



Impact of Section 5 inspections: maintained schools in England

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Executive summary

Background

A new system of school inspection was introduced in September 2005 as laid out in Section 5 (s5) of the Education Act 2005. The main elements of the system are more frequent inspections with shorter notice, smaller inspection teams, new and greater emphasis on the school's own self-evaluation evidence, a common framework for inspection across all phases of education and shorter, sharper reports, with clear recommendations for improvement.

Approximately 2,000 of these new s5 inspections were carried out in the autumn term of 2005. In early 2006 Ofsted commissioned NFER to conduct the first strand of an independent, detailed focussed evaluation of how the inspection process and outcomes impact on school effectiveness. This pilot work involved a survey, with a random sample of 134 schools, and case-study visits to 36 schools, where interviews were conducted with senior managers and governors. All schools were inspected in the period October to December 2005. This study will be followed by a more in-depth second strand which will commence in September 2006.

Key findings

- Although almost all respondents said it was too early to comment on specific outcomes, two-thirds of survey respondents reported that they had taken action since receiving Ofsted's recommendations.
- Schools identified factors such as staff commitment, communication between staff and senior management, self-evaluation and school ethos, as the major contributors to school improvement. Inspection, in its role as assessor of self-evaluation, is an integral element of this school improvement cycle.
- More than half of the school survey respondents were 'very satisfied' with the s5 inspection, and, in addition, just under a third were 'quite satisfied'. Furthermore, the inspection process was perceived to be sound: seven out of ten survey respondents reported no differences between s5 and self evaluation (SEF) grades.
- The completion of the Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) was a process which was viewed positively by the vast majority of sample schools and, overall self-evaluation has been successfully incorporated into the new inspection process. Moreover self-evaluation was seen as an integral part of school improvement.

- The findings show that the oral feedback stage is of crucial importance to schools. School managers appreciated the opportunity to ask questions and to conduct a dialogue about the inspection process.
- The majority of respondents felt that the written inspection report was fair and accurate. However, some schools found the report and its recommendations to be too generalised and a small minority experienced disagreement with the findings. The main contention centred on the use (or lack of use) of data.
- The main benefit of the s5 inspection was that it was perceived primarily to *confirm* or *validate* areas that the school had previously identified for attention. Although many viewed this confirmation to be valuable and an aid to action planning and prioritising target areas, some felt that, because new areas had not been identified, it had not helped to move them forward.
- Most schools agreed with the recommendations for action presented in the s5 report, and said they were in accord with those the school had already identified. Staff in these schools welcomed the recommendations as a vindication of their own judgements.
- Just under two-thirds (63 per cent) of survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the new inspection process was less stressful than the previous system: a quarter disagreed and ten per cent strongly disagreed.

Contribution of the inspection to school improvement

The survey showed a clear perception that the inspection's main contribution to school improvement was its value in helping schools to prioritise actions, rather than in highlighting new areas for action. However, there was a strongly positive response to the statement that 'the inspection had made a valuable contribution to school improvement'. The positive attitude to the inspection's contribution was especially strong amongst schools graded 1 (86 per cent), while 70 per cent of schools graded 2 agreed and 59 per cent of schools graded 3 agreed.

Most respondents thought the inspection had already contributed to improvements in their school to some extent and schools were positive about the likely contribution in the future, with the higher-graded schools most optimistic. Although the inspection was not overtly perceived to be a major direct contributor to school improvement, it had been important in affirming the school's successes and self-evaluation, giving impetus and direction to actions, and in boosting staff morale.

Overall satisfaction with inspections

More than half of the survey respondents (58 per cent) were 'very satisfied' and just under a third (31 per cent) were 'quite satisfied' with the s5 inspections. Only ten per cent were 'not at all satisfied'. Most survey

respondents were ‘quite satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the time spent on use of data, lesson observation, and inspectors’ interaction with staff, pupils, parents and governors. Most were also ‘quite satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the quality of inspections. The new s5 inspections were generally deemed more useful than Section 10 inspections (30 per cent strongly agreed and 47 per cent agreed).

Main benefits arising from inspections

The main benefit identified by more than half of the survey respondents (59 per cent) and 14 case-study schools was that the inspection had been valuable in providing external confirmation and validation of what schools had identified in their own self evaluation. Comments included, *‘It was confirmation of the progress made, our view of the school and the areas for improvement’*. In some cases, the inspection had helped school staff to stimulate action and concentrate on improvements in school: *‘it did help to push through changes’*. Some respondents made comments about the inspection having given *‘staff a boost’*. Moreover, the new inspection process was praised by some for being *‘highly preferable’* and *‘far less stressful than the old system’*.

Self-evaluation form

The completion of the Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) was a process which was viewed positively by the vast majority of sample schools. Despite some issues about gradings, there is evidence that, overall, developments in school self-evaluation, as expressed in the SEF, have been successfully incorporated into the new inspection process. The findings from this pilot strand of the evaluation of s5 inspections show, very strongly, that the oral feedback stage is of crucial importance to schools. Furthermore, almost all school respondents (96 per cent) reported the oral feedback to be ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ useful.

Oral feedback

There were three main ways in which the oral feedback was perceived to be useful to schools: as confirmation of the school’s self-evaluation and plans for improvement; as a stimulus for ongoing dialogue within the school, and as a driver for new or planned improvements. Majorities of both survey respondents (58 per cent) and interviewees (19 of 36 case-study schools) reported that they had ‘no disagreements’ with the oral feedback.

In the minority of schools (five case-study schools) where there were major disagreements about the inspection findings as expressed in the oral feedback, these tended to centre upon the overall grade awarded (most disagreements

came from schools with a ‘satisfactory’ grade) and the interpretation and use of data.

Diagnosis and inspection grades

Approximately seven in ten survey respondents reported no differences between s5 inspection and SEF grades (across all sub-sections). Interestingly, comparative analysis of the s5 and SEF grades of the case-study schools revealed that, in those cases where there were discrepancies in grading, as many were attributed to the school being too modest (and therefore the s5 upgrading the SEF) as to there being areas, according to the s5 report, needing more rigorous attention (and therefore the s5 downgrading the SEF).

In a few case-study schools there was a disagreement with the diagnosis largely due to the perceived misinterpretation of data. This concern centred on the apparent use, or lack of use, of data, such as contextual value added data and validated, or un-validated, PANDA reports.

Impact of written report

The vast majority of survey respondents (84 per cent) believed that the inspection findings, presented in the written report, broadly matched the school’s expectations. Furthermore, the report was perceived to be fair by the majority of respondents and, compared favourably with the previous format of Ofsted school inspection reports. The report was largely valued as confirmation and validation that schools were ‘*on the right track*’. Where negative views were expressed about the report, these were inevitably bound up with the diagnosis. The majority of both survey and case-study respondents believed the oral and written feedback from inspectors was consistent

Strengths and weaknesses

The majority of survey respondents believed that inspectors accurately identified school strengths (81 per cent), and weaknesses (72 per cent), a finding endorsed by two-thirds of case-study respondents. A minority, and more pronounced amongst grade 1 and primary schools, felt that inspectors recognised additional strengths, whilst one in ten respondents said inspectors had identified further weaknesses. Furthermore, the majority of survey respondents (83 per cent) felt the report was either very or fairly helpful in identifying areas for improvement. The lower the ‘overall effectiveness’ grade, the more likely the school was to find the report unhelpful.

The recommendations for action

The great majority (97 per cent) of survey respondents agreed, completely or partially, with the inspection team's recommendations for improvement, and 92 per cent of respondents found them helpful to some extent, although more found them 'quite' helpful than 'very' helpful. The majority of schools (65 per cent) thought that the recommendations had been sufficiently specific and 27 per cent described them as very specific. Most of the case-study schools were also positive about the recommendations, claiming that they matched the areas that they had already identified for improvement and so confirmed the accuracy of their self-evaluation process. Some schools found the recommendations were particularly valuable, because they gave headteachers the lever they required to introduce changes. In some schools, although there was no disagreement with the recommendations, they were described as unhelpful because they were too vague and needed to be *'refined and more specific'*, rather than something *'which you could say in any school'*.

Action planning and outcomes

Most of the surveyed schools (89 per cent) reported specific school action as a result of the recommendations. While most schools (59 per cent) were neutral about the ease with which recommendations could be turned into action, those which considered this easy (38 per cent) far outweighed those which had found it difficult (2 per cent). Around two-thirds of schools reported that there had been some impact from their actions, with more primary schools (70 per cent) stating this than secondary schools (57 per cent). The most common examples of impact reported were in the areas of improved monitoring and target setting and stronger focus on action plans, subject areas and leadership.

When this matter was examined more closely in case-study schools, evidence emerged that many schools had, through the process of self evaluation, already identified the same areas for improvement and were acting on them before the inspection. For many schools, it was a matter of focusing more clearly on certain areas, rather than initiating action. Very few of the schools were able to see definite outcomes as yet and said that it was too soon to expect to be able to do this. Many respondents also stated that it would be difficult to disentangle outcomes from action plans already in operation from outcomes that were a result of the inspection.

Other contributions to improvement and effectiveness

Both the survey and the case-study data revealed a strong belief in schools that the most important factors in helping schools to improve and be effective were a combination of unquantifiable factors and practical policies. The first included such things as school ethos, staff and governor commitment and effort, senior management leadership and good relationships between senior

management and staff and staff and students. The second included strong self-evaluation skills, good staff development and robust assessment and monitoring systems. The inspection played a part in all this when it helped to focus policies and confirm a school's own judgements.

Main concerns

Although concerns were only expressed by a minority, some issues were raised in relation to the inspection process. For example, some respondents were negative about the inspection not including all staff, which had led to them feeling detached: *'some teachers were disappointed they had not been inspected'*. Some respondents felt that more time should have been spent on lesson observation or that the balance of lessons observed was inappropriate. Some inconsistencies between inspectors were raised, including their use of data. There were criticisms of the inspection process being too 'data-driven' and for the inspectors' use of the 'wrong' data.

Ways of improving inspections

Overall, the new s5 inspection process was favoured over the previous s10 system, although some improvements were suggested. The shorter-notice was preferred, though the time spent in schools was perceived by some to be too short, resulting in a 'narrow focus'. Some suggested the need for more time to be spent on lesson observation, with less emphasis on the analysis of data. The new grading system was criticised by a few respondents for being too broad and unclear, with a suggestion that 'very good' should be reinstated. Some questioned the need for inspections for 'outstanding' schools, and felt the focus should be on schools which need most support. A differentiated system for schools with different overall effectiveness grades was suggested by a few respondents.

All of these suggestions were made in the context of a positive overall view of the s5 inspection process. It is worth reiterating that, while there is clearly room for improvement with respect to some elements of the process, 89 per cent of survey respondents were 'very' or 'quite' satisfied with the inspection, and 63 per cent found the process less stressful than the previous, longer, format of inspection.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This report presents the findings from strand 1 of an independent external evaluation of the impact of Section 5 inspections, commissioned by Ofsted, and carried out by a team at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). It draws on a number of sources of evidence in order to complete a pilot evaluation of the impact, if any, of these inspections. The data sources used include a desk-top review of key case-study school documents, fieldwork visits to 36 schools and a pilot school survey.

The new form of school inspection was introduced in September 2005. The main elements of the new system, as laid out in Section 5 (s5) of the Education Act 2005, can be summarised as follows:

- shorter notice of inspections (usually two days' notice)
- smaller inspection teams
- more frequent inspections (a maximum of three years between inspections)
- a new and greater emphasis on the school's own self-evaluation evidence
- a common framework for inspection across all phases of education
- shorter, sharper reports, with clear recommendations for improvement.

This new approach to inspection was located in the broader context of a 'New Relationship' which was being sought between the DfES, local authorities (LAs) and schools (DfES/Ofsted, 2004). In addition to the new inspection arrangements, the elements of this relationship included: a greater emphasis on self-evaluation (including the recommended completion, by schools, of an on-line Self-Evaluation Form, or SEF); the use of School Improvement Partners to support and challenge schools within the context of a 'single conversation' about school improvement; and the School Profile, a document which replaces the Annual Governors' Report and provides high-quality information to parents and the general public.

The self-evaluation element of inspections, although not new, has received a much greater emphasis in recent years. The new system ensures that an external, independent element of inspection remains, but also that there is detailed and rigorous consideration of how the school evaluates itself, including through the use of the new Self-Evaluation Form (SEF). The Ofsted *Framework for Inspection* explicitly acknowledges this point by stressing that

there is a ‘*strong emphasis on school improvement through the use of the school’s own self-evaluation*’ (Ofsted, 2005b, p.6).

It is in this context of the introduction and development of the s5 inspection that Ofsted commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to undertake an independent evaluation of how the inspection process and outcomes may have assisted with the development of school effectiveness. The post-pilot strand 2 of the evaluation commences in September 2006 and will also be carried out by the NFER.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The long term aims of the evaluation are:

- to establish the differences, if any, in school effectiveness resulting from s5 inspection
- to identify the elements of the inspection process and contextual factors that affect the extent of difference made by inspection.

The methodology used for Strand 1 of the evaluation is outlined below.

1.3 Methodology

In order to achieve the aims of the evaluation a range of research methods were adopted, as outlined below:

Desk-top review

Analysis of the key documents for the 36 case-study schools was carried out. These documents included:

- The s5 report
- The Performance and Assessment (PANDA) report (including contextual value added data)
- The completed Self-Evaluation Form (SEF)
- The DfES’s Achievement and Attainment tables.

Analysis of these documents provided both a contextual background for the case-study schools and, in consultation with Ofsted, an analytical framework in which examination of the data could be carried out. The categories used for the analysis were drawn from the *Guidance for Inspectors of Schools* (Ofsted,

2005a, page 3), the *Standard Inspection Report Template* (Ofsted, 2005c) and other sources.

Fieldwork visits

Semi-structured interviews with selected senior managers and governors in each of the 36 schools were a central part of the research study. These interviews provided respondents with an opportunity to comment on the usefulness of their s5 report and the recommendations made in relation to their school effectiveness and improvement processes.

Each school was sent an approach letter and a request for interviews with:

- the headteacher
- one or two other school senior managers
- a governor.

The school visits were carried out in two waves, in March 2006 (18 schools) and May 2006 (18 schools). The fieldwork visits were carried out by a core team of researchers, augmented by other experienced NFER researchers, as necessary.

The interview data was analysed systematically in order to establish any trends in experiences of the inspection process, and any patterns in post-inspection school improvement strategies. Findings from the first wave interviews were also used to inform the development of the pilot questionnaire survey which formed the basis of the third element of the implementation of the study.

Pilot questionnaire survey

A pilot survey, sent to 200 schools, was carried out between May and June 2006 in order to supplement the case-study evidence and to assist with the subsequent design of a questionnaire, which would be used for a further national survey with a much larger sample, in strand 2 of this evaluation. The questionnaire was predominantly quantitative in nature, but also incorporated three open-ended questions.

Questionnaires were sent to headteachers in the sampled schools, with a request that they should either fill them in themselves or delegate them to another senior manager who had been closely involved in the inspection (details of the achieved sample are provided in Section 1.4 below).

1.4 The school samples

Representative samples were drawn for both the case-study schools and for the survey, as detailed below.

Case-study sample

Datasets were provided by Ofsted of all schools inspected from October to December 2005. A random representative sample of 36 schools for the case-study visits was drawn, stratified on the following criteria:

- School sector – secondary, primary and special
- Geographical region – based on nine government office regions
- Overall inspection grade (grade 1 ‘outstanding’, grade 2 ‘good’ and grade 3 ‘satisfactory’; grade 4 schools can be placed in special measures or be given a notice to improve).

The achieved sample consisted of 17 secondary, 15 primary and four special schools and six grade 1 ‘excellent’, 11 grade 2 ‘good’ and 19 grade 3 ‘satisfactory’ schools.

The survey sample

A random stratified sample of 200 schools, visited by Ofsted between October and December 2005 inclusive, was selected for the pilot survey. The sample was stratified by phase of education and by the inspection grade received by the school. The sample was checked for representativeness in terms of free school meal entitlement, government office region and month inspected and was found to be representative. A response rate of 67 per cent was achieved.

It is worth pointing out that the numbers in this survey are small (134 respondents) and, whilst numbers have been commented on and differences between sub sections observed, these are usually not statistically significant. Strand 2 of the research, to be carried out from September 2006, will involve a much larger sample of 2000 schools.

Characteristics of the respondents

The achieved sample of schools consisted of 63 primary, 61 secondary, and seven special schools and three pupil referral units. It also included 21 grade 1, 61 grade 2 and 52 grade 3 schools.

