



Introduction

The NASUWT has a longstanding record of monitoring and reporting on the impact of inspection on the professional practice and working conditions of teachers and school and college leaders.

Using survey evidence, the findings of research and direct consultation with members, the Union has continued to highlight not only the direct impact of inspection but also the way in which perceptions of the expectations of inspection can have adverse consequences in relation to levels of organisational bureaucracy, the workload of teachers and school and college leaders and their ability to use their professional skills, knowledge and expertise to meet the needs of learners.

This Report:

- sets out the NASUWT's existing policy position on school accountability and the critical role played by inspection within effective school accountability frameworks;
- summarises the activities undertaken to date by the Union to advance these policies across the UK;
- draws attention to the shortcomings of recent proposals to address issues related to inspection through the establishment of high-stakes models of school accountability, in which inspection is wholly or substantially replaced by systems that rely on evaluation of pupil performance data to an even greater extent than is currently the case;
- uses evidence gathered through the NASUWT's online inspection reporting tool, 'Inspect the Inspectors', and other sources to consider teachers' and school and college leaders' direct experience of inspection and its implications in the settings within which they work;
- addresses the additional impact that interpretations of the requirements of inspection frameworks at school and college level can have on approaches to teaching and learning and workforce management; and
- highlights priorities for the NASUWT in its ongoing work to secure fit-for-purpose inspection arrangements across the UK.

School accountability and inspection: the NASUWT's policy and principles

Through resolutions and reports passed at the Union's Annual Conference, the NASUWT has developed a clear and consistent policy perspective on the systems of school accountability in place across the UK and the role played by school inspection within these frameworks.

At Annual Conference in 2014 a resolution was adopted which focused on the work of Ofsted, the statutory school inspection body in England. This resolution asserted that Ofsted was not fit for purpose. Specifically, it highlighted concerns about the extent to which its work was being used to advance Coalition Government policy on the expansion of the academies sector. It also emphasised the impact of shortcomings in the Ofsted inspection regime on the recruitment, retention and morale of teachers.

The resolution called on the National Executive to campaign:

- '(i) to protect teachers from the flawed judgements of Ofsted;*
- (ii) for a review of the work of Ofsted;*
- (iii) for an inspection body which:*
 - (a) is fit for purpose;*
 - (b) operates consistently and fairly across all settings;*
 - (c) is accountable;*
 - (d) does not exceed its remit.'*

These concerns reflected those set out in an Annual Conference 2013 resolution on inspection bodies and frameworks that addressed the implications for teachers, school and college leaders and learners of the inspection frameworks in place across the UK.

Conference notes the growing concern of qualified teachers and the public about the increasingly politicised, punitive and irrational approach employed by inspection systems and their inspectors.

Conference asserts that the framework changes and inspection practices often result in:

- '(i) a lack of clarity as to what constitutes a good lesson;*
- (ii) a significant number of lessons graded unreasonably as unsatisfactory;*
- (iii) increasingly unrealistic expectations as to what a teacher should achieve in a lesson and in the course of a working day;*
- (iv) undue pressure on school leaders which results in unreasonable demands made of other teachers;*

- (v) *an overly prescriptive pedagogical approach that undermines the professionalism of teachers and*
- (vi) *increasing workloads with no commensurate benefit for pupils.'*

The resolution urged the Union to make representations to ensure that:

- (a) all inspectors have relevant and recent classroom experience;
- (b) inspectors' employment experience and qualifications are published on the inspection websites; and
- (c) staff welfare and the implementation of workplace agreements to ensure an acceptable work/life balance for all teachers form part of the framework.

A resolution passed at Conference 2011 reflected the concern of NASUWT members about the detrimental impact on teachers and school and college leaders of the ways in which the perceived requirements of inspection systems across the UK are interpreted at school and college level:

Conference asserts that the inspection frameworks for schools and colleges have had a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of teachers and are used by some schools and colleges to justify the imposition of onerous monitoring that increases workload and undermines the work/life balance of teachers.

Accountability and inspection were also key themes of the NASUWT's groundbreaking Report, *Maintaining World Class Schools*, adopted unanimously as Union policy at Annual Conference 2013.¹ This Report, drawing on the aims and values that continue to guide the Union's policy development, made the case for UK public education and securing its world-class status in future. *Maintaining World Class Schools* made clear that effective systems of accountability are central to the provision of effective education in a democratic society:

'The NASUWT's view is that whilst it is right for schools within the system to be held to account, they must be held accountable for the right things. There must be an accountability system that is fit for purpose and which secures public trust and confidence in public education.'

Maintaining World Class Schools

The report advanced the view that accountability frameworks, and the inspection systems incorporated within them, should seek to reflect more accurately the contribution that schools make to the educational wellbeing of

¹ NASUWT (2013). *Maintaining World Class Schools*. Available at: on 05/03/15. Available at: nasuwt.org.uk/consum/groups/public/@journalist/documents/nas_download/nasuwt_010997.pdf, accessed on 05.03.15.

pupils and their future life chances. *Maintaining World Class Schools* drew attention to the extent to which a reliance on a limited range of pupil performance indicators in inspection methodologies and in accountability systems more generally undermines achievement of this objective:

'...the measures widely used to assess the performance of schools throughout the UK tend to fixate on a handful of narrow measures – normally through the instruments of performance tables and school inspection. As governments seek to impose a bottom line below which no school should fall, schools will continue to be driven by a narrow performance measure rather than considering their performance and contribution to the purposes and values of public education in the round. The NASUWT does not believe that this is a good place for our schools to be.'

