interview Schedule**

#### **The extent to which interviewees feel that the values of Ofsted inspectors influence the inspection process and how this occurs?**

Explain the nature of the research. Thank interviewees for completing the questionnaire and for agreeing to be interviewed. Explain that the purpose of the interview is to probe further some of the themes that appear to be emerging from the questionnaires.

Explain that:

- The interview will be digitally recorded and then transcribed. It will last approximately one hour.
- The transcription will be emailed to the interviewee for amendment and approval and that no part of the transcription will be used by the researcher until full consent has been given.
- All transcriptions will be anonymised and not used for purposes beyond this research.
- Interviewees can withdraw from the research programme at any point.

Provide a copy of their original questionnaire responses and begin by asking each interviewee about their views of the questions posed in the questionnaire. Did they find the questionnaire interesting and the process easy to complete? Continue by saying I would like to hear your thoughts about how you apply your skills as an inspector and the extent to which you think that inspectors influence the Ofsted inspection process.

Possible running order for questions but the overall order will be governed by avenues of interest pertinent to the research.

Thank you for meeting me to carry out the interview.

**1. What were your main reasons for becoming an Ofsted inspector?**

**2. Do you think Ofsted has raised standards in schools?**

**3. To what extent do inspectors' values relate to those of Ofsted?**

(a) To what extent do your values influence the way in which you carry out your work as an inspector?

**4. To what extent have you experienced conflict between your values and those of Ofsted?**

**5. In what ways do you (have you) influence the Ofsted inspection process?**

(a) What methods do you employ to build trust with schools?

**6. To what extent do you think that a shortage of time contributes to inspectors cutting corners?**

(a) If they do cut corners can you think of any areas where this may happen?

**7. To what extent do you think inspectors mediate their work in schools and if so what strategies do they use?**

**8. Is the Ofsted inspection process objective or subjective?**

(a) To what extent do you think inspectors are true to the Ofsted Inspection Framework?

**9. To what extent are Ofsted inspections consistent in practice?**

Thanked interviewees for their time.

## **Appendix 4: Letter to HMCI Christine Gilbert requesting permission to involve additional inspectors in the research programme.**

Gamal Rigg  
Spaunton  
Appleton-le-Moors  
York YO62 6TR

Mrs Christine Gilbert,  
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools,  
Office for Standards in Education,  
Alexandria House,  
33, Kingsway,  
London,  
WC2B 6SE

26<sup>th</sup> July 2010

Dear Christine,

### **Re: Ed.D in Educational Policy and Values, The University of Hull**

I am an Additional Inspector (18480) contracted to carry out Section 5 inspections for SERCO. At the same time I am working as a Primary Improvement Partner in Bradford and undertaking a doctorate at the University of Hull. My supervisor there is Professor Mike Bottery and I am now entering the dissertation phase of my Ed.D. For that I would like to carry out research that will require me to interview practicing Ofsted inspectors.

I approached Mr Keith Wheeldon at SERCO to seek permission to post a brief questionnaire to SERCO Additional Inspectors. He suggested that before he could authorise me carrying out research, that involved SERCO Additional Inspectors, that I should seek to gain permission from Ofsted. Having spoken to HMI Clive Moss on the helpdesk on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> July, he suggested that I write directly to you regarding this matter.

My research question focuses on whether Additional Inspectors mediate the inspection process based on their prior and aggregated inspection experience, their interpretation of the *'The Evaluation Schedule for Schools'* and their educational values. The assumption in this research is that despite the best attempts by Ofsted to standardise the inspection process for all schools, and the individuals working in them, there could be evidence that the inspection process is inadvertently 'manipulated' by some inspectors through the way they interpret the school self-evaluation form and data, apply the inspection framework and mediate their role to form judgements. Consequently, the current inspection model could leave open the door for a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' to occur in a minority of schools. Furthermore, where complaints

are lodged by schools (either to Ofsted or to the Inspection Services Provider) these may be less to do with the inspection framework but could be triggered by the way individual inspectors carry out their work, mediating their role and forming judgements.

The research question that I wish to explore based on the above summary is:

*'How, and to what extent, does an inspector's values and interpretation of the 'The Evaluation Schedule for Schools' (under section 5 of the Education Act 2005) influence the process of an inspection?'*

To carry out my research I am seeking permission from you for three things:

- Approval to approach SERCO or CfBT to seek permission to involve a number of Additional Inspectors in a short postal questionnaire survey based on the above question;
- Subsequently to interview up to three inspectors;
- Permission to have access to Ofsted's inspection complaints file for 2009-2010. In seeking approval for this, it is the nature of the complaint in relation to the research question that would be of interest. Therefore, it would be expected that the names of individuals and schools would be deleted.