The majority of survey questionnaires were completed by headteachers as can be seen in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1 Role in the school

Role in school	%
Headteacher	90
Deputy Head	6
Assistant Head	0
Other	2
No response	2
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

132 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER Impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Respondent headteachers were experienced teachers having a mean of 26 years experience. As can be seen in Table 1.2 below, there appeared to be an association between the numbers of years of teaching respondents had experienced, in total, and in their current post, and the overall effectiveness grade the school received in the Ofsted inspection. Schools which had received a grade 1 for overall effectiveness were generally led by teachers who had been teaching for 29 years (and 10 in their current post), whereas schools that had received an overall effectiveness grade of 3 had, on the whole, fewer years of experience (24 in total and 5 in their present school).

Table 1.2 Years in teaching and current post

Grade	Years in teaching (mean years)	Years in current post (mean years)
1	29	10
2	27	7
3	24	5
Total	26	7
N = 134		

Numerical data

134 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

In total, 112 personnel were interviewed in the case-study schools. The interviewees consisted of:

- 33 headteachers, two principals and one acting-head
- 20 deputy heads, three assistant heads, two vice-principals and one acting deputy head
- one business manager
- 14 senior managers/teachers

- 16 chair of governors and two vice-chairs
- 17 other governors.

1.5 Structure of the report

The remaining chapters of this report focus on the impact of different elements of the s5 inspection. They are organised as follows:

Chapter 2 examines the impact of the self-evaluation form, the dialogue between inspectors and teachers and the oral feedback.

Chapter 3 explores the impact of the written Ofsted report, the diagnosis and the inspection grades. It further examines discrepancies in grades between the s5 report and the SEF and looks at levels of agreement about schools' strengths and weaknesses.

Chapter 4 considers the impact of the s5 inspection on school improvement. It discusses Ofsted's recommendations and the actions that followed on from the inspection. It also examines the perceived contribution of the inspection to school improvement.

Chapter 5 explores schools' overall satisfaction with the inspection and the main perceived benefits and concerns. This chapter also summarises what respondents have said about ways in which the inspection could be improved.

Chapter 6 concludes the report by drawing out the main findings from the case studies and the survey.

2. Impact: the Self-Evaluation Form and oral feedback

Key findings

- The completion of the Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) is a process which is viewed positively by the vast majority of sample schools. Despite some issues about gradings, there is evidence that, overall, developments in school self-evaluation, as expressed in the SEF, have been successfully incorporated into the new inspection process.
- The findings from this pilot strand of the evaluation of s5 inspections show, very strongly, that the oral feedback stage is of crucial importance to schools. Furthermore, almost all school respondents (96 per cent) reported the oral feedback to be 'very' or 'fairly' useful.
- There were three main ways in which the oral feedback was perceived to be useful to schools: as confirmation of the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement; as a stimulus for ongoing dialogue within the school, and as a driver for new or planned improvements.
- Majorities of both survey respondents (58 per cent) and interviewees (19 of 36 case-study schools) reported that they had 'no disagreements' with the oral feedback.
- In the minority of schools where there were major disagreements about the findings expressed in the oral feedback (five case-study schools), these tended to centre upon the overall grade awarded (most disagreements came from schools with a 'satisfactory' grade) and the interpretation and use of data.

Introduction

This chapter examines school respondents' views on the experience of completing the SEF, and on the effectiveness and usefulness of the SEF in relation to the s5 inspection. The SEF was introduced as part of the New Relationship with Schools (see Halsey, *et al.*, 2005). This leads to a discussion of viewpoints regarding the giving of oral feedback by the lead inspector to the school management team and the dialogue that takes place around this.

2.1 Use of the Self-Evaluation Form (SEF)

Table 2.1 below shows that the vast majority of schools (85 per cent) were able to complete the main part of their SEF prior to the inspection. A minority (13 per cent), however, had been unable to fully complete the SEF in the time available. This is broadly consistent with the findings from the 36 case-study

visits: respondents in only three of these schools reported that their SEF was not completed in time for the inspection. In the remaining 33 schools, the SEF was completed in time, but interviewees in four of these schools commented on the fact that the SEF had to be completed ‘*at speed*’ in order to be ready for the inspection visit.

Table 2.1 Extent to which Part A of the Self-Evaluation Form had been completed prior to the inspection

Completion of Part A of SEF	%
Fully completed	85
Partially completed	13
Not at all completed	2
No response	0
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

134 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Comments from the case-study interviewees indicated that the completion of the SEF is largely seen as something that should be carried out collaboratively, in an ongoing, continuous way, reflecting developments across the school. In this context, the survey included a question about the experience and involvement of various school personnel in this process.

As can be seen from Table 2.2 below, headteachers often took advantage of inputs from other personnel: only one in ten schools reported that their headteacher had completed the SEF ‘alone’. In just under one in five schools (18 per cent) an independent consultant was brought in to assist with the completion of the SEF, and more than half of the survey respondents (56 per cent) reported that they had attended local authority training on how to complete the SEF. The survey findings also revealed that staff and governors were very much involved in completing the SEF. Staff were consulted about the SEF in over 90 per cent of schools, and made an input in over three-quarters of schools. There were similar levels of governor involvement, with over 90 per cent being consulted and around two-thirds (67 per cent) making an input.

All of this suggests that self-evaluation prior to inspection is very much seen as a shared responsibility within a school, but the surveys findings also indicated a possible note of concern: just over one third of respondents (34 per cent) expressed a view that they had not received appropriate guidance on completing the SEF, suggesting that improvements could be made in supporting this task.

Table 2.2 Experiences of completing the Self Evaluation Form

Experience of completing SEF	Yes %	No %	No response %
I and/or other staff were assisted by an independent consultant	18	65	17
I and/or other staff attended LA training on how to complete the SEF	56	33	11
The SEF was completed by the Head alone	10	66	23
The SEF was completed by the Head and Senior Management Team	82	12	6
Staff were consulted about the SEF	92	4	5
Staff had input into the SEF	76	17	7
Governors were consulted about the SEF	92	3	5
Governors had input into the SEF	67	22	10
The SEF was completed at the last minute prior to inspection	21	60	19
The SEF was completed in good time before inspection was notified	67	23	10
There was appropriate guidance for completing the SEF	59	34	7
N = 134			

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 134 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

The case-study interview allowed for further exploration of the experience of completing the SEF prior to the inspection. Staff in around half the schools made predominantly positive comments about the experience of completing the SEF: many of these expressed the view that it was a useful or helpful process in preparing for the inspection, or that it was a good way of ensuring collaboration by staff across the school. In around ten schools there was what might be described as a 'neutral' view on the SEF completion process, with respondents either making no comment or expressing a cautiously optimistic viewpoint. In eight schools there were some negative comments about the process, emphasising either that the process took too long or that it was too demanding.

One of the most-commonly expressed positive aspects of using the SEF to prepare for an inspection was the enhanced requirement for *collaborative* working. There were several schools where this had been a key development in this process (see case-study box below for two examples).

Case studies: completing the SEF as a collaborative experience

1. The headteacher of one secondary school explained how the SEF had been at the centre of what the School Management Team had agreed about their school, and it had been shown to all staff. The senior manager interviewee in this school supported this view: *'We spent months working on the SEF, it is now much more owned by staff'*. He said that each team leader was responsible for his or her own section of the SEF. The SMT noted what each curriculum area had done and staff were working together to improve their existing assessments through procedures that will include regular updating of the SEF.
2. In a second school, this time a primary school, a senior manager said: *'It took along time for a range of staff to write the SEF... [but] it made sure that everyone knew what the aims were and, as all teachers were involved, it promoted a lot of discussion, so people knew about other areas of the school and it made SMT think about what the next phase of activity could focus on'*.

In three of the 36 schools time demands meant that the SEF had not been completed in time for the inspection, but in these schools the inspection team was generally flexible and willing to consider other sources of data, as in the example given below.

Case study: SEF not completed and other sources of data used

The headteacher of one primary school said that the SEF had not been fully completed and it was *'fortunate'* that they were evaluating the school through methods other than the SEF. These included *'tracking pupils to show progress from year to year, and using software to analyse children's performance'*. Ofsted were said to be *'happy'* to see evidence of this sort instead of the SEF. The school was also involved in the Primary Leadership Programme and this had required some evaluation. As a result of this, they had developed whole-school and layered targets. Ofsted were also told about these targets. The school had planned to send their own questionnaire to parents, but this was the week that Ofsted arrived, so they were not able to send this out (parents were already busy doing the Ofsted questionnaire), though showed the inspection team what they had planned.

The difficulties caused by having to complete the SEF quickly were mentioned by several other respondents: *'We were on the fourth draft! We'd had no training, though there was some support from the [local authority] adviser. We put down everything we were doing'* (headteacher of a special school); *'We were working against the clock - everything was done at breakneck speed!... At first we didn't really know how to do it. It was a difficult thing to complete. It was all new to us'* (senior manager, same school). In another school, an infants school, the headteacher said: *'It would have been helpful to have had SEF for one year before inspection, rather than one month'*.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews, regarding use of the SEF as preparation for an s5 inspection, concerned the way in which school self-evaluation was now extended to decisions about gradings for specific aspects of the school. Whilst this might have been done previously for internal purposes, allocating grades prior to inspection was a new experience for the school staff and there was a strong tendency to be self-critical or over-cautious:

- *The SEF makes you cautious; schools tend to play down what they think they have achieved* (senior manager).
- *Ours was a long SEF, we erred on the side of caution, and we didn't want to take any risks* (headteacher).
- *Internally, there was a tendency to be over-[self]-critical* (headteacher).
- *What came across was that we were harsh critics of our school and our performance and that shows in the SEF...We didn't want to be seen to be complacent and we wanted to be seen as rigorous self evaluators* (headteacher).

These comments and the finding that around a third of schools would like more appropriate guidance on completing the SEF (see Table 2.2 above) suggest that this is an area of preparation for inspection that could be enhanced in future years. School staff, it seems, would like more help with definitions of the categories to be graded and would like consistent advice on how to make self-assessments (see Section 5.3).

All of this needs to be seen in the context that survey respondents were found to be largely satisfied with the SEF as a self-evaluation tool: *'Although the SEF is not compulsory I'm glad we had done it and we will continue to do it as it is a useful tool'* (secondary headteacher). Table 2.3 shows that almost all respondents felt that the SEF had been either 'very' or 'somewhat' effective in helping them to identify the school's strengths and weaknesses; and Table 2.4 indicates that a similarly large proportion felt that it was an effective vehicle for self-evaluation.

Table 2.3 Effectiveness of the self evaluation process in helping to identify the school's strengths and weaknesses

Strengths and weaknesses	%
Very effective	56
Somewhat effective	43
Not at all effective	2
No response	0
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

134 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Table 2.4 Helpfulness of the SEF as a vehicle for self evaluation

Helpfulness of SEF	%
Very effective	46
Somewhat effective	51
Not at all effective	4
No response	0
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

134 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Some interview respondents commented on the ways in which the use of the SEF enabled self-evaluation to become an ongoing, continuous process: 'You are not writing on your SEF everyday, but that process is still going on in your head' (primary headteacher). Others noted that the SEF was useful as a means of collating information, or informing all staff about the plans and targets for school improvement. Another important point made was that, because the school is, by definition, in control of self-evaluation and can take the initiative in providing data, it has more of a leading role in the inspection process: 'we controlled the inspection in a way' (senior manager).

This evidence suggests that the SEF seems to play a large part in assisting the inspection team to form their judgements about the schools. Interview comments suggested that this was indeed the case. In 28 of the 36 case-study schools at least one respondent said that the oral feedback was closely and/or thoroughly based on the SEF. The following statement, made by the headteacher of a junior school, summarises the typical view on this relationship: 'It was very apparent, very early, that the inspection team had studied the SEF. It had focused them and their probing'. Many other

comments, from a range of different respondents and schools, echoed this view:

- *The inspector was very thorough and had read the SEF from cover to cover. She picked up a lot from the SEF and we felt that she knew what she was talking about (headteacher).*
- *Inspectors read SEF thoroughly in advance of visit and focussed on specific areas raised when in school (governor).*
- *The team made good use of the SEF; they read it thoroughly and picked out the right issues for the inspection (governor).*
- *They are very shrewd. They had read all the HMI reports and looked at the SEF (senior manager).*
- *On the whole, the inspection tied in well with the SEF... (headteacher)*
- *The SEF was like a complete little bible. That is what the inspection was based on, that's what they had as a starting point (senior manager).*

In a few instances, school respondents commented upon how the inspectors had also *moved beyond* the content of the SEF, as in the following examples: *'They did not simply take issues from the SEF and dump them in the report, they had analysed, synthesised and crystallised the information into issues'* (senior manager); *'They used the SEF well and demanded more evidence than was implicit in it'* (governor).

There were only three case-study schools where the SEF and the findings expressed in the oral feedback were not deemed to have been closely linked: (in a further five schools respondents seemed to express no strong opinion either way or there was a mixed view). In one of the dissenting schools the disagreement was about judging standards of achievement: *'it all hinged on the achievement and standards issue...They clearly disagreed with some of our judgements, and even after we sent them more data they still disagreed. They wouldn't budge'* (headteacher); in a second school, the headteacher was displeased about the fact that the local context (an area of social and economic deprivation) had not been taken into account (despite this being stressed in the SEF) - *'my impression is that they were not aware of things in the SEF'*; and in the third school there was just a general feeling that the SEF had not be used in the formation of the inspection team's judgements, it seemed as if the SEF had been *'produced for a different exercise'* (headteacher).

2.2 Oral feedback

In both the survey and the case-study interviews, respondents were asked who was involved in speaking to the inspection team and who received the oral feedback about the inspection. With the s5 inspection being a shorter process than the previous form of inspection, it might be reasonable to surmise that

there would be less contact with various personnel within the school, but the findings presented in Table 2.5 below suggest that, during the course of the visits, the inspection team still managed to make contact with a fair spread of groups within the school.

Table 2.5 Personnel involved in speaking to inspectors during the inspection process (e.g. informal conversations or formal interviews)

Staff involvement in inspection process	Fully involved %	Involved to some extent %	Not involved %	No response %
Headteacher	98	2	0	0
Senior managers/leadership team	69	28	2	1
Chair of Governors	40	50	8	2
Other governors	13	40	39	9
Heads of Department	21	47	12	20
Subject teachers	13	56	22	10
LA adviser(s) or other external representative(s)	9	23	60	8
Pupils	59	40	1	0
Parents	9	54	32	5
Teaching assistants	11	56	29	4
N = 134				

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 134 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

In terms of the personnel receiving the oral feedback from the inspection team, the findings presented in Table 2.6 indicate, unsurprisingly, that the headteacher was always present, and in around nine out of ten cases at least one other school senior manager (88 per cent) or the chair of governors (83 per cent) was also present. In just under two-thirds of inspections (62 per cent) a local authority adviser or another external representative was also in attendance.

Table 2.6 Personnel present when the oral feedback was provided by inspectors

Present at oral feedback	Yes %	No %	No response %
Headteacher	100	0	0
Senior managers/leadership team	88	10	2
Chair of Governors	83	14	3
LA adviser(s) or other external representatives	62	33	5
N = 134			

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 134 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Interview responses from the 36 case-study schools largely confirm this pattern. By far the most common format for feedback meetings was for the headteacher, plus the senior management team and the chair of governors, to meet with the inspectors. Local authority advisers or external personnel were reported to have been in attendance at the feedback meeting in 14 of the 36 schools (a somewhat smaller proportion than the 65 per cent reported in the survey). The average number of school-related personnel in attendance (excluding inspectors) was around five. The smallest reported feedback meeting consisted of just the headteacher and the lead inspector, and the largest involved 16 individuals in total (headteacher, eight members of the school SMT, the chair of governors, a local authority adviser and five inspectors).

It was common for the oral feedback to be summarised or reported back to the whole school staff soon after the meeting with the inspectors. Where dialogue took place prior or subsequent to the oral feedback, usually it was only the headteacher who was involved. This dialogue usually involved request for data, the interpretation of data, and discussion about lesson observations. Most respondents indicated that the oral feedback had been given in a professional (and sometimes ‘*relaxed*’) manner, though one senior manager commented that the atmosphere at first ‘*appeared adversarial, with the team of inspectors facing them across the table*’.