Maintaining World Class Schools

The Report rejected the negative perceptions of the teaching profession and the education system that appear to characterise accountability and inspection frameworks across the UK:

'The NASUWT believes that it is time to end the culture of blaming schools for the ills of a system of education which is in the gift of politicians to change. The Union also believes that it is time to take party politics out of education; that educational policy and strategic choices for our nation's children should be driven on educational, not political, grounds.'

Maintaining World Class Schools

These sources of NASUWT policy, as well as others relating to the professional status of teachers and school and college leaders, their right to a reasonable work/life balance, the curriculum and the importance of institutional collaboration and democratic local oversight of the state education system, have led the Union to identify important principles against which the effectiveness of any system of accountability should be assessed.

Systems of accountability should:

- i. be rigorous, challenging, reasonable and focused on educational rather than party political priorities. Both the public and the profession should have confidence in judgements that are made;
- ii. support schools and colleges to raise standards and improve the quality of teaching and learning;
- iii. help schools and colleges to deliver a broad and balanced education to all learners;
- iv. link to, encourage and support ongoing professional and institutional development;

- v. be fair and equitable. Measures should take account of an institution's context and schools and colleges should not be disadvantaged or penalised because they are inclusive and take learners with complex needs;
- vi. recognise and respect teachers' professionalism. Accountability should not operate in ways that could undermine teachers' professional judgement or integrity;
- vii. involve and take account of the views of teachers, school leaders, support staff, learners, parents and the community;
- viii. avoid unnecessary bureaucracy and not place excessive workload burdens on teachers and school and college leaders;
- ix. be streamlined so that duplication and conflicts are avoided; and
- x. encourage co-operation and collaboration. Institutions should be encouraged to work together to develop and share effective practice.

Notwithstanding the different models of school accountability in place across the UK, the implications of which are considered elsewhere in this Report, the NASUWT believes that these principles are essential characteristics of any inspection and accountability system that seeks to support teachers, school and colleges leaders and other members of the education workforce in securing the highest possible levels of learner progress and achievement.

Advancing the NASUWT's accountability and inspection policy across the UK

The NASUWT continues to work actively not only to press for positive reform of the accountability systems across the UK and to draw attention to the shortcomings they cause, but also to defend teachers' and school leaders' legitimate professional and employment interests where they have been threatened by the implications of the accountability and inspection regimes.

With particular regard to inspection, the Union has continued to engage actively with administrations and inspectorates across the UK. The NASUWT has highlighted the concerns raised by teachers and school leaders about the implications for learners and the workforce of inspection frameworks that fail to reflect the principles established by the Union. This work has included participation in formal consultation exercises, direct representations to Ministers and officials and the submission of evidence to relevant parliamentary and assembly committees across the UK.

The NASUWT has liaised and collaborated with other organisations across the education sector to highlight the shortcomings of approaches to inspection and accountability in place across the UK and has produced position statements and other policy briefings to raise broader public awareness of its

concerns. The Union has also addressed inspection-related issues through presentations given at educational and academic conferences and policy forums.

Through its membership of Education International (EI), the NASUWT has engaged with unions in other jurisdictions to develop its understanding of accountability and inspection practice elsewhere, as a means of supporting its own policy development in this area.

In addition to its work in highlighting accountability and inspection issues, the NASUWT has taken an active role in defending the legitimate interests of its members when these have been threatened directly by inspection or by the way in which the perceived requirements of inspection have been interpreted by schools, colleges, local authorities, Education and Library Boards (ELBs) in Northern Ireland and other employers of teachers.

In particular, in instances where it is evident that the quality of work undertaken in schools and colleges has been criticised unduly by inspectors, the Union has been active in supporting those teachers and school and college leaders who have elected to pursue cases through official complaints procedures and by other appropriate means.

The Union's ongoing commitment to representing members subject to unjustified treatment from inspectorates was illustrated particularly clearly during 2014 in relation to the 'Trojan Horse' controversy in Birmingham, centred on the alleged promotion of extremism and governance failures in 21 schools. The case attracted a significant level of media coverage as well as intense national and local political scrutiny, placing considerable pressure on staff, pupils and members of the local community. It also prompted the commissioning of Ofsted inspections of these schools at extremely short notice.

Following the publication of the outcomes of these inspections, in which some schools identified as effective by Ofsted in the recent past were rated negatively by inspectors, the NASUWT raised concerns that Ofsted had allowed an impression to be created that its evaluations in this instance were driven more by political imperatives than by objective evidence of the quality of provision in these schools. The NASUWT stressed throughout the affair that inspections undertaken on such a basis served only to undermine professional and public trust in the impartiality of Ofsted's inspections of schools. These concerns were echoed by the House of Commons Education Select Committee in its Report on the Trojan Horse case in which the role of the inspectorate in this matter was called into serious question.²

² House of Commons Education Select Committee (2015). *Extremism in schools: the Trojan Horse affair*. Available at: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmeduc/473/47302.htm, accessed on 18.03.15.

In addition to addressing the national policy implications of the Trojan Horse case, the Union also continued to place significant emphasis on providing direct support and advice to members in relation to their working conditions, job security, professional activities and the reputations of the schools within which they were employed. In extremely challenging and difficult circumstances, the work of NASUWT representatives in Birmingham not only ensured that members' legitimate professional and employment interests were promoted as effectively as possible, but also contributed to promoting stability in the affected schools and securing community cohesion across the City.

While remaining clear about the negative implications of inspection regimes in place across the UK for teachers, school and college leaders and learners, the NASUWT has also continued to recognise that inaccurate interpretations of the requirements of inspection within institutions have led to the imposition of practices in some settings that have had profoundly negative employment and professional consequences. In the context of inspection in England and as a result of concerted and determined industrial action by the NASUWT, the Union was able to secure the publication by Ofsted in October 2014 of a clarification document setting out key expectations of inspection, with an updated version published in March 2015.³ These documents were the result of the distinctive and pragmatic line taken by the Union that the need to reform accountability systems should not preclude efforts to protect teachers from the negative impacts of inspection in the classroom and to offer them a line of protection from the imposition of unacceptable management practices.

