

Shaping the future of school inspection

Since 1992, Ofsted inspectors have visited schools, colleges, and other education establishments to grade them against a framework. Although the framework has undergone several updates, the inspection’s basic premise has stayed the same: inspectors visit the school, watch lessons, interview teachers and students, look at data, and then create a report with a graded judgement. The leadership of Ofsted changed in January 2024 when Sir Martyn Oliver became His Majesty’s Chief Inspector. Since taking up the post, Sir Oliver has launched ‘Ofsted Big Listen’ partly in response to scrutiny following the tragic death of headteacher Ruth Perry in January 2023.

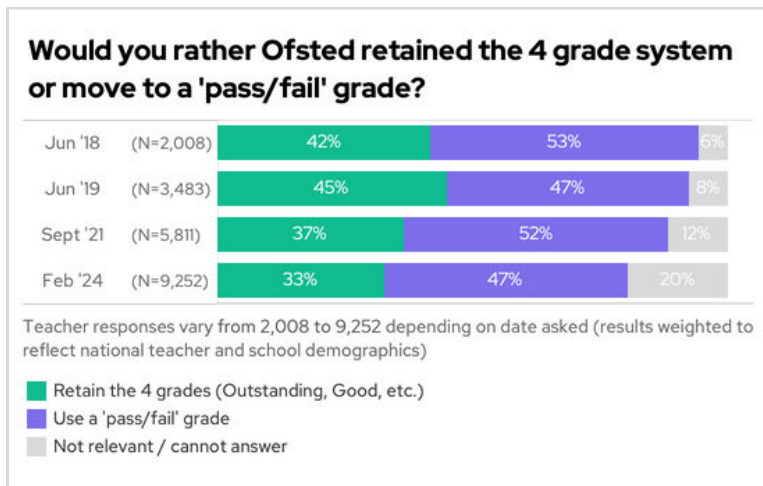
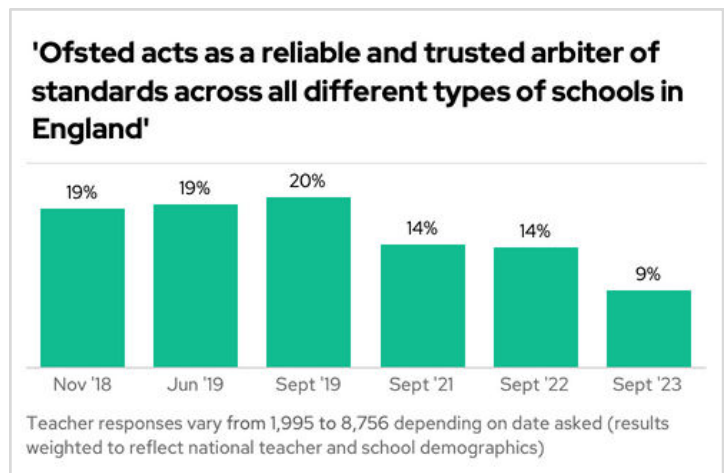
Trust in Ofsted

Over time, support for Ofsted has dropped. Since 2018, in ‘outstanding’ schools, those strongly agreeing or agreeing that Ofsted is a reliable arbiter has dropped **16 percentage points**, in ‘good’ schools **8 percentage points**, and in RI or ‘inadequate’ schools **7 percentage points**.

Enthusiasm for the four-grade system

When asked to choose between a four grade system, or a pass/fail grading, **59%** of teachers opted for a change to pass/fail. When breaking this down by seniority, it was

headteachers and senior leaders who were the most likely to say they wanted to move to pass/fail (65%), with middle leaders and classroom teachers more closely aligned (59% and 57%). There are slightly more teachers in RI/inadequate schools who would choose to retain the current grading system moving to a pass/fail judgement when compared to teachers in ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ schools (45% vs 40%).



What is notable is the increase over time in the teachers opting ‘don’t know/cannot answer’ for this question: **9%** in 2018 to **20%** in 2024. This perhaps speaks to a desire for a larger reformation beyond the gradings used.

How would abolishing Ofsted change what teachers do?

Teachers on Teacher Tapp were asked to describe, in their own words, how their working lives would change if Ofsted was abolished. Around 1 in 7 said that they’d do nothing differently: *“I don’t do things just for Ofsted, neither do my school.”*

The remaining responses mainly fell into two categories: ‘stress’ and ‘performative tasks’.

- Stress and anxiety:** Teachers talked about the mental load of preparing for inspection and the specific pressures on school leadership who feel their jobs are at stake: *“Worrying about the impact that the Ofsted judgement has on each school community and how stressful staff find the current process.”*
- Performative tasks:** A significant number of teachers talked about *“pointless admin just for Ofsted”*, including *“duplicating paperwork”* and writing lengthy lesson plans.

From this, we may infer that people believe if Ofsted were abolished there would be less stress and anxiety, and fewer performative tasks.