As can be seen from Table 2.7, below, a majority of survey respondents (69 per cent) found the oral feedback very useful, with a further 27 per cent finding this feedback ‘fairly useful’. It seems that, in the view of school respondents, this aspect of the inspection is the most useful element for schools (25 per cent of respondents said that the written report was ‘very helpful’ and a further 58 per cent said that it was ‘fairly helpful’ in identifying areas for improvement: see Table 3.4 in Chapter 3).

Table 2.7 Usefulness of the oral feedback

Usefulness of oral feedback	%
Very useful	69
Fairly useful	27
Not at all useful	3
No response	1
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

133 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Again, the qualitative data from the interviews support this survey finding, with respondents in around two-thirds of the 36 case-study schools expressing a view that the oral feedback was either very useful or very helpful. There were three main themes underlying interviewees' positive views of the oral feedback:

- the feedback provided **confirmation**, a reaffirmation of the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement
- the process encouraged a **dialogue**, sometimes provoking further thought about ways for the school to move forward
- the feedback provided a focus and could be used as a **driver** for new or planned improvements within the school.

The **confirmation** theme was certainly the strongest positive theme in interview comments, and this theme has also been identified as being of central importance in an evaluation carried out by Ofsted themselves based upon a School Inspection Survey and HMI quality assurance visits. In the report arising from Ofsted evaluation the point is made that a number of headteachers reported that: *'they were well aware of areas for improvement but they found it helpful to have their judgements confirmed'* (Ofsted, 2006, para. 51).

The following example, taken from one of the case-study interviews, illustrates the typical experience of many of the schools in this respect.

Case study: oral feedback as confirmation that a school is doing well

The chair of governors in this school reported that the oral feedback helped the staff to focus on improvements and she felt that the areas highlighted were ones that the school already recognised, so *'it underscored what they had already believed to be the case'*. She felt it was a helpful process and there was an overall reassurance that it had gone well. The senior manager and headteacher supported this view. The oral feedback was thought to be very positive and the good thing about it, they felt, was that they were then able *'to go straight to the staff who were waiting on tenterhooks'* for the initial outcome (headteacher). It was much more *'relaxed'* than they had experienced before, confirmatory and: *'More of a two-way conversation and more useful'* (senior manager).

Further typical examples of comments about the confirmatory and validatory nature of the oral feedback, the ways in which it could sometimes give credibility to what a school was doing, included the following:

- *It was great for us – a vindication of all the work we've done. Good reinforcement for us as a management team, also very targetted on where to go next* (senior manager).
- *The standard of feedback was first class...It was very good. Perfectly clear. They agreed with the SEF* (headteacher).
- *It was useful because we knew what was coming in the written report... it was affirmatory and confirmatory'* (headteacher).
- *It pinpointed the areas that they had identified for improvement, which were basically the same as ours anyway... it was very positive and they emphasized, more so than in previous inspections, the strengths of the school* (headteacher).
- *We already knew what our major weakness was. It was useful in enabling us to unpick that one issue and tackle that* (headteacher).
- *The inspection findings reinforced the fact that we have good processes – it's external, objective reinforcement* (senior manager).

Many respondents commented upon the importance and usefulness of having a **dialogue** about the school's strengths and weaknesses and plans for the future. It is also noticeable that most of the negative comments about the impact (or lack of impact) of oral feedback were to do with not having an opportunity to have a full dialogue. One governor interviewee stressed the importance of dialogue by going so far as to say that: *'it was genuine dialogue, which is very important if inspection is to have any real use'*. The following case-study illustration sets out one headteacher's view of the importance of a dialogue that includes explanation of the inspection team's judgements.

Case study: usefulness of having a dialogue

One primary headteacher explained that she had found the whole process of oral feedback very helpful, because:

It explained the reasons behind the judgements and this was important because we were given different grades. The inspector explained why she had moved us up. She said a lot more than she was able to write and without that we would not always have understood what she meant in the report. Also it gave us a chance for discussion and if we had needed to question her judgements, we could have done so. I would have hated it if she had gone away and we had only got the written report. It was so much clearer that she could explain it face-to-face. It was useful because she explained the comment about the spelling and put it in context, so we knew that it was a very minor criticism in general terms. She also explained the criteria more fully which was important, because it's difficult to judge what they actually mean.

The third positive theme arising from the interviews, in relation to the oral feedback, was to do with the ways in which the feedback sometimes helped to **promote or accelerate actions or planning for school improvement**. In some instances feedback had helped to speed up plans that were already in place: *'All the actions taken as a result would have been taken anyway – but it did help to push through the changes'* (senior manager); *'This enabled the improvements to be driven through a lot quicker'* (senior manager). One headteacher described how the inspection had clarified the staff's thinking about the issues they had already identified and *'fired them up'*. She felt that the inspectors had *'made things possible'*, by recommending that suitable training and support be put in place.

Case study: oral feedback as a driver of school improvement plans

I think the oral feedback helped – we had two key action points and we also had the facility to say 'yes please, we would like that as an action point', which is helpful when you are trying to follow something through with staff. Both of the points were in our plans and they were things we wanted to move forward on. They were both things that we really agreed with. It confirmed our resolve in two key areas and it also resulted in actions for us in terms of the way that we gather, collate and use evidence (headteacher).

Sometimes it was informal advice from the inspectors that was helpful in this respect:

Their off-the-record advice was very useful... they hinted at areas to focus on, 'you've done a good job at...', 'this is progressing well', 'you're progressing faster than average here' – demeanor, tone of voice and body language reveal a lot. ...Also positive momentum invokes enthusiasm and makes people work even harder (senior manager).

In the one third of case-study schools that were not overtly positive about the oral feedback process, respondents' comments could be described as either 'neutral' (six schools) or 'negative' (seven schools). Although respondents making negative comments were clearly in a minority, it is instructive to look at their concerns about the process.

The main theme in the negative comments centred on a perceived lack of opportunities to engage in a meaningful dialogue. There seemed to be some inconsistencies in inspectors' approaches to this, ranging from '*very useful open discussion*', to what was described as '*a clinical reading out of statements*'. Some respondents clearly felt that they had not had a full opportunity to raise queries and their views were in direct contrast to the comments about the usefulness of an open dialogue (reported above). Three examples of this were as follows:

Case studies: lack of dialogue on oral feedback

1. In one school a senior manager expressed a view that the oral feedback '*had not been particularly helpful. The key issues for action were vague. The meeting was delayed which was disconcerting. The tone of the feedback was that it was being done to us not with us. The feedback was a very cold reading out of set paragraphs by individual inspectors. The feedback meeting wasn't a forum for discussion*'.
2. '*The inspector read notes from a written sheet: this was not the fluidity you might expect*'. It took 25 minutes in total to be '*signed, sealed and delivered*'. The school managers asked a few times why they had been classified as good rather than outstanding in certain sections. '*No real answers were given... it was just bureaucratic*'. Judgement was delivered as a '*done deed*': '*like a police statement*' (senior manager).
3. In another school a headteacher explained how he had been given contradictory feedback by an inspector. On the first day, he had asked how the lessons observations were going and was told that '*they were all satisfactory or good*'. The next day he was told at the oral feedback that one lesson had been unsatisfactory and that it had been observed '*the previous day*'. This appeared to have undermined the interviewee's confidence in the process.

Both interview and survey respondents were asked whether there had been any disagreements about the feedback. As can be seen from the figures in Table 2.8 (below), 58 per cent of survey respondents said that there had been no disagreements, ten per cent said there had been disagreement(s), and 31 per cent indicated experiencing a 'partial' disagreement.

Further analysis revealed that, as would be expected, there were more disagreements recounted by grade 3 schools (25 per cent), than grade 2 (13 per

cent) or schools awarded grade 1, which reportedly experienced no major disagreements.

There appeared to be fewer disagreements amongst special schools (86 per cent) and primary schools (65 per cent), than secondary schools (48 per cent). Twenty three per cent of secondary schools reported either experiencing partial (but over major issues) or complete disagreements at the oral feedback stage: whereas only eleven per cent of primary schools reported having a similar experience.

Table 2.8 Were there any disagreements between the school and the inspection team at the oral feedback stage?

Disagreements between school and inspection team re oral feedback	%
Yes	10
Partly – but minor issues	25
Partly – but major issues	6
No	58
No response	1
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

134 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Analysis of the interview responses revealed a similar pattern: respondents in just over half (19) of the 36 case-study schools indicated that there were no disagreements about the oral feedback. In a third of the schools (12), however, there were what could be described as ‘minor’ disagreements, and in five schools there were ‘major’ disagreements.

2.3 Dialogue and level of agreement

In the schools where **no disagreements** were reported the general pattern was that the oral feedback had been relevant and useful (as outlined above). The oral feedback had been in line with what was expected, the school’s SEF had been used extensively, and any areas for development had been identified by both the school and the inspection team. The following two statements are typical of the comments made: *‘the oral feedback was in line with expectations and we were very pleased with it’* (headteacher); *‘There were no disagreements, we were very happy with what she said’* (headteacher).

The **minor disagreements** (expressed in 12 schools) were usually to do with the use of language, technical information about the school or school

processes, grades for particular aspects of the school, or the perception that the school had not been given due credit for 'softer' outcomes, such as the provision of care and support for pupils, or creating a positive ethos.

The language issue was mentioned by two respondents: *'There was very little disagreement, just one or two nuances re use of language'* (senior manager); *'we were concerned about the use of harsh wording in places'* (headteacher). Minor disagreements concerning technical information about the school were raised by three respondents. One example of the latter came from the primary school headteacher who said that: *'Yes, there were disagreements, but they were not brought up at the time of the oral feedback. There were two things in the draft written report. I queried these points and my points were accepted'*. One of the disagreements was to do with the quality of school meals (*'nothing major, but staff had worked really hard on this'*), and the second was to do with admissions: the report queried the admissions procedure of the school and the headteacher had to point out to the inspection team that the school was simply following local authority guidelines on admissions.

Another example of what might be called a 'technical' query concerned the use of attendance data. The headteacher and senior manager at a small, inner city primary school indicated that they had produced a good deal of evidence to support their claim that they were doing everything that they could to ensure good attendance by the pupils at the school. The percentage attendance figure was low in a national context, but quite positive in a local context, in fact *'near the top of the Borough'*. The headteacher said that the inspector was *'apologetic'*, but said the judgement depended on the numbers and could not be changed.

There were also a small number of disagreements about the grades given for particular aspects of the school. One example of this was a senior manager's concern about the grade awarded for leadership and management: *'We had wondered why leadership was only 'satisfactory'. We felt we were good, but [following discussion] we realized that the specification of leadership was very wide'*. Another example related to the quality of the sixth form in a high-performing school. Here, the sixth form was graded as 'good' in the SEF, but actually, said HT, *'It is outstanding. 126 out of 126 sixth formers went to university...So on outcomes we **are** outstanding. Ofsted could have said this to us. They could have said 'you've been hard on yourselves''*. In this case, too, further discussion clarified the situation for the senior school staff, and since they had graded the sixth form as 'good' themselves (in order *'to avoid complacency'*) they realised that they could hardly complain about the inspector's confirmatory assessment.

Another minor disagreement that was mentioned in a few schools concerned the way in which credit had apparently not been given for non-quantifiable strengths of the school. This can be a difficult issue to deal with, because

clearly the inspectors have to rely primarily on ‘hard’, standardized data that enables comparisons of schools across a national context. The following examples illustrate the kinds of things school interviewees were talking about:

- Curriculum enrichment: *‘There is a lot of enrichment that we do that doesn’t show in the report’* (senior manager).
- Pastoral care: *‘There was a comment that the inspector made, ‘it doesn’t matter how much you love your kids’ but I really disagree, it does matter’* (senior manager).
- School ethos: *‘Our Catholic ethos is critical and we wanted this referred to... this is the raison d’etre of the school’* (headteacher).

In most cases of minor disagreement, there was negotiation regarding these issues and agreement was reached to the satisfaction of both parties. These types of clarification and negotiation can be seen as part and parcel of any system of assessing and reporting upon a school.

The **major disagreements**, identified by respondents in five of the case-study schools, were all to do with the overall grade awarded and, usually, the way in which data was used, or not used, to arrive at these grades. With major disagreements of this sort, negotiation and discussion usually took place, but in only two instances was the overall grade changed (examples 4 and 5 in the case-study box on the following page).

It is interesting to note that the disagreements were successfully resolved in two of these five examples, though one required a formal appeal. Survey respondents were also asked about the extent to which any disagreements about the oral feedback had been resolved and, as Table 2.9 shows, just under a fifth (18 per cent) said that any disagreements were ‘completely’ resolved, and another fifth (19 per cent) said that they were ‘partially’ resolved.

Table 2.9 **Extent to which any disagreements were resolved**

Extent to which disagreements were resolved	%
Completely resolved	18
Partially resolved	19
Not at all resolved	10
Not applicable	41
No response	13
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

117 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Case studies: disagreements about the overall effectiveness grade

1. The headteacher of a large secondary school described how: *'When I read the report there were lots of positive things in it, and I was a bit surprised at the end when the overall result was satisfactory'*. The previous inspection report, said this interviewee, had suggested that this was a 'good' school. He had a discussion with the inspector about the overall grade and the school sent additional information afterwards, with a long letter of explanation, but the inspectors *'ignored it and it wasn't reflected in the written report'*.
2. In another school, a small, rural primary school, the headteacher expressed her dissatisfaction with the 'satisfactory' grade: *'It was a fair report – but I have a major problem with the word 'satisfactory'. When I was at school it meant OK, but I know it now means 'good' – it's the new 'good'... because we're a small village school – it's not a level playing field, you can't compare my school with a large town school, where different staff have coordinator roles in different subject area... ethos and pastoral care are exceptional here, but they [the inspectors] concentrated on progress'*.
3. The third example related to a large secondary sports college which had been allocated an overall grade of 'satisfactory'. Here the Chair of Governors described how: *'There was disagreement about the overall grade... if you don't get to a certain level in your achievement you can't get a certain level in other areas; that is your performance indicator of all other areas. It felt like you were battling with them all the time to get them to give at best an accurate picture of what the school is like'*.
4. In a special school much discussion took place about the overall grade awarded at the oral feedback. In this example, however, negotiation resulted in a change of grade, in line with case made by the school's management. The headteacher commented that: *'There was negotiation. It went really well. They were going between good and outstanding... They had a debate about whether leadership and management could be 'outstanding' if teaching and learning 'was' good... we spent ages discussing it'*. In the end the school was graded as 'outstanding' overall, 'outstanding' for leadership and management (the s5 report also uses the word 'exceptional') and 'good' for teaching and learning.
5. The final example of a major disagreement about the overall effectiveness grade is a second case where the grade was changed, but in this instance a formal complaint on the part of the school was required. Here the headteacher of this primary school complained that the inspectors' judgement had been based entirely on the PANDA and that they had *'preconceived ideas'*. He felt that there was little or no point challenging the feedback on the day, but he subsequently had a discussion with the inspectors who said that they could not give a 'good' grade when the data indicated 'satisfactory'. The headteacher said that it took the complaints procedure to overcome this. The complaints procedure was *'very fair and simple'* and he was happy with it.

Summary

The Self Evaluation Form is clearly viewed positively by the vast majority of schools, but the relationship between self-evaluation and inspection is a complex and developing one, and this makes it difficult to assess the impact of inspection on school improvement. This is largely because the link between the two is in many ways indirect and is mediated by many factors. It seems that self-evaluation, along with other factors (see Chapter 5) can be a key driver for school improvement, and that this takes place at least partly because it is useful as preparation for an inspection. It is clear, however, that self-evaluation has become, and is becoming, more of a distributed, collaborative, ongoing process. It is also evident that, even in the first year of operation, and despite some issues about the ways in which schools grade themselves, self-evaluation has largely been successfully and usefully incorporated into the new inspection process.

The findings presented in this chapter have also shown that the oral feedback stage of the inspection is of crucial importance to schools, with almost all school respondents reporting this to be ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ useful. The feedback provides them with an early indication of what the inspectors are going to say and in most cases, but not all, provides a useful opportunity for dialogue and discussion between the school’s senior managers and the inspection team. Whilst in many cases the oral feedback session was seen as useful and helpful to school staff, there were a few instances of disagreement or of a lack of dialogue: it would be worth looking at how this aspect of the inspection process might be further developed, or made more consistent, so as to ensure that these difficulties can be minimised.