Inspection across the UK

In addition to acknowledging the significant work undertaken by the NASUWT in promoting its principles and values in respect of inspection, it is important to note that the Union's experience of organising across the UK has given it a uniquely well-informed perspective on issues associated with inspection and school accountability.

Specifically, the Union continues to recognise that each of the inspection models operated by Ofsted in England, Estyn in Wales, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in Northern Ireland and Education Scotland differ in terms of their remit, functions and models of working. It also acknowledges that each of these systems operate in a distinctive historical, political and social context that must be taken into effective account if policy in each UK jurisdiction is to be advanced appropriately.

³ Ofsted (2015). *Ofsted – clarification for schools*. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-inspections-clarification-for-schools, accessed on 13.03.15.

It is worth noting that public and professional perceptions of each of these inspection regimes have tended to differ. For example, historically, it is evident that the reputation of Ofsted has been more problematic than that of the other UK school and college inspectorates. This was due in part to concerns that its creation by the 1979-1997 Conservative Government rested on a contentious assumption that the education system in England was highly ineffective and that a punitive system of school inspection was necessary to drive up standards.⁴

However, notwithstanding these important considerations, it is evident that many inspection-related issues and concerns often cut across the geographical boundaries within which each UK education system operates.

This feature of inspection in the UK invites particular reflection on practice in Scotland. It is clear from feedback received by the NASUWT from teachers and school leaders working in Scotland that the inspection system to which they are subject is not free of challenges and shortcomings.

Nevertheless, the Union's experience is that the implications of inspection differ significantly in Scotland from those evident elsewhere in the UK and that inspection-related issues are less readily identified as problematic by teachers and school and colleges leaders in Scotland than those working in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In part at least, it is reasonable to suggest that these differences of perspective between teachers and school and colleges leaders in Scotland relate to the fact that inspection in Scotland is undertaken by an agency with a wider set of responsibilities for school improvement, in contrast to the position elsewhere in the UK. Research has suggested that this feature of inspection in Scotland, combined with a less punitive school and college accountability framework, has led to it being perceived relatively benignly across the education system.⁵

While the existence of these differences in professional perceptions do not, of themselves, justify calls to transplant the model of inspection used in Scotland to other jurisdictions in the UK, they do serve to highlight the similarities between inspection in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In each of these education systems, inspection is undertaken by dedicated inspectorates within the context of a high-stakes school accountability system in which pupil performance data plays a prominent role. Although Ofsted, Estyn and ETI claim that their activities contribute to system and school-level

⁴ Martin, J. 'Inspection of Education and Skills: From Improvement to Accountability', in Davis, H. and Martin, S. (2008). *Public Services Inspection in the UK*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers; London and Philadelphia.

⁵ Croxford, L., Gray, J. and Ozga, J. (2009). 'Teacher Attitudes to Quality Assurance and Evaluation (QAE) in Scotland and England', *CES Briefing No. 51*, Edinburgh: Centre for Educational Sociology, University of Edinburgh.

improvement, it is the case that, in effect, they have no formal responsibilities in this regard beyond conducting and reporting the findings of inspections. However, for each inspectorate, identification of a school or college as underperforming can have significant consequences, including school or college closure and replacement of senior leaders or governors, as well as adverse consequences for an institution's public reputation. In England specifically, negative inspection outcomes can lead to a change in school status through forced academisation or, for existing academies, an enforced change of proprietor.

Therefore, in light of these considerations, this Report focuses particularly on inspection practice in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The importance of inspection in a fit-for-purpose system of school accountability

As described elsewhere in this Report, the NASUWT's policy perspective on school accountability has continued to emphasise the critical role played by inspection. Given the Union's clear view that the full range of work that schools and colleges undertake with learners cannot be reflected fully through evaluation of pupil performance data alone, it is clear that some form of inspection must be incorporated into any accountability framework that seeks to establish a holistic view of the quality of educational provision. It should be noted in this context that independent polling commissioned by the NASUWT highlighted the significantly greater value attached by parents to inspection than tests and examination results as a means of evaluating the quality of educational provision in schools and colleges.⁶

It is for this reason that the NASUWT's response to the clear shortcomings in inspection-related policy and practice across the UK has not included pressing for the abolition of Ofsted, Estyn, ETI or Education Scotland. Instead, the Union has continued to call for reforms to inspection systems to enable them to align more closely with the principles of effective accountability identified by the NASUWT.

With specific regard to inspection in England, recent attention has focused on the publication in 2014 of separate reports by the Policy Exchange and Civitas think-tanks, both of which called into question the continued role of inspection as a key pillar of the school and college accountability system.⁷

⁶ ComRes (2015). *Parents' view of schools/colleges*. Available at: www.nasuwt.org.uk/WhatsNew/NASUWTNews/PressReleases/ComResParentsPoll, assessed on 22.03.15.

⁷ Waldegrave, H. and Simons, J. (2014). *Watching the Watchmen: The future of school inspections in England*. Available at: www.policyexchange.org.uk/publications/category/item/watching-the-watchmen-the-future-of-school-inspections-in-england, accessed on 12.03.15; Peal, R. (2014). *Playing the game: the enduring influence of the Ofsted teaching style*. Available at: www.civitas.org.uk/press/PRplayingthegame.html, accessed on 12.03.15.