Finally, all research protocols, questions and interview schedules would be carefully scrutinized by the university's ethics committee before I was allowed to carry out my research. As HMCI you would also be able to consider the questions prior to posting and to view elements of the research outcomes and findings.

I hope that you find this area of research as interesting as I do and that you will facilitate the process by granting approval to the research going ahead.

Yours sincerely,

T.D Lowes

**Appendix 5: Response letter to researcher from Ofsted.**

Inspection Delivery  
Freshford House  
Redcliffe Way  
Bristol  
BS1 6NL

T 0300 123 1231  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0117 945 6277  
Direct F 0117 945 6554  
marcia.headon@ofsted.gov.uk



12 August 2010

Doug Lawes  
Gamal Rigg  
Spaunton  
Appleton-le-Moors  
York  
YO62 6TR

Dear Mr Lawes

**Request to involve additional inspectors and have access to Ofsted's complaints file, in conducting research for an Ed.D in Educational Policy and Values.**

Thank you for your letter of 26 July 2010, received in Christine Gilbert's office on 27 July 2010, concerning the above request. Christine is currently on leave and I have been asked to respond on her behalf. It is interesting to learn about your involvement in education as both a learner and an inspector.

I am pleased that in your letter you recognise the efforts Ofsted makes to 'standardise the inspection process for all schools and the individuals working in them.' Working as an additional inspector, you will know that Ofsted has a suite of documents for all inspectors to use when conducting inspections. The high expectations of all inspectors are clearly set out in the *Code of Conduct*, and the *Evaluation Schedule* guides inspectors on the evidence needed to substantiate judgements made using the grade descriptors. You will also be aware that Ofsted has strict quality assurance procedures which include all inspections and inspection reports. These quality assurance and moderation procedures are in place to ensure rigour in the inspection process and consistency in judgements. We monitor the consistency of judgements tightly and take action when we identify inconsistency in practice although I recognise that we may never achieve absolute consistency in our inspections.

As you would expect, it is not appropriate for me to comment on the thrust of your research question. Since you work as an additional inspector on behalf of Ofsted, your request is viewed as conflict of interest and it would be against the contracts which the inspection service providers have with us. For these reasons, I am very sorry but I must refuse your requests to approach the inspection service providers in



order to ask additional inspectors to complete your questionnaire and to meet with additional inspectors.

With respect to your request to have access to Ofsted's complaint file for 2009/10 I am not able to give you permission for this. We have considered this request as we are required to under the Freedom of Information Act and draw your attention to the following:

1. Whilst it is the case that Ofsted holds some information that is relevant to this request, Ofsted assures our complainants that we treat their correspondence with us in confidence and we would in any event regard information in relation to complaints to be confidential by its nature. You may wish to note in addition that Ofsted also operates a policy which destroys correspondence about such complaints after six months or if the complaint is not resolved in this time, it is destroyed when it is resolved.
2. Ofsted therefore considers that to provide this information, even in anonymised form, would constitute an actionable breach of confidence. Ofsted is therefore exempt from providing this information under section 41 of the Freedom of Information Act. In addition, much of this information is likely to constitute personal data in that it is data relating to individuals who can be identified from the data and other information in Ofsted's possession. Given the confidential nature of the information and the circumstances in which it was given to Ofsted, these individuals would not expect this to be released and therefore to do so would be unfair and in contravention of the First Data Protection Principle. For these reasons Ofsted considers that it would be in addition exempt under section 40(3) of the Freedom of Information Act from providing information within the scope of your request that constitutes personal data. Both of these exemptions are absolute exemptions.
3. If you are unsatisfied with how we have, specifically, responded to or handled your request for access to Ofsted's complaint file, you may request a formal internal review. In order to do this, please write to the following address, explaining what aspects of our response you are unhappy with:

Email: [Richard.McGowan@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:Richard.McGowan@ofsted.gov.uk) or write to:

Head of Information Rights  
Legal Services Division  
Ofsted  
Aviation House  
125 Kingsway, London, WC2B 6SE

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you also have the right to apply to the Information Commissioner for a decision as to whether or not Ofsted has complied with its obligations under the FOI Act



with respect to your request. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

FOI Case Reception Unit  
Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire, SK9 5AF

Finally, we do receive similar requests from other parties conducting research into a variety of educational aspects. However, research connected with Ofsted is commissioned by the Ofsted Board to an agreed schedule. This ensures that any research conclusions are presented within the wider context of Ofsted's work. Consequently, Ofsted's practice is not to support third party research such as you suggest.

I am sorry if this is a disappointment to you and if it impacts upon the research you hoped to do. I am grateful to you for seeking Ofsted's agreement to the research before you carried it out. I hope that you understand my reasons for not being able to help you with this. I would like to take this opportunity to wish you every success in your doctorate.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marcia Headon".

**Marcia Headon HMI**  
**Regional Director**  
**Inspection Delivery**