Several important points emerged from the evidence collected from the case-study schools where there had been major disagreements. Firstly, they were all to do with views about the overall effectiveness grade. Secondly, in all of the cases except one (example 4), the central issue was about whether a ‘satisfactory’ school should be classified as ‘good’: this appears to be a grade border at which there is much contention. Thirdly, they all involved issues about which data should be used and/or how data should be interpreted (local versus national data, validated 2005 data versus provisional 2006 data, ‘soft’ data versus ‘hard’ data, ‘other’ attainment data versus PANDA data, and so on). In most of these cases, analysis of the ‘hard’ 2005 data, as contained in schools’ PANDA reports and in the performance tables, suggests that, if national standards are the key criterion, then the inspection teams were correct in the judgements made, but what some school managers seem to be asking for is a degree of consistency and clarity with respect to which data ‘counts’.

3. Impact: the inspection report

Key findings

- The inspection findings broadly matched the schools' expectations. Furthermore the majority of school respondents felt that the written inspection report was fair. Many schools liked the s5 report, which they described as 'clear', 'fair' or 'concise'. They often found it 'reassuring' and more accessible and easier to read than the s10 report.
- However, some found the report too bland and generalised and a minority of schools (5) experienced disagreement with the findings and the main contention centred on the use (or lack of use) of data.
- Approximately seven in ten survey respondents reported no differences between s5 and self evaluation (SEF) grades. Where there were discrepancies in grades, this was sometimes attributed to the school being too modest (and therefore the s5 upgraded the SEF), or to the inspectors' interpretation that there were areas needing more rigorous attention (and therefore the s5 downgraded the SEF).
- Although the majority of survey respondents felt the report was helpful, to some extent, in identifying areas for improvement, the lower the achieved overall effectiveness grade, the less likely the school was to find the report helpful.
- The report was not so much seen as having identified improvement areas, rather it primarily confirmed or validated areas that the school had previously identified. Although many perceived this confirmation to be valuable, and an aid to prioritising target areas, others felt it had not helped to move them forward.
- The majority of survey respondents believed that inspectors accurately identified school strengths and weaknesses. A minority, however, disagreed, largely due to a perception that the inspection was 'too data driven'.

Introduction

This chapter explores the impact of the written s5 inspection report and the level of agreement, or disagreement, between the school and the inspectors on the diagnosis. It reports on the variances between the s5 grades and those in the Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) and examines these differences. Finally, it considers the school's perceived strengths and weaknesses and whether the report enabled the school to identify key issues for improvement.

3.1 The diagnosis and inspection grades

As can be seen in Table 3.1, the majority of respondents found that the inspection findings broadly matched with schools' initial expectations. This was more pronounced amongst schools graded 1 (91 per cent) than in schools graded 3 (75 per cent).

Table 3.1 **Extent to which the inspection broadly matched schools' initial expectations**

	%
Yes	84
No	6
Partly	10
No response	0
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

134 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Inspection grades

Approximately seven in ten survey respondents reported no differences between s5 and SEF grades (across all sub sections), as can be seen in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2 **Differences between the S5 inspection report and the schools' self evaluation in relation to grades**

Difference between s5 inspection report and school's self evaluation re grades	No difference in grading %	s5 graded it higher than SEF %	SEF graded it higher than s5 %	No response %
Overall effectiveness	72	13	14	2
Achievements and standards	72	14	12	2
Personal development and well-being	72	14	11	2
Teaching and learning	72	13	13	2
Curriculum and other activities	75	10	12	3
Care, guidance and support	71	13	13	3
Leadership and management	70	13	14	2
N = 134				

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 131 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Interestingly, where there were discrepancies, as many were attributed to the s5 upgrading the SEF as to the s5 downgrading the SEF. This was echoed by comparative analysis of the s5 and SEF grades of the case-study schools. This revealed that, in those cases where there were discrepancies in grading, as many were attributed to the school being too modest (and therefore the s5 upgrading the SEF) as to there being areas, according to the s5 report, needing more rigorous attention (and therefore the s5 downgrading the SEF).

More differences between s5 and SEF grades were reported in secondary schools than in primary schools. Primary schools were more likely to report no differences in s5 and SEF 'overall effectiveness' grades, (83 per cent) than secondary schools (66 per cent).

Nearly two-thirds (21) of the case-study schools perceived the inspection team's diagnosis of the school's progress to be fair. One governor said, for example, that: *'we have had difficulties with staffing and the inspectors recognised that we had done well to overcome that'*. The diagnosis was described as: *'excellent, on the ball'*, *'very shrewd'* and as containing *'sensible judgements'* and a *'validation of our gut feel, which was reassuring'*.

There were a number of comments on how well prepared inspectors had been on arrival. One headteacher said she was *'extremely impressed by the knowledge they [the inspectors] had from the moment they walked through the door'*. Senior staff in another school commented on how the inspectors *'had been through the SEF very carefully'*, and the governor expanded *'they used the SEF well andwent much deeper'*.

As would be expected, case-study respondents were happy when the inspectors upgraded inspection report areas. One governor said: *'any differences were on the plus side....so we were very happy with their diagnosis'*. This did reveal an interesting point with regard to the threshold between grades 1 and 2. Inspectors upgraded some schools from grade 2 to 1 and it appeared that a few schools were reluctant to grade themselves as 1. One headteacher explained:

It isn't a particularly helpful process if you just say you're outstanding. We said we were good with many outstanding features and we said that deliberately. We didn't want to be seen to be complacent and we wanted to be seen to be rigorous self-evaluators. If you say to staff "you are outstanding", where do you go from outstanding?

In two cases schools reported being advised by their local authority to be *'very cautious'* with regard to the SEF grades. A senior manager in one special school said: *'the local authority adviser said that we had to be careful at judging ourselves. We were overcautious. We underestimated ourselves'*. It appeared that the inspectors endorsed the SEF grades in this school, leaving

the school concerned that their SEF grading should have been more *'upbeat'*. Similarly, another headteacher explained that *'the LA advice was to be cautious'*. In this case, however, the school chose not to be cautious as *'the National Association of Head Teachers said to "say it as it is" – and they were right'*.

Some case-study respondents, although satisfied overall with the diagnosis and the s5 grades, expressed some minor misgivings about the diagnosis. For example, one respondent commented that: *'they didn't pick up on some things we do really well'* and another pointed out that *'it was fair but we were given no credit for improving'*. A couple of schools revealed subtly different approaches used by inspectors with regard to the extent to which a school has to have hard evidence in order to achieve the higher grade. One headteacher described the inspectors as very fair as they gave as much credence to *'what is going to happen as to what has happened'*; whereas a headteacher in another school said *'where we would have liked an 'outstanding' in one area, the inspectors said: "it is nearly there but we are not seeing quite enough evidence and it is not embedded"'*.

Interviewees in two other schools also gained the impression that there was a prerequisite to achieve higher grades in one area (for example, *'achievement and standards'*) before it was possible to gain high grades in other areas. One senior manager explained this as follows:

If it [the achievement and standards grade] is satisfactory don't expect to get too high with the other ones because when all's said and done it doesn't matter what you do – you can stand on your head and sing 'Ava Maria' – but if the kids don't get through the exams you've had it.

The governor agreed that the leadership and management grade had been downgraded because it had been linked it with the achievement section and he found this *'demoralising'*.

Although the majority of staff in case-study schools believed the inspection team's diagnosis of the school's progress was fair, staff in a small minority of case-study schools (5) were dissatisfied with the diagnosis and the inspection grades. As has been discussed in Section 2.2, this dissatisfaction centred on the interpretation, or lack of interpretation, of data. A senior manager in a primary school commented that there had been no mention of value added scores and that *'if they were graded on value added, rather than final outcome, that would be fairer'*. The following example illustrates how these schools felt that some inspectors were too narrowly data driven, which sometimes caused their judgement to be doubted by school staff.

Case study: 'data driven' inspection?

The inspection team in a large secondary school downgraded the SEF 'overall achievement' grade from 2 to 3. They also downgraded, from 2 to 3, 'achievement and standards', 'teaching and learning' and 'leadership and management'. The headteacher explained *'achievement and standards was data driven. We disagreed with this because this particular inspector focussed exclusively on the 2005 GCSE results... he wouldn't look at previous figures... he just focussed on the dip from the previous year in 5 A* to C grades. There is no doubt that the raw figures dipped but he did not have the contextual value added'*. According to the headteacher the CVA score was positive, but not considered. She perceived this discrepancy was crucial to the 'overall effectiveness' score of 3. The headteacher also pointed out that one factor identified by the inspectors was the poor results in a new ICT course, *'the raw scores were not good. However subsequently I got the county figures and actually in that respect our scores were ok, not the disaster that they [the inspectors] seemed to think was the case'*. The headteacher also provided a letter from the LA School Improvement Partner, who backed up the school and said he disagreed with the inspection team's judgement of 'satisfactory'. The governor discussed it with their SIP, who *'agreed with us on our own judgements, which made us feel better, because it's someone who knows us and knows our school and the way we are'*.

3.2 The written report

Case-study visits established that staff in most schools (32 of the 36) were, overall, positive about the written inspection report. Some staff were enthusiastic and described the written report as *'fantastic'*, while others were more moderate, for example one headteacher stated that: *'there was nothing unjust'*. Many comments were brief, for example *'fair'*, *'focussed'*, *'clear'*, *'concise'* and *'useful'*. The following example encapsulates the positive reaction to the written report.

Case study: A positive view of the inspection report

A junior school was awarded an overall effectiveness grade of 3 and the deputy head felt that the report *'gave credence to what we were doing'*. She felt that the areas for improvement had all been identified already and therefore the feedback *'validated my views'*. She felt the inspectors *'made things possible'*. She believed the findings were *'correct and very useful'*. She called the findings *'very timely and gives us more credibility'*. The result had been to make the SMT more comfortable with the moves she had already suggested to improve the teaching of numeracy.

Many case-study respondents compared the s5 written report favourably with the old Ofsted school inspection reports. Seven interviewees stressed the point that *'it was easier for parents and non-educationalists to understand'*, and six believed it to be a more *'accessible'* document than the previous reports. Four respondents pointed out that the s5 report was *'more user-friendly'*, and a

governor in one school explained that the s5 report was '*easier to make sense of than previous Ofsted reports*'.

A few of the respondents who expressed positive views about the report, added provisos, for example, a senior manager said that: '*if there had been disagreements we would have wanted more detail*'. A headteacher in another school pointed out that because of the report's brevity, the inspectors, of necessity, had to concentrate on certain areas that they believed to be important, therefore lots of good points that staff perceived to be important had been omitted.

As with the case with the oral feedback (see Section 2.2) over a third (14) of case-study respondents, most of whom were in secondary schools, valued the written report as confirmation and validation that they '*were on the right track*'. The following comment from a headteacher was typical of responses: '*the report validated what we were going to do and confirmed that we were heading in the right direction*'. Furthermore, a deputy headteacher explained that the report '*is there in black and white, the staff can't argue with it. It is also very useful as a lever for change, people can't deny things*'.

Although the majority of respondents were positive, interviewees in four case-study schools expressed negative views about the written report, but these were inevitably bound up with the diagnosis. For example, one primary school headteacher said she felt '*demoralised*' by the written report, that although there were lots of superlatives and it read well, it said nothing that she had not '*flagged up*' already. She believed '*the inspectors had not identified anything*' and that they were '*working to a formula and watching their backs...they were very cautious*'.

The following example illustrates how reaction to the written report was inevitably linked with the whole inspection experience. It highlights how, when the diagnosis was believed to be fair, the written report was, on the whole, favourably received, but when there were fundamental disagreements, the written report was criticised.

Case study: A critical view of the inspection report

The headteacher of a primary school was highly critical of the inspection, including the report. In their SEF they had an 'overall effectiveness' grade of 2, but this had been downgraded by the inspection team to a 3, largely because the inspectors felt that '*the school's self-evaluation was not sharp enough*'. The inspectors had graded the school down in three other sub-sections (but had upgraded them from a 2 to a 1 for 'personal development and well-being').

The headteacher reported that there was a good deal of positive feedback at the oral stage and no indication was given that the written report would be so negative. She did, however, observe that the inspectors appeared to have

made a judgement *'before they even came here'*. She said that *'the written report was a real shock – the first report was dreadful and the continued revisions made it pointless'*. She continued by observing that a report that had *'highlighted areas of weakness and given guidance, would have been welcomed...but they refused to recognise what we had done and only gave negative feedback'*. This view was endorsed by both the deputy headteacher and the governor, who felt that not only had the written report not reflected the oral feedback, but also that it had contributed nothing to school improvement as the weaknesses were already identified and *'we did not get any good ideas from it [the report]'*.

As can be seen in Table 3.3 below, the overwhelming majority view expressed by survey respondents was that oral and written feedback was completely consistent (74 per cent), or consistent (22 per cent) with some minor discrepancies. The few who reported major discrepancies were graded 2 and 3, and the one school which reported no consistency was graded 3.

Table 3.3 Extent to which the written report was consistent with the oral feedback

Written and oral report consistency	%
Completely consistent	74
Partly consistent with minor discrepancies	22
Partly consistent with major discrepancies	4
Not at all consistent	1
No response	0
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

134 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Three case-study respondents commented that the oral feedback was *'better'* than the written, and several interviewees expressed a view that the written report *'stacked up'* with the oral. However, a few case-study respondents believed that the written feedback on its own was not enough, it only worked in conjunction with the oral feedback, as one headteacher explained: *'because we had good discussions during the inspection, it [the written report] was ok'*.

The pupil letter

Case-study respondents were not asked specifically about the letter which was written for the pupils and students. However, 11 case-study respondents spontaneously mentioned it and most (eight) were positive. Interviewees commented that the *'children absolutely loved their letter'* and *'it was a lovely touch'*; one headteacher *'appreciated the tone of the letter'*, and another felt *'it was very good'*. Three interviewees expressed negative reactions to the letter,

one of whom was critical *'because a comment on reading led to the parents chastising the children when there was little wrong'*.

3.3 Identifying strengths and weaknesses

As can be seen in Table 3.4, whilst the majority of survey respondents (83 per cent) felt the report was helpful, to some extent in identifying areas for improvement, 16 per cent believed that it was not at all helpful.

Table 3.4 Extent to which the written report was helpful in identifying areas for improvement in the school

Areas for improvement identified by written report	%
Very helpful	25
Fairly helpful	58
Not at all helpful	16
No response	1
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

133 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

More grade 1 schools (48 per cent) described the report as *very helpful* than either grade 2 or 3 schools (both 21 per cent). The lower the grade the more likely the school was to find the report unhelpful.

If schools found the written report *very helpful* in identifying areas for improvement, they tended to initiate action, which led to a perceived impact. Closer examination of the data revealed that most (88%) of those who found the written report *very helpful* in identifying areas for improvement, believed that specific school actions had already resulted in impact.

Case-study respondents felt, to a degree, that the inspection report helped them in recognising areas for improvement. However, the report was not so much seen as having *identified* improvement areas, rather it *confirmed* or *validated* areas that the school had previously identified. One headteacher explained that *'the key issues were already identified in the SEF'*, another reported *'the key areas were already in our improvement plan'*.

However, as one respondent pointed out: *'it wasn't rocket science, we knew we could improve'*, and another believed the report *'didn't identify, it clarified'*. As noted in Section 2.2, many interviewees valued the inspection team's identification of key issues for improvement, because this *'focussed'* SMT to *'drive forward more quickly'* and was perceived to be useful for formulating future plans.

The majority (81 per cent) of survey respondents believed that inspectors accurately identified school strengths, as can be seen in Table 3.5 below. This view was more evident the higher the school grade: all grade 1 schools agreed, 98 per cent of grade 2s and 85 per cent of grade 3s.

Similarly, most (72 per cent) respondents felt that inspectors correctly identified weaknesses. There was still only a small minority (six per cent) who said that inspectors had not appropriately identified weaknesses, a view expressed by more grade 3 schools (10 per cent) than grade 1 or grade 2 schools.

Table 3.5 Did the inspection team identify the school's strengths and weaknesses accurately?

	Strengths	Weaknesses
	%	%
Yes	81	72
No	7	6
Partly	13	20
No response	0	2
N = 134		

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

134 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Respondents in nearly two-thirds (22) of case-study schools said that the inspection team had successfully identified the school's strengths and weaknesses. Many reported that there '*were no surprises*', that '*there were no strengths and weaknesses that we were not [already] aware of*'.

A few staff in schools believed that Ofsted had not identified the school's strengths and weaknesses and this was largely due, in respondents' views, to the inspection team being too data driven, as discussed in Sections 3.1 and 5.3.