The Policy Exchange Report, while stopping short of calling for the outright abolition of Ofsted and inspection, envisaged a model of accountability in which the clear majority of schools would undertake a process of ongoing self-evaluation in which the role of Ofsted inspectors would simply be to validate the outcomes of this process through a monitoring visit.⁸ The author of the Civitas Report, while recognising that issues related to behaviour and safeguarding would be problematic to assess without some form of inspection, set out the view that judgements of the quality of educational provision would no longer be derived through an inspection process. It is worth noting that the foreword to the Civitas publication, written by its Director, went further than this position and called for the outright abolition of Ofsted.⁹

However, while recognising the problems associated with current approaches to the inspection of schools in England, it is important to be clear that, in large part, these issues are caused by the high-stakes school accountability context within which this inspection system operates.

The NASUWT believes that calls for the abolition, or substantial downgrading, of inspection would not, of itself, lead to a reduction in the pressures schools and colleges experience currently to privilege the perceived requirements of the accountability regime over other priorities, particularly those identified by teachers and school and college leaders as central to the educational and wider wellbeing of learners.

These concerns also extend to Wales and Northern Ireland, where high-stakes accountability has become an increasingly evident feature of their education systems.

Instead, the removal of inspection in a high-stakes school accountability system would simply place even greater emphasis on qualitative pupil performance data as a means of forming judgements about the effectiveness of educational provision. Abolition of inspection cannot, therefore, be seen to equate to an abolition of the debilitating high-stakes school accountability systems that teachers and school and college leaders continue to identify as problematic. Given that the consequences of perceived institutional failure would be equally as significant in an unreformed accountability system without inspection, pressure on schools and colleges to produce pupil performance data indicators regarded by this system as acceptable would be even more intense than they are at present and would not be subject to mediation by inspectors as is possible at present.

⁸ Waldegrave, H. and Simons, J. (2014). *op.cit.*

⁹ Peal, R, (2014). *op.cit.*

It is important to note in this context that both the Policy Exchange and Civitas Reports on inspection suggest reforms that increase reliance on pupil performance data as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of individual institutions.¹⁰

It is, therefore, evident that the abolition of ETI, Estyn and Ofsted would not only fail to address substantial problems associated with high-stakes systems of school and college accountability but would also lead to a further unhelpful narrowing of the parameters within which judgements about the quality of provision in schools and colleges are made.

Extensive research undertaken by the European Commission's Eurydice Unit provides further clear evidence that it is possible to establish systems of inspection within the context of school and college accountability frameworks that are more reflective of the principles established by the NASUWT.¹¹ Across Europe, where inspection is used in high-performing educational jurisdictions, it is characterised by a collegial and supportive approach to evaluation of institutional effectiveness, with strategies for future development established in genuine partnership with inspection authorities. These systems seek to give tailored and supportive advice and guidance to schools and colleges on strategies for future improvement.

Experience in Europe and elsewhere confirms that alternative approaches to school and college inspection are entirely feasible and can play a positive role in constructive and development-focused systems of accountability that reflect the NASUWT's aspirations. However, it is clear that inspection-related policy and practice in England, Wales and Northern Ireland continues to fail to reflect these principles. The nature of these shortcomings is explored in further detail below.

The direct implications of inspection

As noted above, it is important to draw a distinction between those issues that relate directly to the inspection process and those associated with the ways in which the perceived requirements of inspection influence practices within schools. The development of appropriate responses to inspection therefore depends upon accurate identification of which of these sources of concern is relevant to any particular problem in which inspection is seen as a relevant factor.

The NASUWT is clear that the act of inspection, the identifiable expectations of inspectors and the ways in which inspectorates are organised and operate

¹⁰ Waldegrave, H. and Simons, J. (2014). *op.cit*; Peal, R. (2014). *op.cit*.

¹¹ Eurydice (2007). *School Autonomy in Europe: Policies and Measures*. Eurydice European Unit; Brussels.

in practice continue to create significant issues in schools and colleges. Feedback from teachers and school leaders and the Union's direct engagement with inspectorates, as well as the findings of independent research, have confirmed that inspection processes across England, Wales and Northern Ireland do not reflect many of the key features that characterise fit-for-purpose inspection systems.

In order to augment its understanding of the implications of inspection still further, in April 2014, the NASUWT established its online inspection reporting tool, 'Inspect the Inspectors'. The tool provides teachers and school and college leaders with an opportunity to critique how inspection has been carried out in their school, early years or post-16 setting, how inspection teams behaved and whether they met all the provisions of the relevant inspection frameworks, handbooks and codes of practice.¹²

The information gathered by the tool allows the NASUWT to identify where there may be recurring problems with particular inspection teams or lead inspectors, to assess the consistency of judgements made and to check whether inspectors are conforming to official advice and guidance. The tool is also designed to collect evidence to support the NASUWT's representations to inspectorates and policymakers across England, Wales and Northern Ireland and its campaign to secure a fit-for-purpose inspection framework.

By March 2015, 'Inspect the Inspectors' had enabled the Union to gather information on over 1,000 individual episodes of inspection across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, providing a unique and independent evidence base on inspection-related issues.

'Inspect the Inspectors' and the other sources of evidence and feedback have highlighted important direct implications of inspection for learners, teachers and school and college leaders. These implications are summarised below.

a) Training, experience and capacity of inspectors

Serious issues have been raised consistently by NASUWT members about the capacity and experience of some inspectors, as well as the quality of training they appeared to have received. As a result, teachers and school leaders are not always clear that judgements are made about the quality of provision on a sufficiently informed basis. This is a significant issue given the potentially serious consequences for schools and colleges of negative inspection outcomes.

¹² NASUWT (2015). 'Inspect the Inspectors'. Available at www.nasuwt.org.uk/MemberSupport/NASUWTPublications/Accountability/Inspection/inspectingtheinspectors/NASUWT_012345, accessed on 15.03.15.

