

Ofsted – inspections under the microscope

In September the new school year started with an important tweak to Ofsted inspections: [the removal of single-word judgements](#).

But that's not all. More changes are coming in the shape of 'Report Cards', due to launch in September 2025.

But how do teachers feel about these changes? We asked questions to dig into the bigger issues around inspections, including what matters to teachers about inspectors, how results should be used and what should go into report cards?

The Results: What did 11,000 teachers say?

Using Teacher Tapp, we asked our panel of over 11,000 teachers fourteen questions about Ofsted. Some questions went to all teachers, some were split so teachers saw different questions. Here's what we learned:

1. Inspection Length

Only a third (35%) of teachers agreed that inspections could accurately assess a school in three days or fewer, with 5% strongly agreeing

To understand views on Ofsted, we started with a fundamental question: Can an inspection accurately assess a school's performance in just three days?

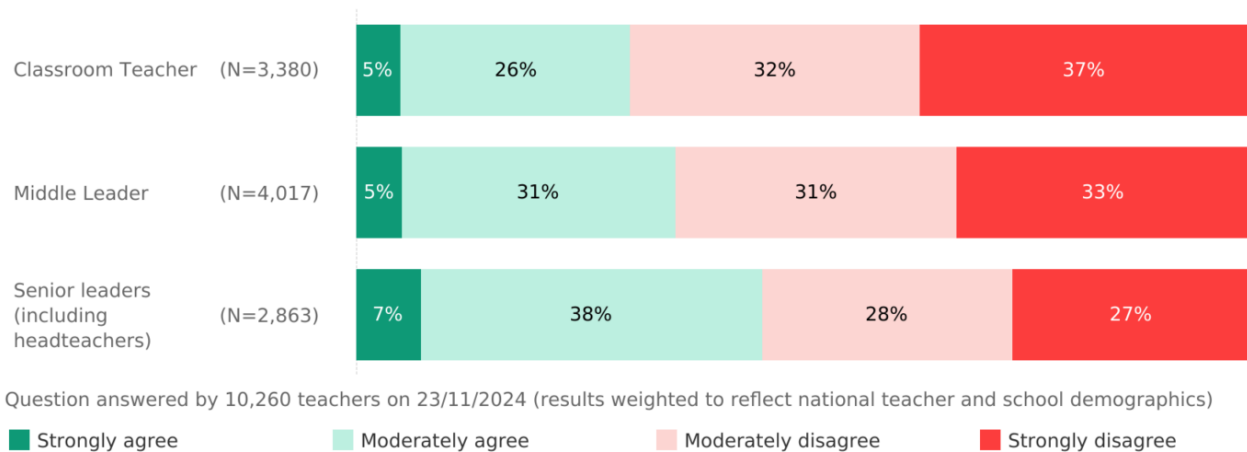
This question matters because if teachers don't believe it's possible, any inspection framework—no matter how well-designed—will face resistance. The key is understanding how many teachers feel this way.

The answer? Just 35% of teachers felt it was possible, with only 5% feeling strongly positive.

However, there's a notable divide between roles. Senior leaders were more optimistic, with 45% believing inspections could work within three days. In contrast, only 31% of classroom teachers agreed. This surprised us as it's often school leaders who express the most consternation about Ofsted in the newspapers and on stages at events – but it shows a belief

in inspection more broadly is at its lowest among classroom teachers.

'It is possible for an inspection to accurately assess a school's performance in a visit of 3 days or fewer'



How long should inspections be?

If people didn't feel that 3 or fewer days worked for a reliable inspection, how much longer would it take for people to start to think it was reliable?

In the end, no matter what, 41% of teachers felt that inspections could not accurately assess a school's performance with an inspection of any length. Again, this tells us that no matter what Ofsted does, there will be an amount of scepticism towards its work.

A huge 41% of teachers felt that you cannot accurately assess a school's performance with an inspection of any length.

Among those who do believe an inspection can be accurate, opinions are split. Just over half (54%) felt three days or fewer would suffice, while 46% believed a longer inspection would be needed.

However, longer inspections come with a higher price tag—and there's little appetite in government to spend more on the process. While extending inspections might win over some sceptics, it's unlikely to happen anytime soon.

2. The 'super inspector'

Teachers deemed it 'very important' for inspectors to have school context knowledge (84%), phase expertise (80%) and subject expertise (60%).

Inspection accuracy isn't just about length, though— perception of its reliability also hinges on the expertise of the inspectors themselves.