A minority of survey respondents (13 per cent) felt that inspectors identified additional strengths (Table 3.6); this was most pronounced amongst grade 1 schools (24 per cent) and least prominent in grade 3 schools (eight per cent). Also, more primary school respondents (19 per cent) said that the inspection team had identified new strengths, than secondary school respondents (seven per cent). One in ten respondents said that inspectors had identified additional weaknesses, this was slightly more evident amongst grade 3 schools (14 per cent) than in grade 2 (eight per cent) and grade 1 schools (ten per cent).

Table 3.6 **Extent to which inspection team identified any new strengths or weaknesses**

	Additional strengths	Additional weaknesses
	%	%
Yes	13	10
No	87	89
No response	0	1
N = 134		

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

134 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Summary

Overall the written inspection report was largely perceived to be fair and accurate, although some respondents found the report generalised and a few disagreed with the diagnosis due to the perceived misinterpretation or misuse of data. Where there were discrepancies in grades, as many of these discrepancies were attributed to the school being too modest, as to the inspection team identifying areas of the school needing more rigorous attention.

A large majority of respondents (83 per cent) felt the report was very, or fairly helpful, to some extent, in identifying areas for improvement, but the lower the achieved overall effectiveness grade the less likely the school was to find the report helpful. The report was not so much seen as having *identified* improvement areas, rather it *confirmed* or *validated* areas that the school had previously identified

This chapter on the impact of the written inspection report has revealed that, although respected as fair and valued as validation and affirmation, the report and diagnosis would benefit from more consistency, especially with regard to the use of data, and more differentiation in terms of shorter confirmatory diagnosis for grade 1 schools and more detailed helpful direction, with sharply targeted priorities, for grade 3 schools. The next chapter explores the impact of the inspection, including the recommendations for action, planning and outcomes, on school improvement.

4 Impact on school improvement

Key findings

- Although many case-study schools commented on the fact that it was too early to see evidence of impact of the inspection, two-thirds of survey respondents nevertheless felt that actions taken subsequent to Ofsted's recommendations had already resulted in impact.
- In addition, approximately three-quarters (78 per cent) of survey respondents believed that the inspection 'had already contributed to improvements in the school'.
- Most schools agreed with the recommendations for action presented in the s5 report and said they were in accord with those the school had already identified: in addition the majority welcomed the recommendations as a vindication of their own judgements and said they would have been concerned if the report had introduced anything new.
- Some schools found the recommendations particularly useful as a lever for persuading their staff, governors or local authority of the need to take action.
- A few schools were disappointed by what they regarded as recommendations that were unhelpful because they were not sufficiently specific: this was particularly true for grade 3 schools, who also found it more difficult to action the recommendations.
- The majority view was that although the inspection was not seen to be a significant contributor to school improvement on its own, it was nevertheless very valuable as confirmation and validation and, when grading was perceived to be positive, morale-boosting. Another main benefit was that it helped the school to focus and prioritise.
- Schools identified factors such as staff commitment, good communication between staff and senior management, self-evaluation and school ethos, as the major contributors to improvement, and valued the inspection as an element of this, when it confirmed their self-evaluation.

Introduction

This chapter examines the impact of the s5 inspection on school improvement. It explores school respondents' perspectives on the recommendations for action, action planning and outcomes, and the contribution of the inspection, and other factors, to school improvement

4.1 Recommendations for action

The vast majority (97 per cent) of survey respondents agreed, completely or partially, with Ofsted's recommendations for improvement, as can be seen in Table 4.1 below. The small number who disagreed were from schools graded 2 (one school) and 3 (2 schools).

Table 4.1 **Extent of agreement with the Ofsted recommendations to improve further**

Extent of agreement with recommendations	%
Completely agree	66
Partially agree	31
Do not agree	2
No response	1
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

133 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Table 4.2 illustrates that the vast majority (92 per cent) of respondents found the recommendations helpful to some degree, although more found them 'quite' helpful than 'very' helpful, indicating some reservations which are explored later in this chapter. As in the case of agreement with the recommendations, where a small minority disagreed, so a minority (eight per cent) found the recommendations not at all helpful. Schools that did not find the recommendations helpful were generally those that received lower overall effectiveness grades (six grade 3 schools, four grade 2 and one grade 1 schools).

Table 4.2 **Extent to which recommendations viewed as helpful**

Helpfulness of recommendations	%
Very helpful	40
Quite helpful	52
Not at all helpful	8
No response	0
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

134 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

The answers to a survey question on whether the recommendations were specific enough revealed a similar pattern of response (Table 4.3). The

majority of schools (65 per cent) described the recommendations as specific, with the most strongly positive reaction (very specific) from 27 per cent, while eight per cent said they had not been sufficiently specific.

Table 4.3 Extent to which recommendations viewed as specific enough

Were the recommendations specific enough?	%
Very specific	27
Specific	65
Not specific at all	8
No response	2
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

132 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

The responses of case-study schools to similar questions provided more detail on attitudes towards the recommendations. As with the survey, most of the case-study respondents agreed with the recommendations for action made in the inspection report, but they varied as to whether they found them useful and helpful.

The most common response from case-study schools was that the recommendations matched the areas that they had already identified for improvement. Generally, the response to this was positive, in that schools felt that the recommendations were ‘confirmatory’ and underlined the accuracy of their own self-evaluation process. Describing her school staff’s reaction, one headteacher commented: ‘*We all said at the time when she [the inspector] read them (the recommendations) out – “superb, we couldn’t have written them better ourselves”*’. She added that having these areas of development confirmed by Ofsted, ‘*enabled the school to move on to the next stage*’.

There was a sense of relief and enthusiasm in many case-study schools’ responses that the report made it clear that the school was ‘*on the right lines*’ and their own view of areas on which to focus were vindicated. This deputy headteacher’s reaction was similar to many others:

They were helpful, in as far as they confirmed that we were clear about what we want. For us that was good, because if they had come up with anything different, we would have thought, well, why didn’t we pick up the same things, but it didn’t pick up anything we didn’t know already.

In some schools the headteacher found there was an additional value in having their own judgements clearly set out as recommendations, because it gave them the backing they needed to deal with either their own staff, or their local

authority (LA). As one interviewee explained *'We had already identified areas for improvement and the report was just a tool to confirm our practice, but it also helped by making the local authority more aware of the issue of exclusions and changing school culture on exclusions – they have given me back up.'*

In a different school, the deputy headteacher said that *'the inspectors formalised what was already known by the school'*, but *'having it down in black and white is enormously helpful – it needed to be said'* and in this case, they hoped it would push the local authority into doing something about the headteacher's workload.

There were however, some cases where there was no discrepancy between the report recommendations for improvement and the views of the school itself, but the staff interviewees took a more negative stance on this. In one school, the headteacher described the recommendations as *'so obvious, they are peripheral to our school improvement plans'*. In another school, the fact that there was nothing new or different was seen as rather disappointing and the phrase *'use data to ensure pupils make good progress'* was described as so vague that it was unhelpful. A similar point was made by two other headteachers, one of whom described one recommendation as *'something which you could say in any school'*. The other commented that: *'They were helpful but they were too broad. They need to be refined and more specific, e.g. instead of 'raise achievement', 'raise GCSE scores from x% to y%'.'*

Two interesting observations made in different schools also related to the nature of the recommendations. Neither had any particular quarrel with what had been stated, but one said that although they had only been graded as 'satisfactory', of their two recommendations, one was to *'make more use of the local community as a learning resource'* and in this interviewee's view, was, *'possibly not the most relevant thing. This is not very dramatic, considering we only got satisfactory.'* In the other school, the headteacher commented: *'It was all helpful and we agreed totally, but it didn't give us the answer to our enigma'* (that is, if they are doing everything right, why aren't their results better?)

On the whole though, there was a clear sense that the majority of schools were quite happy to have the same areas for improvement as they had highlighted, because, *'nothing new'*, was far better than unpleasant surprises.

In addition to schools valuing the recommendations as confirmation and validation of their own judgements, there were some schools where it was felt that a new insight had been obtained, or a sharper focus given. One headteacher said he thought this section of the report gave *'clear pointers to future development'* and the governor in the same school also felt that this part of the report was very useful for the governing body. All the SMT

interviewees in one secondary school said that they had found the recommendations helpful, and that one comment, relating to pupil confidence, had *'changed the way the leadership team thinks'*. In a special school that had been graded 'outstanding', the headteacher felt that the recommendation about teaching and learning was helpful, because it prevented them from becoming complacent and would help them to focus on an area that still needed further improvement.

Also reflecting the survey findings, the number of case-study interviewees who disagreed with the section on recommendations was very small (six). Most of these disagreements centred on the interpretation of data, and changes to the report. One secondary school headteacher objected to the emphasis the inspection gave to key stage 3 results, as he considered that *'KS3 SATs are an irrelevance and employers and parents are not interested'*. In a primary school, the staff were perturbed by changes made between the draft report and the final one without any discussion. A new point was added which they considered *'inappropriate'* and *'contradictory'* to other statements. Another primary school had very negative views generally about their inspection and the number of changes made to the report had left the staff with a very jaded view of the recommendations, which they considered had exaggerated the school's weaknesses. There was a similar situation in another primary school, where appeals had been made against the original report and where the headteacher complained about the inspection being *'all about maths and English'* and not an assessment of the school as a whole, adding that the inspectors might as well *'never have visited the school at all'*. In a fourth primary school, the headteacher said that while they agreed with one recommendation about reading, they disagreed with the second which had allegedly been based on an example of just one pupil.

The responses to a survey question on attitudes to the clarity of the recommendations (see Table 4.4 below), confirmed the view from both the survey and the case-study schools that, in general, respondents thought the recommendations were clear and specific enough, but there was a small minority who held a more negative view.

Table 4.4 Level of agreement with the statement ‘The recommendations did not provide clear and specific priorities’

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	No response %
The recommendations did not provide clear and specific priorities	5	10	67	17	2
N = 134					

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 13 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

4.2 Action planning and outcomes

Table 4.5 below shows that the vast majority (89 per cent) of survey respondents confirmed that specific school actions followed from Ofsted recommendations.

Table 4.5 Specific school actions following from Ofsted recommendations

Did you follow specific recommendations?	%
Yes	89
No	11
No response	0
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

134 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

More primary schools (94 per cent) reported specific school action as a result of the recommendations than secondary schools (84 per cent), and 92 per cent of schools graded both 2 and 3 confirmed they had taken action, while a smaller proportion (71 per cent) of schools graded 1 reported resulting action.

Most of the schools surveyed were neutral about the ease with which recommendations could be turned into actions (see Table 4.6). Over a third (38 per cent) found the recommendations easy to action, and a small minority found them difficult (two per cent). A higher percentage of schools graded 1 (52 per cent) found this an easier process than schools graded 2 (40 per cent), or graded 3 (31 per cent). Data from the case-study schools (see below)

suggests that a reason for this may be that schools with more weaknesses require more specific and detailed recommendations and sometimes assistance from external bodies, such as their local authority.

Table 4.6 Level of ease of action following recommendations

Were recommendations easy or difficult to action?	%
Easy	38
Neither easy nor difficult	59
Difficult	2
No response	1
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

134 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

As can be seen in Table 4.7, around two-thirds of survey schools reported that there had been some impact from actions subsequent to the recommendations. More impact was reported in primary schools (70 per cent) than in secondary schools (57 per cent). The smaller size of primary schools possibly accounted for impact occurring sooner than in secondary schools with larger staff and management structures.

Table 4.7 Have these actions resulted in any impact yet?

Actions from results	%
Yes	66
No	32
No response	2
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

131 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Of those schools reporting and identifying some impact, the most common responses were:

- an improvement in monitoring procedures (13 per cent)
- improved target setting (11 per cent)
- improved procedures (general) (9 per cent)
- focus on action plans (8 per cent)
- writing skills (8 per cent)
- focus on leadership (7 per cent)

- attendance improved (5 per cent)
- quality of teaching improved (5 per cent).

The picture that emerged from case-study schools was similar in many respects, but there was generally less perception of impact, as the great majority claimed that they had already identified the same areas for improvement as the inspection reports and, in most cases, were acting on these before the inspection. There were numerous references to the recommendations already being part of the school's School Improvement Plan (SIP) or School Development Plan (SDP) and therefore there were no further actions being taken. These comments made by the SMT in a primary school reflected the view of many of the schools visited: *'We've got action plans in every subject, a lot of which are related to the Pupil Tracker which we started over a year ago. I don't think we've actually formally sat down and drawn up specific actions from the Ofsted report yet'*.

For many schools, it was simply a matter of focusing more clearly on certain areas, *'highlighting recommendations which were already in the SDP'*, rather than initiating action. One headteacher, talking about their actions, explained: *'the work on this was already ongoing, but it did give us that little push'*

Where there were examples of specific actions resulting from recommendations, they were often the same areas as those specified in the survey, with monitoring and evaluation, assessment systems and pupil tracking featuring most frequently, often with the acknowledgement that the inspection had helped to prioritise actions. There was also more awareness of the need to collect evidence to show progression, especially for the SEF. As a secondary school headteacher explained, they had already been working on areas highlighted in the report, but she had:

unpicked the priorities and these were translated into the new SIP. We have also put in place monitoring systems so that we can collate information more easily and monitor the things that we didn't have accurate information on at the time. It raised the profile of evidence and I think we are now saying all the time 'how do we know that' and we have changed some of the processes accordingly.

Along similar lines, a primary school headteacher described focusing on *'increasing the challenge for more able pupils'* and keeping work samples as proof, and another interviewee said their school was planning *'more monitoring and evaluation that was sharply focused on achievement – we need to ensure that we have evidence of achievement'*.

Other areas of impact identified by case-study schools were examples of changes to staffing and a greater emphasis on particular subject areas or staff development. Some schools, for example, had appointed extra classroom

assistants to help raise achievement, or added to the SMT, sometimes in relation to a specific recommendation, as in a special school where they had been told *‘to develop the local community as a learning resource’* and had recruited a new deputy headteacher *‘with a community dimension as part of their job description’*.

Some schools reported picking up on advice to make better use of their governing bodies, for example by giving governors *‘individual faculties which they would be responsible for monitoring’*. In another school, the governor interviewee explained, in relation to her role in the school: *‘We were already welcome, but now we make actual arrangements to come in’*.

Where schools had received very specific recommendations in areas that were considered priorities, schools reported that they had taken action as soon as possible after their inspection. For example, a secondary school had *‘gone onto a fast-track system for taking truants to court’* as a means of tackling this particular problem, and in a primary school, the deputy headteacher described how, *‘the risk assessment folder was corrected immediately – in fact psychologically it was good to have one [a recommendation] that was easy and straightforward and could be easily addressed’*.

This last point re-inforced the view that emerged from both the survey and the case studies, that **practical and sharply-focused recommendations** were far easier to act on than those that were more vague and related to long-term policies, such as raising achievement across a whole phase. This finding is supported by an evaluation of s5 inspections carried out by Ofsted themselves, based upon a School Inspection Survey and quality assurance visits to inspections by HMI. A key point made in the report arising from this latter evaluation is as follows:

Inconsistencies in the quality of the recommendations in an inspection report can limit both the impact of inspection on school improvement and Ofsted’s ability to evaluate that impact in the future by measuring schools’ progress against sharply focused priorities. Although the quality of recommendations has improved, since September 2005, a minority are still insufficiently clear and precise (Ofsted, 2006, para. 27).

As regards **outcomes** from any action taken, the most frequent comment was that it was too early to see outcomes because any improvements would not show for some time. One headteacher said that realistically *‘embedding change which impacts on improvement can take up to seven years’*, and most commented that expecting to see results after only six months was unrealistic. Several schools said that there was an expectation that this year’s (2006) key stage 3 and 4 results *‘may show something’*. There were also some schools that stated that any outcomes were the result of policies the school had in place already and so were not linked to the inspection. Others stated that it was very

difficult to disentangle what resulted from action plans already in operation before the inspection and what was done as a result of it. The case study below is an example of a school that thought they could see definite outcomes, but this was because policies for improvement were already in place.

Case study: from recommendations to action

In the inspection report for an 11-18 school four recommendations had been given. Two of these were described by the headteacher as *very broad brush*: they asked the school *to raise standards and improve achievement and to increase further the proportion of good or better teaching*. The other two were more targeted to specific areas and related to the quality of marking and involving students more in assessment and developing the quality of subject leadership. All were already part of the School Improvement Plan and the SMT had, by coincidence, prioritised the key areas for development a few days before the inspection. Following the inspection there was a renewed emphasis on teaching and learning strategies, lesson observation and lesson plans and on putting more people through middle management courses. The interviewees reported that there had been a definite improvement in standards of teaching and learning (this had been evaluated by the headteacher), there were strong applications from within the staff for leadership posts and attendance for SATs had been much better than the previous year. These were seen as concrete results, but it was only the beginning of a much longer process. As the headteacher stated: *It takes time to turn a school around and we've got a long way to go, but we've made a successful start on the journey*.