In particular, some users of the 'Inspect the Inspectors' online tool emphasised the lack of subject or phase experience of inspectors, leading to assessments of educational effectiveness that lacked credibility. Teachers also stressed that the lack of recent classroom experience on the part of inspectors meant that some failed to appreciate fully the challenges of professional practice in a contemporary context. This has emerged as a particular issue in England, where the use of seconded headteachers to undertake inspections is common practice.

'Our inspector had no practical experience of teaching in the Foundation Phase and this was clear from the ill-informed way he commented on my practice.'

Post-threshold teacher, Wales

'It was clear from her comments that the inspector had not taught for many, many years...'

Secondary head of department, England

These concerns have been reflected in independent investigations of inspectorates across the UK, most recently by the House of Commons Select Committee and the Committee for Education in the Northern Ireland Assembly.¹³ In the case of Ofsted in England, the Committee highlighted the lack of transparency in respect of the nature and extent of inspector training and the absence of any independent means of auditing its quality.

b) The fitness-for-purpose of the inspection frameworks within which inspectors operate

While inspector quality is an important dimension of the effectiveness of inspection, it is also evident that the inspection framework within which inspectors are required to operate also has a significant impact on their ability to form appropriately balanced and informed evaluations of the quality of provision. Although it is critical to recognise that schools and colleges continue to have choices about ways in which they address the pressures created by the operation of inspection regimes, it is evident that priorities within schools and colleges will be influenced by those established by inspectorates operating within a high-stakes school accountability context.

¹³ House of Commons Education Select Committee (2011). *The role and performance of Ofsted*. Available at: www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/the-role-and-performance-of-ofsted/, accessed on 14/03/15; Northern Ireland Committee for Education (2014). *Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)*. Available at: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/education/calls-for-evidence/inquiry-into-the-education-and-training-inspectorate-eti/>, accessed on 14.03.15.

Evidence from NASUWT members across England, Wales and Northern Ireland continues to indicate that inspection frameworks in these jurisdictions encourage schools and colleges to focus on particular areas of learning, notably English, mathematics and, in Wales, the Welsh language, to an extent that many regard as disproportionate. While survey evidence gathered previously by the Union confirms that teachers and school and college leaders continue to stress the importance of these subject areas, it is clear there is a strong identifiable belief that other dimensions of learning are not reflected appropriately in inspection frameworks and are thereby undervalued across the education system.

This feature of the inspection system can have important impacts on the ability of teachers and school and college leaders to use their professional skills and expertise to plan and implement learning experiences that will meet the needs and interests of children and young people. A survey of over 2,000 teachers and school and college leaders in England undertaken in 2012 reflected this concern in its finding that almost three quarters (72%) of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the priorities established by Ofsted limited their ability to adopt approaches to teaching and learning that they believed were in the best interests of learners.

In England, for example, the NASUWT is clear that the decision of the Coalition Government, on taking office in May 2010, to remove explicit reference to community cohesion from the inspection framework reduced incentives for schools and colleges to prioritise this critical area in their strategic development plans. The narrowness of the Ofsted inspection framework in this regard was recognised most recently in the report of the House of Commons Education Select Committee on the Trojan Horse affair and in evidence given to the Committee by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills.¹⁴

c) Using evidence effectively to form valid, reliable and consistent judgements about educational quality

Each of the inspection frameworks in place in England, Wales and Northern Ireland recognises that the ability of inspectors to form valid and reliable assessments of the effectiveness of provision depends critically on their ability to use evidence effectively. These frameworks establish that inspectors are required to ensure that their judgements and observations are based on clear and robust evidence.

However, reports made using the 'Inspect the Inspectors' online reporting tool confirms that a significant proportion of teachers and school and college

¹⁴ House of Commons Education Select Committee. (2015). *op.cit.*

leaders do not believe that evidence was used effectively to inform inspection judgements. In England, almost one in five users (19%) of the tool reported that they did not agree that evidence had been used in this way during their inspection, while over a quarter of respondents (29%) strongly disagreed that judgements about the quality of provision in their school or college were based on effective use of evidence. It is notable in this context that Ofsted has sought recently to address these concerns through trials of enhanced inspection verification systems to explore ways in which the reliability of inspection outcomes can be enhanced.

Similar concerns were expressed by teachers and school and college leaders in Wales and Northern Ireland. For example, in Northern Ireland, over one in seven (16%) of 'Inspect the Inspectors' users reported that they either disagreed or disagreed strongly with the statement that inspectors used clear and robust evidence to form their judgements.

d) The conduct of inspectors

While evidence from 'Inspect the Inspectors' and other sources of evidence secured by the NASUWT suggests that in the majority of cases inspector conduct is appropriate, it is important to recognise that teachers and school and college leaders report that this is not universally the case.

Ofsted, Estyn and ETI all recognise that the integrity and credibility of the inspection systems they manage depends critically on high levels of inspector conduct. For example, Ofsted has a longstanding Code of Practice for inspectors that requires that they carry out their work with *'integrity, treating all those they meet with courtesy, respect and sensitivity...minim[ising] the stress on those involved in the system.'* Estyn and ETI make comparable requirements of their inspectors.

However, evidence from 'Inspect the Inspectors' confirmed that across the UK, almost a quarter (23%) of respondents felt that inspectors either rarely demonstrated conduct in line with these expectations or never did so.

'...the inspectors were offhand and discourteous pretty much the entire time they were here...'

Secondary post-threshold teacher, Northern Ireland

e) The independence of inspectorates from political influence

The official status of Ofsted and Estyn as Non-Ministerial Public Bodies (NMPBs), answerable to legislators in the UK Parliament and the Welsh Government respectively, is intended to ensure that in undertaking their operational functions, the judgements of inspectors cannot be influenced or overridden by Ministers or their officials. While ETI does not have NMPB status and is, instead, a body located within the Department of Education,

ETI officials and Ministers have insisted that ETI's operational arrangements are such that it is beyond direct political sway or interference.