Other definite outcomes described by case-study school interviewees related to specific areas. For example, the headteacher of a primary school said that one year group had *improved their writing skills dramatically*, and they knew this because a monitoring chart was being kept, and a secondary school reported that a focus on pupil behaviour and tracking had resulted in students enjoying lessons more and being more involved in self-assessment. This school had used pupil questionnaires to gain qualitative information on attitudes and this was also a good example of how many schools said they were now far more aware of the need to gather evidence to prove that progress was being made.

4.3 Contribution of inspection to school improvement

Table 4.8 below shows that amongst the schools surveyed there was a clear perception that the inspection's main contribution to school improvement was its value in assisting schools to prioritise areas for action, rather than in highlighting new areas. This was particularly the case among primary schools (65 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that the inspection prioritised areas for improvement) rather than secondary schools (48 per cent agreed or strongly agreed).

Table 4.8 Level of agreement with views about the s5 inspection

School improvement	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	No response %
The s5 inspection highlighted some important new areas for improvement	1	17	62	19	1
The s5 inspection prioritised areas for improvement	3	55	33	8	1
The s5 inspection made a valuable contribution to school improvement	6	61	21	10	2
The s5 inspection hindered school improvement	2	8	60	28	2
N = 134					

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 132 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Although, as has been discussed elsewhere in this report, it is often difficult for respondents to attribute specific improvements in the school to the inspection, the findings from this survey question (Table 4.8) indicate that two-thirds of respondents (67 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed with the general statement that the s5 inspection had ‘made a valuable contribution to school improvement’. This view was more strongly held the higher the overall effectiveness grade achieved: 86 per cent of grade 1 schools and 59 per cent of grade 3 schools agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Table 4.9 below shows that the majority view among the surveyed schools was that the inspection had already contributed to improvement, *to some extent*. More primary schools (83 per cent) believed that the s5 inspection had already contributed, either to a great or to some extent, to improvements in their schools than secondary schools (71 per cent), although this disparity equalled out when schools considered the extent to which the inspection would be likely to contribute to improvements in *the future* (see Table 4.10 below).

Table 4.9 **Extent to which the inspection has already contributed to improvements in the school**

Inspection has contributed to improvements already	%
To a great extent	9
To some extent	69
Not at all	20
No response	2
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

132 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Table 4.10 **Extent to which the inspection is likely to contribute to improvements in the school in the future**

Likelihood of inspection contributing to improvements	%
To a great extent	23
To some extent	62
Not at all	13
No response	2
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

132 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

The fact that schools were generally more positive about the likely effect on improvement in the future was reflected in comments made by case-study school interviewees about the long-term nature of changes and new policies. Interviewees in the case-study schools were also asked for their opinion on how much they thought the Ofsted inspection had contributed, or was likely to contribute, to their school's improvement and effectiveness. The majority view was that inspection was not a major contributor, but its role was important in terms of affirming the school's successes and efforts and for boosting staff morale (although the latter mainly tended to apply to schools graded 1 or 2).

The difficulty of separating the effects of the inspection from the school's existing policies was reflected in the fact that some interviewees within the same school had quite different views on the inspection's impact. In one secondary school, for example, the headteacher described the inspection as '*a huge help*', while the chair of governors said it had made '*a small contribution at the moment*'. In another secondary school there was a similar divergence of opinion, with the headteacher claiming: '*I don't think the inspection*

contributed to improvement, the local authority adviser asks the hard questions', but a senior manager interviewee said: 'I think it has had a significant impact because it sharpened it [the school's planning] up and formalised that process and then gave a relentless demanding timescale for delivering on that which does drive school improvement'.

Some schools were able to point to what they thought had been particular contributions from the inspection, such as raising the profile of monitoring and evaluation, *'raising the expectations of staff and children'*, reducing the number of exclusions because of a concerted effort, and helping the school *'to attract good staff and pupils'* after being in special measures. Generally, however, it was the less concrete effects that schools considered had been valuable, from the focusing effects of knowing that *'they [the inspectors] will be coming again soon'*, or that the recommendations were *'a sharpener for the next three years'*, to the fact that the inspection *'puts the school in a national context'*. Above all, the inspection was seen as being important because it validated the school's self-evaluation and sometimes added impetus, a view repeated frequently and summed up by a headteacher and a governor from the same school: *'The process of filling out the SEF has moved things on more quickly and the inspection has confirmed that we are going in the right direction and has validated what we are doing'; 'If we had not been inspected, we would be doing exactly the same. However, it may have given more momentum. The inspection made sure of the focus needed and the actions necessary and made it more urgent'.*

Interviewees in a small minority of case-study schools felt that the inspection had been detrimental to their progress. In one secondary school, a *'mistake'* in the wording of the report had led to the resignation of *'a very good teacher'*, and the headteacher said that this had affected staff morale. In another secondary school the claim was made that it had derived no benefit and staff had been disappointed with their experience, but this was mainly to do with an inspection system that the headteacher thought was only suited to schools with serious weaknesses: *'It was not helpful in terms of improvement. I don't think Ofsted has much to do with improvement. Unless you are a school in serious difficulties, it's not about improving a school. How can three or four people coming into school for a day bring any great insight?'* His views were supported by the deputy headteacher who added that: *'They don't take account of the ordinary classroom teacher working really hard doing sixty to seventy hours a week...and if only they could be a bit more human'.*

Managers in two schools were very negative about their particular experience, which they both described as having *'set back'* the school because of the effect on staff morale. In one the headteacher said the inspection had *'a very negative and deflating effect on the staff'* and as a result he had to *'put a lot of effort'* into limiting the damage. A further example of a negative experience is provided in the box below.

Case study: negative experience of inspection

Senior managers in one primary school had objected to the written report of the inspection after they received the first copy and had been engaged in a long and '*exhausting*' process of appeals. The interviewees, who included the headteacher, deputy headteacher and chair of governors, were united in their belief that the inspection contributed nothing to the school's progress, because its recommendations were regarded as having been based on misinterpretation and a '*pre-set agenda*'. Its impact *was entirely negative*, and in the words of the headteacher had '*set the school back by at least six months*' because of the need to try to repair staff morale and reassure parents. In this school's view, the real contributors to improvement and success were the recent appointment of a new headteacher, the Primary Leadership Strategy, staff training and effort and the assistance of the governing body.

Negative views such as those outlined above were unusual and it should be reiterated that the overall picture was that the inspection played a positive role within the wider context of self-evaluation and the various other factors that made schools successful.

4.4 Other contributions to improvement and effectiveness

Table 4.11 below sets out the views of the surveyed schools about the other factors that contributed, or were likely to contribute, to improvement. This reveals strong support for the significance of largely 'unquantifiable' elements of schooling, such as staff commitment, good communication between staff and the SMT, and school ethos. The more practical contributions were the school's self-evaluation system and such policies as lesson observation, assessment and monitoring systems and staff development. Long-term developments such as improvements to school buildings and initiatives in teaching and learning and behaviour management were also regarded as important.

Table 4.11 Extent to which factors other than the Ofsted inspection have contributed/are likely to contribute to improvements in the school

Other factors contributing to improvements in your school	To a great extent %	To some extent %	Not at all %	No response %
Staff commitment and effort/professional pride	89	9	2	1
Good communication between staff and Senior Management Team	84	13	2	1
School's self evaluation	84	14	1	2
School ethos	81	16	2	1
Improved pupils assessment, monitoring and tracking/targeting systems	68	30	2	1
Staff development	56	42	2	1
Lesson observations	52	45	2	1
Impact of school improvement plans	46	49	5	1
Emphasis on/new techniques in teaching and learning	42	52	6	1
Improvements to school buildings	36	42	22	1
Initiatives to improve pupil attitudes/behaviour	33	52	13	2
Sharing good practice/innovation through local network	31	59	8	2
Changes to leadership/management team	26	44	27	3
Specialist school status	13	23	54	10
Involvement in Primary Leadership Strategy	12	33	46	10
Local authority input	10	67	22	1
N = 134				

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 133 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Factors such as staff attitudes, good communication and strong self-evaluation were seen as very important in all schools, regardless of how they had been graded, or whether they were primary, secondary or special schools. There was a similar shared belief among schools of all sectors and gradings about the importance of the intangible element of school ethos and the practical elements of improved assessment techniques and lesson observation. Some factors were sector-specific, such as the Primary Leadership Strategy, or Specialist School status, but in general there was widespread agreement that it was the combination of positive attitudes with well-focused policies that

made the real difference and that the inspection played a part in this overall picture through encouragement and by affirming the school's own judgements.

The perceptions of the case-study school interviewees on other contributions to improvement mirrored those of the surveyed schools. Almost all of them stated that a committed, well-qualified and hard-working staff was the most essential element, followed by strong but sensitive SMT management and the school's own self-evaluation. There was also the same emphasis on school ethos. In one high-performing secondary school, for example, both the headteacher and the chair of governors said school ethos was of profound importance: *'We want excellence, but we have a wider mission and our ethos is very important'*. In their view the very good relationship between staff and pupils which stemmed from this ethos was the foundation of their success. A further example of using the inspection findings to reinforce a school's direction and ethos is provided in the box below.

Case study: positive experience of inspection

Senior managers in a high-achieving, selective, secondary school expressed a view that the inspection recommendations had been unsurprising, but *'useful as an external reference and a corroboration of the issues that we are focusing on'*. Putting the recommendations into action was not difficult as most of this was already in hand, but *'it gave greater focus and urgency and encouraged the whole thrust of staff peer assessment and observation'*. In the view of all the interviewees, the inspection had contributed to improvement *'to the extent that it has confirmed what we were doing in our self-evaluation and shows that our SEF was honest. It also shows that what we are doing fits in with our mission. It will be a useful tool as part of helping us to help ourselves'*. Other contributing factors to the school's success, were the school's ethos, its high expectations, staff dedication and stability, a supportive governing body and strong staff-pupil relationships. The school had self-confidence, but considered that *'Ofsted contributed motivation, it's an external push to get it right. As professionals, next time round we want to be able to point to how we have improved'*.

A committed and effective governing body which acted as a 'critical friend' to the school, parental support and staff professional development were also seen as very significant. This comment about staff development reflected the views of many SMT interviewees: *'Staff need to be well-trained and need to understand how to raise standards. We link our school development cycle very closely to CPD and that provides a really clear purpose'*.

As with the survey responses, there were comments that were more individual to particular schools or phases; the Specialist School Trust, the Primary Leadership Strategy, an improved environment, staff stability and local authority support were examples of this. However, the clearest message was that a school's ability to self-evaluate and move forward under its own direction was what powered improvement and that it was a combination of the

right factors that made for success. One headteacher summed it up in this way: *‘We have the right staff, the governors are supportive and there is good teamwork. All of this is crucial. It’s also about knowing the children well and monitoring them as individuals – we know all of them very well’.*

Summary

In conclusion, the survey and the qualitative data showed recognition of the inspection as a useful contribution to school improvement, particularly when it helped to focus policies and confirmed a school’s own judgements and self-evaluation. As one interviewee put it: *‘the biggest drive to improvement has to come from within’.*

5. Overview of school perspectives

Key findings

- Overall, over half (58 per cent) of schools were very satisfied with the inspection and almost a third (31 per cent) were quite satisfied.
- Most schools were at least 'quite satisfied', and a considerable proportion were 'very satisfied', with the time spent on aspects of the inspection and with the quality of inspections
- In relation to the outcomes of inspections, 'outstanding' schools were most satisfied with the time spent on aspects of the inspection and with the quality of inspections. Grade 3 schools were least positive, though still relatively satisfied overall.
- When satisfaction with time spent on aspects of inspections and the quality of inspections were explored, secondary schools were more dissatisfied than other types of school (though general levels of satisfaction were still high).
- Just under two thirds (63 per cent) of survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the new inspection process was less stressful than the previous system, whereas a quarter (25 per cent) disagreed and ten per cent strongly disagreed.
- The main benefit of s5 inspections was thought to be that they had confirmed and validated what schools had identified in their own self evaluation.
- The biggest concerns were found to relate to some aspects of the inspection process (such as the lack of time spent on lesson observation) and the use of data.

This chapter offers an overview of levels of satisfaction with the s5 inspection process, and includes a summary of views on the main benefits of the new inspections and some of the concerns held by school interviewees following the process.

5.1 Overall satisfaction with the inspection

The school survey included questions about levels of satisfaction with s5 inspections. As shown in Table 5.1 below, of the 134 respondents to the survey, more than half (58 per cent) were 'very satisfied' and just under a third (31 per cent) were 'quite satisfied' with the s5 inspection. Only ten per cent (14 individuals) were not at all satisfied.

Table 5.1 Overall, how satisfied were you with the inspection?

Satisfaction overall of inspection	%
Very satisfied	58
Quite satisfied	31
Not at all satisfied	10
No response	1
N = 134	

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

133 respondents answered this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Table 5.2 shows that special schools expressed most satisfaction (though the small number of special schools included in the survey should be noted). Of all types of school, primary schools were least satisfied, yet overall satisfaction was still high.

Table 5.2 Overall satisfaction with inspections, by school type

Satisfaction	Primary %	Secondary %	Special %
Very satisfied	52	61	86
Quite satisfied	40	23	14
Not at all satisfied	8	15	-
No response	-	2	-
N =	63	61	7

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 130 respondents answered at least one item in this question, but the table excludes three PRU respondents

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

As presented in Table 5.3 below, schools awarded a grade 1 for overall effectiveness were most satisfied with inspections (with a 100 per cent satisfied to some extent), while schools which had received a grade 3 expressed most dissatisfaction, though more than three-quarters were still very or quite satisfied.

Table 5.3 Overall satisfaction with inspections, by overall effectiveness grade

Satisfaction	Grade 1 %	Grade 2 %	Grade 3 %
Very satisfied	95	59	42
Quite satisfied	5	34	37
Not at all satisfied	-	5	21
No response	-	2	-
N =	21	61	52

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 133 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

The school survey included specific questions on how satisfied individuals had been with the amount of **time** spent on aspects of the inspection process. As illustrated in Table 5.4 below, most respondents were ‘quite satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the time spent on all aspects of the inspection process. Just under half (45 per cent) were ‘very satisfied’ with inspectors’ interaction with pupils, and around a third were ‘very satisfied’ with their interaction with staff (33 per cent) and inspectors’ time spent on the use of data (32 per cent). There was overall satisfaction with time spent on lesson observation, with more than half (55 per cent) being ‘quite satisfied’ and just over a quarter (27 per cent) being ‘very satisfied’.

Fewer respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the time spent on aspects of the inspection, as can be seen in Table 5.4. Around a fifth of respondents expressed some levels of dissatisfaction with inspectors’ interaction with parents (22 per cent), their use of data (20 per cent) or their interaction with governors (19 per cent). Slightly smaller proportions of those who responded were dissatisfied with time spent on lesson observation (17 per cent) and interaction with staff (16 per cent). Some staff in case-study schools were concerned about the amount of interaction with school staff and the amount of time spent on lesson observation, as discussed in Section 5.3 below.

Table 5.4 Level of satisfaction with time spent on inspection

Time spent on...	Very satisfied %	Quite satisfied %	Not very satisfied %	Very dissatisfied %	No response %
Use of data	32	46	15	5	2
Lesson observation	27	55	14	3	1
Ofsted interaction with staff	33	50	13	3	1
Ofsted interaction with governors	28	51	17	2	2
Ofsted interaction with pupils	45	49	5	1	1
Ofsted interaction with parents	25	50	19	2	4

N = 134*A series of single response items**Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100**A total of 129 respondents answered at least one item in this question**Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006*

As shown in Table 5.5 below, grade 1 and 2 schools seemed slightly more satisfied than grade 3 schools, though their satisfaction was still relatively high overall (almost three quarters were very or quite satisfied). Schools which were awarded a grade 1 were most satisfied overall; none of the grade 1 schools answered 'very dissatisfied' to any of the questions.

Table 5.5 Level of satisfaction with time spent on inspection, by overall effectiveness grade

Very or quite satisfied with time spent on...	Grade 1 %	Grade 2 %	Grade 3 %
Use of data	95	77	71
Lesson observation	95	87	71
Ofsted interaction with staff	86	90	73
Ofsted interaction with governors	91	82	71
Ofsted interaction with pupils	100	92	92
Ofsted interaction with parents	95	74	67
N =	21	61	52

*A series of single response items**Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100**A total of 129 respondents answered at least one item in this question**Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006*

Although levels of overall satisfaction were generally high, primary schools were least satisfied with time spent on use of data, secondary schools were least satisfied with time spent on lesson observation and interaction with staff and parents, and special schools were least satisfied with time spent on interaction with pupils (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6 Level of satisfaction with time spent on inspection, by school type

Very satisfied or quite satisfied	Primary %	Secondary %	Special %
Use of data	75	79	86
Lesson observation	84	79	87
Ofsted interaction with staff	86	77	100
Ofsted interaction with governors	86	72	86
Ofsted interaction with pupils	94	93	86
Ofsted interaction with parents	84	64	86
N =	63	61	7

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 129 respondents answered at least one item in this question, but the table excluded three PRU respondents

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

The school survey also included a question on levels of satisfaction with the **quality** of the inspection in relation to use of data, lesson observation and interaction with staff, governors, pupils and parents. Table 5.7 below presents the responses.

Table 5.7 Levels of satisfaction with the quality of various elements of the inspection

Quality of inspection in relation to...	Very satisfied %	Quite satisfied %	Not very satisfied %	Very dissatisfied %	No response %
Use of data	37	39	13	8	2
Lesson observation	38	44	14	2	2
Ofsted interaction with staff	32	50	11	5	2
Ofsted interaction with governors	31	52	10	5	2
Ofsted interaction with pupils	47	45	6	1	2
Ofsted interaction with parents	24	48	19	5	5

N = 134

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 127 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

A substantial majority of respondents were ‘quite satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the quality of the inspection. There was particular satisfaction with the quality of inspections in relation to Ofsted’s interaction with pupils; just under half (47 per cent) were ‘very satisfied’. However, a quarter (25 per cent) expressed some degree of dissatisfaction with the quality regarding interaction with parents and a fifth (21 per cent) with the quality in relation to use of data.

Some senior managers in case-study schools were concerned about inspectors' use of data, as discussed previously in Section 2.2 and in Section 5.3 below.

Overall, therefore, where there was any dissatisfaction amongst survey respondents in relation to time spent on aspects of the inspection or the quality of the inspection, it was most likely to relate to inspectors' interaction with parents and their use of data.

As shown in Table 5.8 below, although levels of satisfaction with the quality of inspections was generally high, grade 1 schools were most satisfied about the quality of all aspects of inspections, whereas grade 3 schools were least satisfied with all aspects.

Table 5.8 Views on the quality of inspections, by overall effectiveness grade

Very or quite satisfied	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
	%	%	%
Use of data	95	79	65
Lesson observation	95	86	69
Ofsted interaction with staff	91	89	71
Ofsted interaction with governors	95	84	77
Ofsted interaction with pupils	100	92	89
Ofsted interaction with parents	95	72	62
N =	21	61	52

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 127 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Regarding school type, secondary schools were least satisfied about the quality of inspections.

Relating to satisfaction, the school survey included a question on views on the usefulness of inspections. As shown in Table 5.9 below, the new s5 inspections were generally deemed more useful than the previous S10 inspections, though a fifth (21 per cent) disagreed or strongly disagreed that this was the case. 'Satisfactory' schools were least likely to agree that s5 inspections were more useful than s10 inspections (though 62 per cent still strongly agreed or agreed), compared with grade 1 schools (90 per cent).

Table 5.9 Usefulness of s5 Inspections

Usefulness	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	No response %
The s5 inspections process was more useful than the S10 inspection	30	47	19	2	2
The inspection helped us to identify our main targets	12	53	28	5	2
The inspection report was superficial	4	17	55	22	2
N = 134					

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 131 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

Compared with other types of school, fewer secondary schools agreed that s5 inspections were more useful than s10 inspections (though satisfaction was still relatively high, with 69 per cent still strongly agreeing or agreeing, compared with 84 per cent of primary schools and all of the seven special schools). Section 5.4 below explores respondents' views on how inspections could be improved.

As illustrated in Table 5.9 above, most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the inspection had helped them identify targets, yet a third either disagreed or strongly disagreed that it had been useful in this way. Again, grade 1 schools were most in agreement (76 per cent either strongly agreed or agreed), and grade 3 schools were least in agreement (58 per cent strongly agreed or agreed).

More than three-quarters (77 per cent) of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the report was superficial, though around a fifth (21 per cent) felt that it was superficial. It is clear from Table 5.10 below that schools which were awarded a grade 3 for overall effectiveness ('satisfactory') were most likely to think the written inspection report was superficial.

Table 5.10 Views on report, by overall effectiveness grade

Superficial?	Grade 1 %	Grade 2 %	Grade 3 %
Strongly agree	-	-	10
Agree	-	18	23
Disagree	67	59	46
Strongly disagree	33	20	21
No response	-	3	-
N =	21	61	52

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 132 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

A quarter of primary schools (25 per cent) and a fifth of secondary schools (18 per cent) strongly agreed or agreed that their report was superficial (none of the seven special schools held this view).

There was overall satisfaction with inspectors amongst survey respondents, with 63 per cent strongly agreeing and 25 per cent agreeing that the inspection team were very professional (ten per cent either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this, and those remaining did not respond). ‘Outstanding’ schools were most positive about the inspectors being professional (90 per cent strongly agreed), whereas ‘satisfactory’ schools were least positive (though 54 per cent still strongly agreed). Although 83 per cent of secondary schools either strongly agreed or agreed that inspectors had been professional, this was a smaller proportion than was the case for primary schools (90 per cent) or special schools (all seven schools).

As shown in Table 5.11 below, just under two thirds (63 per cent) of survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the new inspection process was less stressful than the previous system, whereas a quarter (25 per cent) disagreed and ten per cent strongly disagreed. Grade 3 schools expressed most disagreement that the s5 inspections were less stressful than s10 inspections (25 per cent disagreed and 17 per cent strongly disagreed). Fewer secondary schools than primary or special schools agreed that the new process was less stressful (43 per cent of secondary schools either disagreed or strongly disagreed, compared with 32 per cent of primary schools and none of the special schools). Suggestions for improvements to the s5 inspections are discussed in Section 5.4.

Table 5.11 Views on the Inspection

The inspection	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	No response %
I have not thought about the inspection since the inspectors left	2	8	53	36	2
The s5 inspection was a lot less stressful than previous inspections	23	40	25	10	2
The process was more about accountability than inspection	17	57	20	4	2
The inspection boosted staff morale	22	35	19	22	3
N = 134					

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 131 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of the impact of Section 5 Inspection School Survey 2006

There was a general perception that the process had been more about accountability than inspection, with 57 per cent of all respondents agreeing and 17 per cent strongly agreeing that this was the case. As one headteacher in a case-study school commented: *‘unless you are a school in serious difficulties it [the inspection] is not a contribution to improvement...it is about accountability. I’m happy with that idea...we need to be accountable. Someone needs to check, and Ofsted is part of that’*. This issue is discussed further below.

There were more mixed views about the impact of inspections on staff morale. Though more respondents were in agreement than disagreement, overall, that inspections helped to boost morale, the same proportion (22 per cent) strongly agreed and strongly disagreed that this was the case. As might be expected, ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ schools were more positive than schools with a ‘satisfactory’ outcome about the impact on staff morale. For example, 52 per cent of grade 1 schools compared with 15 per cent of grade 3 schools felt inspections had boosted staff morale.

5.2 Main benefits arising from the inspection

The school survey included an open-ended question about perceptions of the main benefits arising from the inspection. As might be anticipated, comments were very diverse, though some common issues emerged under broad themes (see Table 5.12 below). This section summarises responses to this survey question and uses case-study examples for further illustration. Although

interviewees in case-study schools were not asked specific questions about the main benefits of inspections, general comments were made throughout interviews which relate to this issue.

Table 5.12 Main benefits from inspection

Benefits	%	N
Confirmation/Validation	59	79
Stimulated actions/Improvements	27	36
Boosted morale	14	19
Positive inspection process	10	13
Other benefits	19	25
No response	6	8
N = 134		

More than one answer could be put forward so percentages do not sum to 100

An open-ended, multiple response question

A total of 126 respondents gave at least one response to this question.

Confirmation/validation

A particular benefit, identified by more than half (59 per cent) of the survey respondents, was that the inspection had been valuable in providing external confirmation and validation of schools' own self assessment, good practice and hard work. As one survey respondent said: *'it was confirmation for the whole school community that the school continues to provide an outstanding education and has not become complacent by its achievements'*. Another said, *'it is confirmation of the progress made, our view of the school (SEF) and the areas for improvement'*.

Of the 36 case-study schools, 14 were positive about how the inspection overall had been confirmatory. Comments included:

We already knew we were there...it confirmed what we needed to do. It was spot on and clarified things.

It matched very closely with issues identified in the SEF...it was reassurance.

There was nothing surprising, but it's a useful external reference and a corroboration of the issues that we are focusing on.

In the view of these respondents, even if the inspection had not necessarily told them anything new, the confirmation had *'fired staff up'* and motivated them to take things forward. External validation was also considered to be good for morale: *'It gave us a boost...we were doing a lot of things right'*. Some school respondents felt strongly that if the inspection had highlighted

any new areas for improvement, areas that they had not identified themselves, then they would have been concerned. The following case-study example further illustrates these views.

Case-study: a new impetus

Staff in one secondary school felt that the inspection outcomes matched their own self evaluation, thus when they received the written report, the headteacher said *'I recognised the school'*. From the pre-inspection briefing, there had been no surprises. There was nothing that the school did not know already. The areas for improvement were said to be *'clearly indicated'* and the report *'gave impetus for the school to focus on these issues rather than others identified in the SEF'*. The inspection *'pushed it more to the fore...there was greater focus on areas identified already'*. They were already working towards areas of improvement identified by Ofsted, but the inspection helped them to give greater emphasis to some areas rather than others. Overall, *'it rubber stamped what we are doing'*.

However, a further seven schools were more neutral about the inspection giving confirmation and not adding anything new, suggesting that it had not had an impact on their school. For instance, one senior manager said, *'It was not enlightening...we already knew where we were going...they didn't identify anything that the school didn't know'* (see Section 5.3 below for further details).

Stimulating actions and improvements

More than a quarter of survey respondents (27 per cent) made comments in relation to how the s5 inspection had helped them to stimulate action and concentrate on improvements in their school. Of these, 16 individuals (12 per cent of respondents overall) mentioned that the inspection had helped to focus and sharpen their thinking about necessary improvements. Ten respondents (eight per cent overall) mentioned how the inspection had given them the impetus to improve and five (four per cent) reported that it had helped them to reflect on issues for improvement. Similarly, a number of case-study schools (around a third) felt that the inspection had helped to focus their minds and to prioritise areas for improvement that the school had identified prior to inspection. As one senior manager said, *'there was nothing new [but the inspection] pushed it into the fore and there is a greater focus on things we had already identified'*.

Boosting morale

A total of 19 survey respondents made specific comments about the inspection boosting morale, most often in relation to staff morale, though one individual mentioned parents' morale. One respondent commented, *'morale was already improving...but the inspection team drove us forward and it forged our team'*.

even more'. Staff in a fifth of the case-study schools made unprompted comments about inspections boosting staff morale and/or motivating staff. One senior manager said, *'it has re-energised people'*. Another commented, *'it gave staff a boost'*.

Process

Thirteen survey respondents also made reference to benefits in relation to the new s5 process. Of those, five individuals praised the inspectors for involving the whole school as much as possible in inspections. However, across case-study schools it was more common for staff to criticise the lack of involvement of the whole school (see concerns discussed in Section 5.3 below). Perceptions of this issue may well vary according to the size of the school. A small minority of survey respondents specifically mentioned that they appreciated the shorter more focussed process. This view was also mirrored by staff in a number of case-study schools, across which the general consensus was that the new process was *'hugely preferable'*. As one senior manager commented, *'it is far less stressful than the old system'*.

Staff in eight case-study schools made unprompted positive comments about inspectors during interviews. In six of these schools, the process had been led by HMIs. Two of these schools had built relationships with the same HMIs as they were previously on special measures prior to their s5 inspections. One of the headteachers said: *'We had four HMIs so they were likely to have more impact. HMIs are very sharp, incisive, realistic and reliable. I have learned to trust them'*. The other headteacher commented, *'We have been working with the HMI for over a year now and we have had the chance to build a relationship. This has been a positive experience largely due to the inspectors having empathy'*.

The following case-study example illustrates a school which was generally positive about the s5 inspection process.

Case-study: inspection as a positive experience

Staff in one primary school praised the new inspection process, despite being awarded a grade 3 ('satisfactory') for overall effectiveness. All staff felt the feedback from inspectors was *'very useful'* and said that their findings were very close to the school's own self evaluation. The headteacher commented that the staff were *'very clear about the problems and the way forward'* and that the inspection had clarified staff's thinking about the issues they had already identified in the SEF and *'fired them up'*. The report was considered *'very fair'* and the pupil letter was thought to be *'a lovely touch'*. The inspection was *'HMI-led'* and the headteacher thought: *'they were experienced enough to realise that the school knew where it was going'*. The inspection was considered to be *'a very positive experience, so much better than previous inspections'*.

A small minority of survey respondents mentioned that the inspection outcomes had been useful as a marketing tool. One said, *'it was a very positive letter to students...some very positive local press!'* It should be noted that what some individuals and schools thought of as benefits of the s5 inspection, others were expressing as concerns. Concerns following inspections are discussed in the following section.

5.3 Main concerns following the inspection

As discussed in Section 5.1, there was overall satisfaction with s5 inspections, though a small proportion of survey schools reported some level of dissatisfaction. A more general question was included in the school survey, which asked about the main concerns schools had following inspections. Comments were very diverse and have therefore been summarised under broader themes (Table 5.13). Details of the comments made in relation to the broad themes are discussed below. As above, although interviewees in case-study schools were not asked specific questions about their concerns following inspections, general comments were made throughout interviews which relate to this issue.

Table 5.13 Main concerns following inspection

Concerns	%	N
Process	25	34
Post-inspection concerns	19	26
Conflict of opinion between inspectors and schools	14	19
Use of data	13	18
Inspectors	9	12
Low impact	5	6
No concerns	15	20
Other comments	7	9
No response	16	21
N = 134		

More than one answer could be put forward so percentages do not sum to 100

An open-ended, multiple response question

A total of 113 respondents gave at least one response to this question.

It is worth noting that 15 per cent of all respondents specifically said that they had no concerns following the inspection, and that the consensus across case-study schools was that the s5 process was an improvement on the s10 process. However, some concerns about the new system were mentioned by small numbers of survey respondents and by respondents in case-study schools. Although the concerns were only expressed by a minority, analysis of these

comments may be of use to Ofsted in relation to the future development of inspection.

Process

A quarter of the survey participants had concerns in relation to the inspection **process**. In particular, eight people were concerned, not about the inspection itself, but about the time it had taken to complete the SEF or the time it would take to maintain it. Comments included, *'the SEF completion was hugely time consuming'* and *'a great deal of time was spent on the SEF during the summer'*. Also in relation to process, six survey respondents were negative about the fact that staff had felt detached from the process, as inspectors had only included a minority of staff in interviews or observation. For instance, *'some teachers were disappointed they had not been inspected'* and *'teaching staff felt cheated because judgements were made about their teaching when they had only been observed for 15 minutes'*. Five people said the inspection had been particularly stressful for the senior leadership team. Three interviewees criticised the pupil letter, for example: *'the letter to pupils did not reflect "outstanding in all areas"'*. It is worth noting that the pupil letter also attracted positive comments, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Some of these concerns about process were reiterated by case-study schools. Interviewees in a small number of schools felt strongly that staff had felt detached from the process. This was partly thought to result from inspectors spending less time in schools, resulting in a *'narrow focus'*. It was perceived by some that this narrow focus meant that good practice in schools was sometimes ignored while the more 'negative' practice was emphasised. Comments included, *'Inevitably some heads of department were disappointed because they weren't measured'* and *'not all staff were observed...that may create disappointment'*. This was thought, by some, to have a negative impact on staff morale.

Linked to this is an issue raised by staff in at least eight case-study schools, where there was concern about the lack of time spent during the inspection process on **lesson observation**, resulting in an inappropriate **balance** of classes being observed. One headteacher commented: *'I tracked the lesson observations...one was high quality and the rest were middle to low so I told the lead inspector the sample was skewed'*. Another headteacher said, *'[the inspector] observed just four subjects – English, maths, PSHE and IT. In fact, the PSHE lesson was taken by a supply teacher and the IT lesson was an absence cover'*.