The merits or otherwise of these arrangements continue to be contested. While it is asserted by the inspectorates that current arrangements aim to ensure that the exercise of their powers is guided by evidence and the professional judgements of inspectors rather than by the political priorities of Ministers, it has been suggested that such arrangements are undemocratic, given the powerful influence that inspectorates have over policy and practice in schools and colleges. Many of these policies and practices may, it is argued, undermine the national policy aspirations of democratically accountable Ministers.

Notwithstanding this ongoing debate, circumstances in which an inspectorate that is established on the basis that it is independent of Ministers but that, in practice, is subject to political influence or control or acts in ways that calls this independence into question, cannot be regarded as acceptable.

It is clear that many teachers and school leaders remain unconvinced of the political independence of Ofsted, Estyn and ETI. The NASUWT's 2011 survey of teacher and school and college leader experiences of inspection highlighted that almost all respondents in England (95%) felt that Ofsted acts in the interests of politicians, with comparable proportions of respondents in Wales and Northern Ireland expressing similar concerns about Estyn and ETI.

These concerns can relate to the inclusion of specific provisions in inspection frameworks that reflect ministerial preferences on teaching styles or curriculum content. For example, prior to the inclusion of specific reference to systematic synthetic phonics in the teaching of early reading skills in the National Curriculum in England, Ofsted's inspection methodology was amended shortly after the Coalition Government took office in order to privilege this teaching strategy. This gave rise to concerns that this amendment sought only to reflect the commitment of Coalition Government Ministers to systematic synthetic phonics, given that Ofsted had not taken the opportunity to amend its inspection frameworks and guidance on this basis previously.

It is also evident that many teachers and school and college leaders are not yet wholly confident that inspection judgements about the quality of provision overall in schools, colleges and other settings are made on the basis of objective and evidence-based consideration of relevant evidence. These concerns were reflected in the resolution passed by the NASUWT's Annual Conference 2014, referenced above, particularly in relation to the extent to which, in England, unfavourable inspection outcomes for schools can result

in their forced conversion to academy status, helping to expand the size of the academy sector, a stated policy objective of the Coalition Government.

These considerations were also echoed in relation to the Trojan Horse affair, in which some schools previously found to be outstanding in the recent past by Ofsted were identified as inadequate following re-inspections requested by the Department for Education (DfE). In some cases, these downgrades by Ofsted followed original inspections undertaken less than a year previously, leading to questions about the degree to which inspectors in these instances operated independently of the political concerns of Ministers and others.¹⁵

Concerns about the actual or perceived lack of impartiality of the inspection regime have also been raised in Wales and Northern Ireland. At the NASUWT's 2014 Cymru Conference, delegates highlighted perceptions among teachers and school and college leaders that Estyn's priorities and approach were influenced inappropriately by the Welsh Government's policy imperatives rather than by a determination to evaluate provision in schools and colleges objectively. In Northern Ireland, the Committee for Education of the Northern Ireland Assembly has recommended that perceptions about ETI's lack of impartiality need to be addressed through changes in the inspectorate's status and governance arrangements.

f) Requirements placed on schools and colleges before and during inspection

In light of the principles for effective systems of accountability established by the NASUWT, the extent to which the demands the inspection process make on teachers and school and college leaders remains a particular area of concern for the Union. In this respect, it is important to draw distinctions between the extent to which these demands are associated with the direct requirements made by inspectorates and those that relate to actions schools might take based on their interpretations of practices likely to secure favourable inspection outcomes. This latter consideration is addressed elsewhere in this report.

The NASUWT's survey evidence confirms that requirements related to school and college self-evaluation, a process all schools and colleges are expected to undertake in some form across the UK, are significant drivers of overall workload levels. Over two thirds (68%) of respondents to the NASUWT's survey of teachers' and school and college leaders' experiences of inspection cited self-evaluation requirements as an important contributor to excessive workload, emphasising the Union's longstanding concerns about the relationship between systems of inspection-related self-evaluation and

¹⁵ House of Commons Education Select Committee (2015). (2015). *op.cit.*

unacceptable workload burdens in schools and colleges. It is worth noting that the extent to which self-evaluation processes are cited by teachers and school and college leaders as contributors to excessive workload are broadly consistent across UK jurisdictions, whether or not systems prescribe the precise way in which the outcomes of self-evaluation are recorded, as in Wales, or, as in England, grant significant discretion to schools and colleges over self-evaluation formats.

Concern has also centred on the perceived extent to which inspection frameworks require schools to adopt detailed planning, assessment and record-keeping requirements. In England, Ofsted has confirmed that it does not require planning to be undertaken specifically for inspection and does not expect adoption of particular approaches to assessment, including planning, and learning-related record keeping.¹⁶ Evidence gathered from teachers and school and college leaders in England through the 'Inspect the Inspectors' reporting tool confirms that in the clear majority of cases (80%), inspectors did not ask to see teachers' lesson plans.

Preliminary indications derived from 'Inspect the Inspectors' responses submitted since the publication in October 2014 of the first version of the Ofsted document clarifying expectations on inspection, referenced above, are that requests by inspectors for teachers to submit their planning have declined still further. In respect of those instances where inspectors continue to request planning, it is clear that such requests relate more to the capacity and willingness of inspectors to adhere to instructions from Ofsted's senior leaders than to any inherent problems with the inspection framework or associated guidance.

However, it is evident that in Wales and Northern Ireland, clear expectations have been established by Estyn and ETI respectively in relation to the collation and submission of planning and assessment records to inspectors. Both inspectorates have made clear that schools must hold documents related to lesson planning and assessment and that inspectors will expect to have access to these documents.¹⁷ Therefore, schools and colleges are required to produce and retain significant amounts of documentation solely for the purposes of inspection, regardless of their views of its usefulness or otherwise in securing high-quality educational provision.

¹⁶ Ofsted (2015). *op.cit.*

¹⁷ Education and Training Inspectorate (2014). FAQs. Available at: www.etini.gov.uk/index/what-we-do/faqs.htm#what_documentation_is_needed/_/expected_during_an_inspection?, accessed on 16.03.15; Estyn (2014). *Guidance for the inspection of primary schools*. Available at: www.estyn.gov.uk/english/inspection/inspection-guidance/primary-schools/, accessed on 16.03.15.

g) Professional dialogue between inspectors, teachers and school and college leaders

Feedback from teachers and school and college leaders confirms the value they place on engaging in informed, mutually respectful professional dialogue with inspectors about professional practice, reflecting a key principle of effective school accountability identified by the NASUWT. However, evidence gained from the 'Inspect the Inspectors' online reporting tool suggests that, in many cases, opportunities to engage in dialogue of this nature are not made available in all circumstances. More than three in ten teachers in England and Wales (31%) reported that they were not offered opportunities to receive feedback from inspectors following observations of their lessons. In Northern Ireland, more than half of teachers (54%) reported that they were not offered the opportunity to discuss an observed lesson with inspectors.

Where feedback was offered, more than one in five (21%) of those teachers in Northern Ireland who were offered feedback after a lesson observation either disagreed or strongly disagreed that this feedback was constructive or helpful. Three in ten respondents in England (30%) were dissatisfied with the quality of post-observation feedback they were offered by inspectors.

Consideration of the extent to which teachers with wider responsibilities within their settings and school and college leaders other than headteachers or principals were able to engage directly with inspectors also reveals significant variation in practice. Two thirds (66%) of 'Inspect the Inspector' respondents in England and Wales with wider responsibilities across their school or college reported that they were not offered opportunities to engage directly with inspectors. Over half of such respondents in Northern Ireland (56%) reported that they were not offered a chance to discuss their wider responsibilities with inspectors.

h) Ensuring inspection does not privilege assessment of professional processes over outcomes

The stated purpose of inspection in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is to evaluate and report on the quality of education provided in schools, colleges and other educational settings. It is for this reason that the NASUWT has continued to insist that inspection methodologies should focus on the outcomes secured by institutions rather than the processes they adopt to achieve these outcomes.

Particular recent attention has focused on the ways in which inspectors evaluate teaching and learning. Concentration on outcomes rather than processes in inspection requires an approach that centres on the impact of teaching and learning rather than the particular pedagogic styles teachers use to secure positive outcomes for learners. Inspectors, therefore, should not give the impression that they favour particular learning styles and should not draw

conclusions based upon whether, for example, teachers emphasise collaborative or individual learning in classrooms or whether activities are teacher-led or learner-led.

In England, inspectors have been given clear instructions not to draw conclusions about the quality of teaching and learning based on the adoption or otherwise of specific pedagogical techniques and methods.¹⁸ Evidence gathered through the 'Inspect the Inspectors' online reporting tool indicates that these instructions have resulted in a significant decline in the proportion of teachers and school leaders reporting that inspectors gave the impression that they favoured particular learning styles. Since this clarification was published, only three in ten teachers (30%) and school leaders reported that judgements of the quality of teaching and learning were influenced by inspectors' individual teaching-style preferences. It is notable that, for example, in Northern Ireland, where no such clarification has been issued, a higher proportion of teachers (37%) continue to report that inspection judgements are influenced in this way.

The indirect implications of inspection

It is clear that evidence from 'Inspect the Inspectors' and other sources confirms that inspection arrangements in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have an important and often unhelpful influence on policy and practice within schools and colleges.

However, it is also evident that even within the parameters established by high-stakes inspection regimes, schools and colleges have the scope to make choices about the ways in which they respond to the pressures these regimes create.

Evidence confirms that, notwithstanding these system-wide issues, there is a significant degree of variability in the ways in which different institutions in similar circumstances respond to the pressures ascribed to the requirements and expectations of the inspection framework to which they are subject. For example, evidence gathered through the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), overseen by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), suggests that while there is a tendency for teachers in schools judged by Ofsted to be underachieving are at a greater risk of excessive workload, there is also significant variation of practice between schools in similar Ofsted categories.¹⁹ Feedback from Wales and Northern Ireland indicates that experience in these jurisdictions is similar.

¹⁸ Ofsted (2015). *op.cit.*

¹⁹ DfE (2014). *Teachers in England's Secondary Schools: Evidence from TALIS 2013*. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-in-secondary-schools-evidence-from-talis-2013, accessed on 14.03.15.

The NASUWT is concerned by evidence that conscious or unconscious misrepresentation by schools and colleges of the requirements of inspection to defend unacceptable practices that cannot otherwise be justified on their own merits is a significant driver of this variation. The requirements of inspection frameworks therefore cannot reasonably be held responsible for the existence of such practices.

Survey evidence secured by the NASUWT indicates that across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, four in every five teachers and school leaders cite the inspection as being used to justify the implementation of unacceptable policies in schools and colleges. However, feedback from individual and collective representation undertaken by the Union confirms that, in many cases, the use of inspection as a pretext for such practices is unjustified.

It is for this reason that the NASUWT pressed for the publication by Ofsted of its clarification for schools in England on the precise nature of the requirements of inspection in key areas including, planning, assessment arrangements, marking, and the management of teacher and school leader performance. This document therefore allows schools to be challenged where unacceptable practices are justified on the basis that they are requirements of inspection when, in fact, this cannot be demonstrated to be the case.