Another issue with process, evident from analysing the case-study data, was that there were **inconsistencies across inspectors** and their practices. As discussed in Section 2.2, this partly related to their use of data. For instance, some were happy to use invalidated 2005 PANDA data as they were aware

this was the most up-to-date evidence, whereas others refused and focused on 2004 data (see below for more details). There were also examples given by some case-study schools of inconsistencies in how inspectors were applying inspection grades. For instance, one headteacher commented that he had to negotiate in order to receive ‘outstanding’ for leadership and management when teaching and learning was ‘good’.

This headteacher had argued his case and provided sufficient evidence to be awarded ‘outstanding’ for leadership and management, yet also said that he had talked to the headteacher of another local school who said that he had not been able to negotiate the higher leadership and management grade.

There were some concerns about the new grading system. A minority of case-study school respondents specifically mentioned disliking the new grading system which they described as ‘broad’ and unclear. For instance, there was uncertainty about what was meant by ‘satisfactory’ or ‘good’. As one senior manager said, *‘they could have been clearer why we were ‘good’*. There was also a perception of too big a gap between ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’, with some suggesting adding ‘very good’ as an extra grade. One governor commented: *‘I think because of the grading structure there is nowhere to go between a 1 and a 2’*. It seemed that with only four grades, some schools were left disappointed. One headteacher said, *‘we were told that if there was a ‘very good’ judgement we would have got that category but there’s not and I think that’s one of the failures of the new system’*.

Post-inspection concerns

Post-inspection concerns were particularly related to the difficulty of keeping up momentum after the inspection (mentioned by 12 survey respondents, as shown in Table 5.13 above). Five individuals were concerned about how they were going to address their recommendations. Two ‘outstanding’ schools were concerned about staff complacency following their positive inspection. Other post-inspection concerns were expressed by one or two individuals only.

Conflicts of opinion

Nineteen survey respondents (14 per cent) raised concerns about conflicts between the inspectors and the schools. Some survey respondents, for example, thought that the inspection gave a superficial overview of their school, did not reflect the strengths of their school, or that the inspection outcomes had been based on insufficient evidence. Discrepancies are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Although three-quarters of survey respondents said the oral feedback and written report were completely consistent (as discussed in Chapter 3), a small

minority of case-study schools (three) said that they had experienced conflicts between the oral feedback and the written report. One headteacher commented, *'they [Ofsted] made this allegation [in the written report] that many books weren't marked...it wasn't mentioned in the de-brief'*. A senior manager in another school was of the opinion that: *'The report he read out was better than the one that was printed'*.

Use of Data

As discussed in Section 5.1, most survey respondents reported that they were either very or quite satisfied with the use of data during inspections. However, in a specific survey question on concerns about the inspection, 18 respondents (13 per cent) mentioned some concerns about the inspection being 'data-driven', with inspectors spending a substantial amount of time in schools analysing data rather than observing classes and talking to staff and students, or about the 'wrong' data being used. One survey respondent said, *'the inspector, whose brief was data, had the wrong PANDA data and therefore his hypothesis was flawed. This caused confusion and anxiety'*.

In four case-study schools, staff specifically said that the whole inspection process was 'data-driven'. For example, one senior manager said, *'it should not be so wedded to the data...they should listen to what schools have to say'* and another said, *'it is too data-based...too little evidence on the ground'*. A senior manager in another school said, *'I think that they [Ofsted] do themselves a disservice by being so data-driven...if they could only give themselves time to appear interested in the people of the institution they would really improve what they do'*. These views link to comments made by some staff in case-study schools about a lack of inspector interaction with staff and a lack of time spent on lesson observation (as discussed above).

Moreover, staff in more than a quarter of case-study schools (at least ten schools) criticised inspectors' use of the 'wrong data' (also mentioned by a minority of survey respondents). A common concern was that inspectors had used out-of-date data, and particularly mentioned that 2004 PANDA data had been analysed. One senior manager mirrored the view held by a number of school senior managers when he said, *'they [inspectors] did not accept the 2005 unvalidated PANDA data...I disagreed with the evidence base used'*. Staff in at least four case-study schools criticised inspectors for ignoring contextual value added data. Other schools criticised inspectors for ignoring other data they wanted to provide as evidence, such as Fisher Family Trust (FFT) data, ALIS and MIDYIS. This was thought to be partly due to a lack of understanding; two members of staff in one school said, in separate interviews, that the inspector did not understand the FFT data and that he had commented, *'what do you expect me to do...take a university degree in FFT data?'* In another school where 2004 PANDA data was analysed the

headteacher said, *'the lead inspector was unconfident... [she analysed it] in a highly inexperienced way'*.

The evidence suggests that there were occasional inconsistencies in the data used. One headteacher of a grammar school said that the contextual value added data *had* been analysed, but felt that *'CVA does not work for schools like this'*. The case-study example below illustrates some of these issues relating to the use of data.

Case-study: narrow use of data

Respondents in one primary school were very dissatisfied with inspectors' use of data. The headteacher said, *'they are judging the standards and that is measured by the SATs...but a school isn't just about the SATs...the stuff we do particularly well is the personal stuff and the ethos stuff which is so important...we felt that they understood that but I don't think it came out [in the written report]. They rely to much on the SATs results'*. A senior manager agreed and criticised the inspection for having a 'very narrow focus'. The headteacher said the Primary Leadership Strategy had been more useful than the inspection, as it had involved looking at improvements throughout the school rather than just looking at the SATs.

Concerns with inspectors

As shown in Table 5.13 above, 12 survey respondents mentioned inspectors in response to an open-ended question on concerns following the inspection process. Their comments mainly related to inspectors' use of 'wrong' data or their lack of understanding of data (as discussed above). However, a small minority of interviewees made comments about the quality of inspectors and their level of professionalism.

An example of perceived 'unprofessionalism' occurred in a primary school where the headteacher said that:

[The inspection team] lacked professionalism...observing classes with a supply teacher when they had been asked not to and not allowing any opportunities for discussion. The lead inspector had a great distance to travel and made a big thing about it...she rushed off at the end of the day and did not stay to speak to the link adviser.

One survey respondent commented, *'we had an HMI as our lead inspector. I was very confident in his findings and the outcomes of the inspection. The other two inspectors didn't inspire the same level of confidence'*. Concerns about inspectors' use of data and their professionalism came from schools which were inspected by both HMI and other inspectors. However, staff in a few case-study schools specifically mentioned that they preferred HMIs: *'they are a cut above...they are shrewd and know exactly what is going on'*. In two

of the five schools which were previously on special measures, there was a view amongst some staff that the inspectors were particularly *'hard on them'* because they had been on special measures. One of the headteachers said, *'compared with other schools in the area [inspected by other teams] we perhaps should have got better scores but understand why not [because of special measures]'*.

Low impact of inspections

A small minority of the survey respondents (six individuals) expressed concern that the inspection had **little impact**, suggesting that it had told them nothing new. In addition, staff in seven case-study schools reported that the inspection had little impact. As discussed above in Section 5.2, they felt that the inspection had done little other than confirm what they had already identified in their self evaluation and thus had not been a helpful experience. Interestingly, these schools were all quite negative about the whole inspection process, particularly for being short and thus *'narrow-focused'* or for being *'data-driven'*, as discussed above. As one headteacher said, *I don't think Ofsted inspectors made me decide on any actions. It is not about Ofsted...it is about people who understand the school and the challenges that are here'*. Another said the inspection had contributed *'very little...it was very much a snap-shot...too quick. We tend to work on our own evaluation, it is more informative...this [report] is a summative statement'*.

5.4 Ways of improving inspections

At the end of the school survey, respondents were given the opportunity, in an open-ended question, to suggest how the new s5 inspection process could be improved. Senior managers in case-study schools were also asked to comment on what they might change.

It is worth noting that a number of survey respondents (a total of nine, or seven per cent) made positive comments rather than suggestions for change. Moreover, five individuals (four per cent) specifically said that no change was required. Similarly, senior managers in case-study schools were most often positive about the s5 process, which was generally preferred to the old S10 system, despite some of the concerns discussed above in Section 5.3. As one headteacher said, *'there is no doubt that the stress level is much reduced'*.

Table 5.14 Suggestions for improvements to inspections

Ways in which s5 inspections could be improved	%	N
Process	22	30
Use of data	21	28
Inspectors	13	17
Maximising impact	10	13
Timing of inspections	8	10
Positive comments made	7	9
No improvements required	4	5
Other comments	6	5
No response	29	39
N = 134		

More than one answer could be put forward so percentages do not sum to 100

An open-ended, multiple response question

A total of 95 respondents gave at least one response to this question.

As shown in Table 5.14 above, just over a fifth (22 per cent) of respondents made suggestions for improvements in the s5 inspection **process**. For instance, six individuals (five per cent) felt that the overall process should be lengthened. This view was also held in a number of case-study schools. Although the shorter notice was favoured, the short time spent in school was a concern. As one headteacher said, *‘one and a half days in a school just isn’t long enough to make accurate judgements’*. Headteachers in three case-study schools complained that time was wasted during the inspection collecting data and evidence for the inspectors, when it could have been requested beforehand and be waiting for them on their arrival at the school. One said, *‘there was no advance request for data, which they could have easily done’*.

Five survey respondents (four per cent) suggested that there should be more time allowed for lesson observation (this issue was reiterated in some case-study schools, as discussed in Section 5.3 above). Four individuals (three per cent) felt that the self evaluation process should be simplified (some case-study schools suggested it would be useful to have a *‘critical friend’* when completing the SEF). One headteacher interviewee said, *‘filling in the SEF is a mammoth task...there were hardly any examples of how to fill it in. The form is not user-friendly to fill in online and it required IT skills.’*

A fifth of the survey respondents (20 per cent) made suggestions for change in relation to the **use of data**. Thirteen individuals (ten per cent) felt that inspections should be less data driven, with ten respondents (eight per cent) specifically suggesting that there needed to be more emphasis on contextual information (which could include contextual value added data). Four individuals criticised inspectors’ interpretation of data. A substantial number

of case-study schools also suggested improvements to the use of data: *‘They don’t look at the right data’*.

A total of 13 per cent of respondents to the survey made suggestions for improvements in relation to **inspectors**. Individual responses to the survey were based on concerns about inspectors having their own agenda prior to inspections, there being an overall lack of quality control, poor team connectedness, and that they were under-prepared. Concerns about inspectors raised by case-study schools are discussed above in Section 5.3. As one senior manager said, *‘the inspection team need to view the data and ask questions, not formulate a view and come in and back it up’*. Senior managers in some schools suggested that all inspections should be led by HMI.

Thirteen respondents (10 per cent) suggested that changes to inspections could be made in order to **maximise impact** on schools. For instance, three individuals expressed a desire for their School Improvement Partner (SIP) and/or local authority adviser to be involved in the process to maximise impact, as they have closer and more long-term relationships with schools than inspectors. Three individuals felt they wanted more guidance on how to put recommendations into action, and two people stressed the need for clearer recommendations.

Ten respondents (eight per cent) made comments about the **timing of inspections**, including the desire for inspections to occur less frequently and for more notice to be given prior to inspection.

A small minority of schools (including one graded as ‘satisfactory’) questioned whether there was a need for inspections for the more successful schools and suggested that the focus should be on schools that needed help to improve. The views of some interviewees seemed to suggest a differentiated system for schools with different overall effectiveness grades. For ‘outstanding’ schools, inspections were perceived to be more about accountability. One interviewee suggested an *‘alternative model’* where the ‘outstanding’ school would be able to ask Ofsted for advice on particular issues. The headteacher said, *‘there should be more negotiation...talk to the school about what the focus should be. “What would you really like to know about your school?”’*

Summary

In summary, schools seemed satisfied with the inspection process overall, the time spent on aspects of the inspection and the quality of the inspection process. Although satisfaction was high amongst all types of schools, grade 3 schools seemed slightly less satisfied than grade 1 and 2 schools, and secondary schools slightly less satisfied than primary or special schools. Schools were positive about the inspection outcomes confirming their own self

evaluation. Where concerns were voiced, they were most often related to issues of process, such as a lack of time spent on lesson observation or the use of what was perceived to be the ‘wrong’ data. The following chapter summarises key findings and conclusions from the evaluation in relation to the impact of inspections and makes initial recommendations regarding the future development of the s5 inspection process.

6. Conclusions

Overall, strand 1 of this evaluation has revealed that the vast majority of schools were satisfied with the s5 inspection. In addition, most respondents were positive about the time spent on, and the quality of, the inspection, and nearly all interviewees appreciated the professional way in which the inspectors acted. Furthermore, for schools with a perceived positive grade, there was also an important morale-boosting effect. A small minority of respondents would like to have seen more inspection time spent on parent interaction, the accurate interpretation of data and on lesson observation. This view was expressed by more grade 3 schools than those with higher grades.

The completion of the Self-Evaluation Form (SEF), although considered a time-consuming process by some, was viewed positively by most respondents and valued as a critical preparation stage of the process, as well as holding potential as a collaborative tool to aid self-evaluation, and, in turn, to contribute to school improvement. The oral feedback and accompanying ongoing dialogue were viewed as very important and integral parts of the inspection process. Overall, the written inspection report was largely perceived to be fair and accurate, although sometimes too generalised.

The inspection diagnosis was perceived to be sound: seven out of ten survey respondents reported no differences between the s5 and self-evaluation (SEF) grades. Where there were some discrepancies in grades, approximately half of these were attributed by the inspectors to the school being too modest, and approximately half were downgradings, where the inspectors felt that there were areas needing more attention. There was some indication that a few schools were 'finding their feet' with regard to grading themselves on the new four-point scale and a number were reticent to grade themselves as 'outstanding' for fear of appearing complacent. Staff in some schools pointed out that they would like more guidance with regard to grading.

In a few schools respondents disagreed with the diagnosis, mostly due to the perceived misinterpretation of data or the use of the 'wrong' data. This concern centred, for example, on the apparent use, or lack of use, of contextual value added data and validated, or invalidated, PANDA reports. It would certainly appear that there needs to be some clarification about the forms of data that could and should be used to inform the award of inspection grades.

The vast majority of respondents agreed with the identified areas for improvement, and furthermore, a majority also viewed the recommendations as helpful. The survey findings also revealed that, the lower the achieved overall effectiveness grade, the less likely the school was to find the report and

its recommendations helpful. Similarly, more grade 3 schools felt that the recommendations were not specific enough and reported finding it difficult to action the inspection team's recommendations: these findings offer some explanation as to why more grade 3 schools were dissatisfied with the inspection than those schools which achieved a higher grade. They also highlight a possible need for training for inspectors to deliver more specific, practical and sharply- focussed advice for grade 3 schools. This might also reduce the small number of respondents who thought the inspection process was superficial, a finding more prevalent amongst primary and grade 3 schools.

The main perceived benefit of the inspection was considered to be, not so much the *identification* of improvement areas, but rather the *confirmation* or *validation* of areas that schools had previously identified in their own self-evaluation. Indeed, three-quarters of survey respondents thought the inspection process was more about accountability than inspection. While many perceived accountability and confirmation to be valuable, and an aid to prioritising target areas, others felt it had not helped to identify new improvement issues, and this was particularly evident amongst grade 3 schools.

Although many schools commented on the fact that it was too early to see evidence of the impact of inspection, and it was hard to disentangle the inspection from the entire process (that is, including the initial stages of self-evaluation and completion of the SEF), two-thirds of the survey respondents reported that there had been some impact from actions subsequent to Ofsted's recommendations.

Identifying impact is difficult because there are many factors that contribute to school improvement. There are also complex relationships between these various factors, so that self-evaluation can contribute to inspection outcomes and vice versa: and, even though, as discussed above, the majority view was that the impact of the inspection was primarily focussed on the confirmation and validation of the school's self-evaluation, it is important to acknowledge that it is precisely in this capacity that it contributes to school improvement. Schools identified factors such as staff commitment, communication between staff and senior management, self-evaluation and school ethos as the major contributors to school improvement, and saw the inspection as an integral element of this when it confirmed self-evaluation.

Strand 2 of this research evaluation, to be completed in the school year 2006-7, will investigate these relationships and questions further, with larger data collections, and will be able to make use of the first year of pupil and student outcomes data since the new inspections were introduced. In the meantime the survey and case-study findings presented in this report should provide plenty of 'food for thought' for those who carry out, experience, and make judgements about s5 inspections and their findings.

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