Conclusions and future NASUWT activity

The evaluation of inspection policy and practice in this report highlights a range of important weaknesses in the way in which inspection operates across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It also indicates that while the systems in place in each of these UK jurisdictions have many shortcomings in common, there are issues distinctive to each framework that must be addressed.

The NASUWT will therefore continue its work to draw attention to the flaws in inspection and wider school and college accountability models across the UK and will use the policy principles it has established in order to emphasise the ways in which these models fall short of the legitimate expectations of learners, teachers, school and college leaders and all those with a stake in the success of the education system.

The Union acknowledges that campaigning represents an important dimension of this work. However, in addition to undertaking campaigns that highlight issues with existing approaches to school accountability, there is a recognised need for the NASUWT to build on the Union's principles by developing an alternative inspection model, adaptable to the specific circumstances of each of the jurisdictions across the UK. This model would demonstrate the ways in which the Union's principles could be put into practice and would provide a powerful focal point for future campaigns.

The NASUWT will therefore develop a ‘blueprint’ for an educational inspection and accountability system. This will set out a clear means by which accountability and inspection regimes can be recast to address the profound limitations associated with current arrangements identified in this report. The blueprint will be established through effective engagement with wider stakeholder groups, including parents and employers.

In developing its model, the NASUWT will take effective note of the fact highlighted in this report that many of the education systems in other administrations regarded as high performing or fast improving are able to establish and sustain accountability-related processes that maintain high levels of public confidence and also support system development and improvement without use of inspection frameworks that have the adverse consequences evident across much of the UK.

An objective and detailed review of the models of school accountability used in other education systems will therefore represent an important element of this work. Clearly, such a review will need to take appropriate account of the political, social, economic, historical and cultural contexts within which each of these systems operate. However, undertaking the development of the model on this basis will permit examination of the ways in which accountability systems in operation elsewhere are not only robust enough to hold educational institutions to effective account and to secure high levels of parental and public confidence but are also regarded by teachers and school and college leaders as supportive of their work to provide high-quality educational opportunities for all learners.

Development of this model will also draw upon international evidence to consider the ways in which other inspection and accountability systems are able to establish a more effective balance between accountability at institutional, local and system levels than is evident in the UK, particularly in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Critically, the model developed by the Union will identify an alternative approach to inspection that, if implemented, would address the debilitating and unjustified culture of vilification to which schools, colleges and teachers are subject and would instead promote the public valuing and celebration of the education system evident within other high-performing jurisdictions, such as South Korea and Finland.²⁰

The NASUWT is clear that the development of a system of inspection based on the principles described in *Maintaining World Class Schools* and established by existing Union policy would address many of the concerns associated with current arrangements and allow for the institution of an

²⁰ NASUWT (2013). *op.cit.*

alternative, development-focused model, more reflective of the status of education as a public good and more able, therefore, to contribute positively to sustaining and raising further standards of educational achievement across the UK.

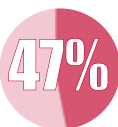
Nevertheless, it is also the case that while current inspection frameworks remain in place, risks will persist that the requirements and expectations of these frameworks will be subject to misinterpretation in some schools and colleges. In such circumstances, teachers and school and college leaders are subject to wholly unnecessary, workload-intensive, bureaucratic or intrusive practices that undermine their working conditions and fail to respect their status as highly skilled professionals.

The NASUWT therefore remains committed to representing robustly the interests of members in schools and colleges where their employment and professionally related rights and entitlements are compromised in this way. The Union will continue to use all legitimate means, including industrial action, to challenge schools and colleges that impose practices on the flawed basis that they are necessary to secure positive inspection outcomes.

To advance this work, the Union will continue to engage with the DfE and Ofsted to keep guidance on inspection-related expectations for schools in England under review and will press for revisions where appropriate. It will also seek to secure comparable guidance for other educational settings in England, including post-16 institutions and dedicated early years settings, as well as the publication of comparable clarification advice for teachers and school and college leaders in Wales and Northern Ireland.

In order to ensure that its activities and policy development in relation to inspection remain guided by the current experience of those working in schools and colleges across the UK, the NASUWT will continue to seek feedback from members through its 'Inspect the Inspectors' online reporting tool, the form and content of which will be kept under close review to secure its ongoing relevance to the realities of school and college inspection.

Inspect the Inspectors: Key findings



Reliability of inspection

Almost half of teachers and leaders do not believe that inspection judgements are based on effective use of evidence.

Inspector conduct

Despite clear codes of conduct for inspectors, nearly a quarter of teachers and leaders felt that their inspectors' behaviour was often inappropriate.



Feedback from inspectors

of teachers were not offered feedback following a lesson observation.

Interaction with learners

Despite the need for learners to be at the centre of the inspection process, more than one in seven teachers reported that inspectors did not interact with learners during lesson observations.

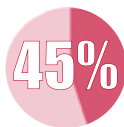


Responding to requests

Although inspectors are obliged to respond to reasonable requests from school and college leaders, over a quarter of teachers and leaders reported that their inspectors failed to do so.

Wider responsibilities

Nearly one in every two teachers and leaders with wider school and college responsibilities were not given an opportunity to engage directly with inspectors about this aspect of their work.



Grading the inspectors

of teachers and leaders in England would grade their inspection teams as requiring improvement or inadequate.

'The inspector walked in and sat down, directly in front of the whiteboard on which I was writing, so that I had to write around her! She should have sat at the side or back of the class. She did not even know what subject I was teaching!'

Primary classroom teacher, England



Website: www.nasuwt.org.uk