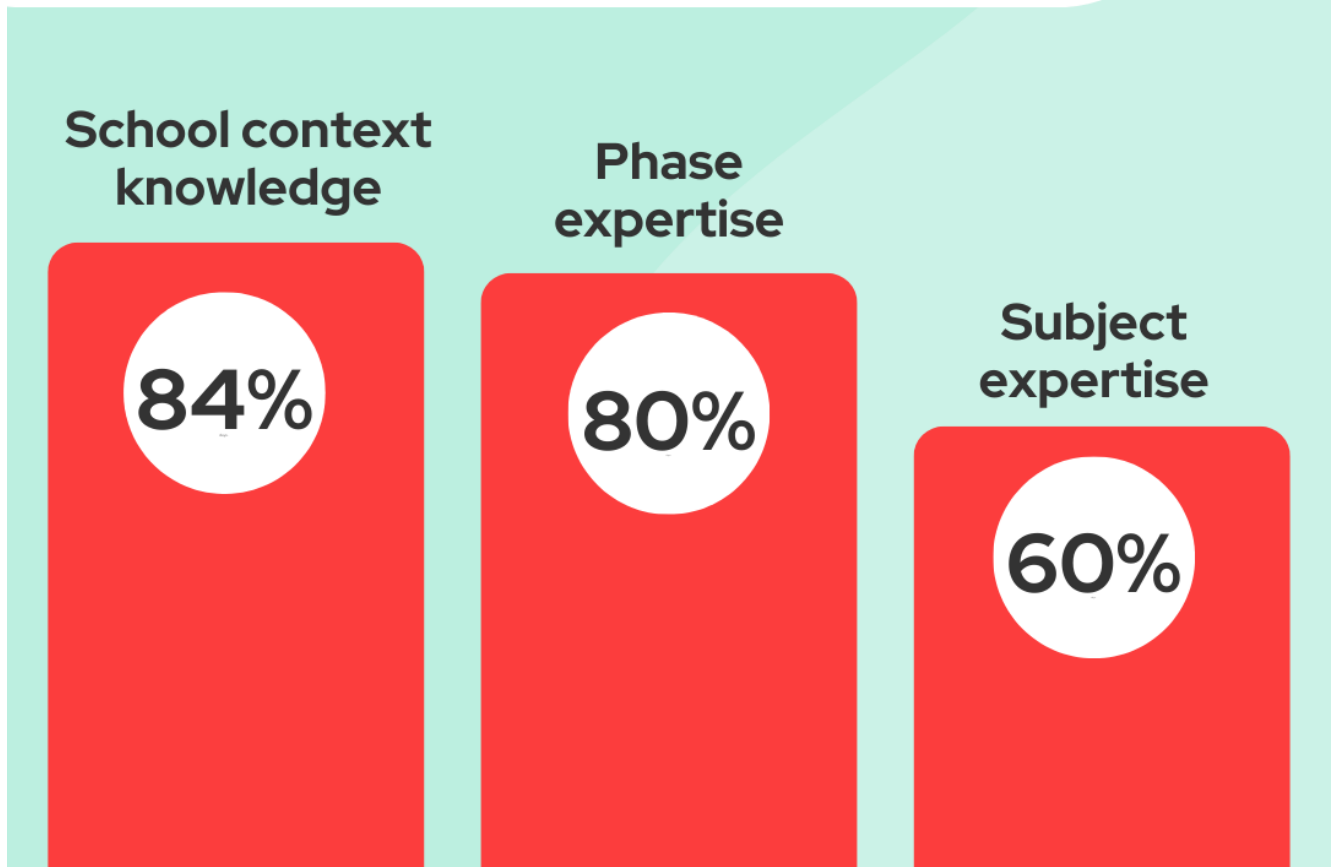
When asked to consider all the factors influencing inspection accuracy, only 10% of teachers saw inspection length as the most important. Instead, top priorities were understanding the school's local context (55%) and having teaching experience (54%).

Given this, what do teachers believe inspectors need to accurately assess a school's performance? The overwhelming consensus was that inspectors must have:

- Knowledge of the school's context (84% deemed this very important)
- Phase expertise (80%)
- Subject expertise (60%)

These findings highlight that while timing plays a role, the expertise and insight of inspectors are what teachers value most for a fair and reliable assessment.

What is 'very important' for an Inspector to have to accurately assess a school's performance?



So what should Ofsted do to ensure the right inspectors are in the right schools?

Matching inspectors to inspections does already happen in some form before an inspection, but one solution could be to include more transparency about the qualifications and experience held by Ofsted inspectors, which would reassure teachers that those who carry out the inspection are well suited to do so.

3. Inspection Consequences?

We wanted to understand how teachers feel about the consequences of Ofsted inspections—specifically, whether they should lead to interventions, both positive (like celebrating success) and negative (like academy orders or leadership changes). The aim was to see whether teachers are more comfortable with “good” consequences, even if they

question the reliability of the grades.

The results suggest a fascinating human response: teachers are far more willing to accept positive outcomes than negative ones, even when reliability is in doubt. This reflects a well-documented psychological phenomenon, called loss aversion – where people are naturally more comfortable with rewards than punishments, even under uncertain conditions. (Mainly because we don't like losing things whereas we don't mind gaining things!)

Here are the key findings:

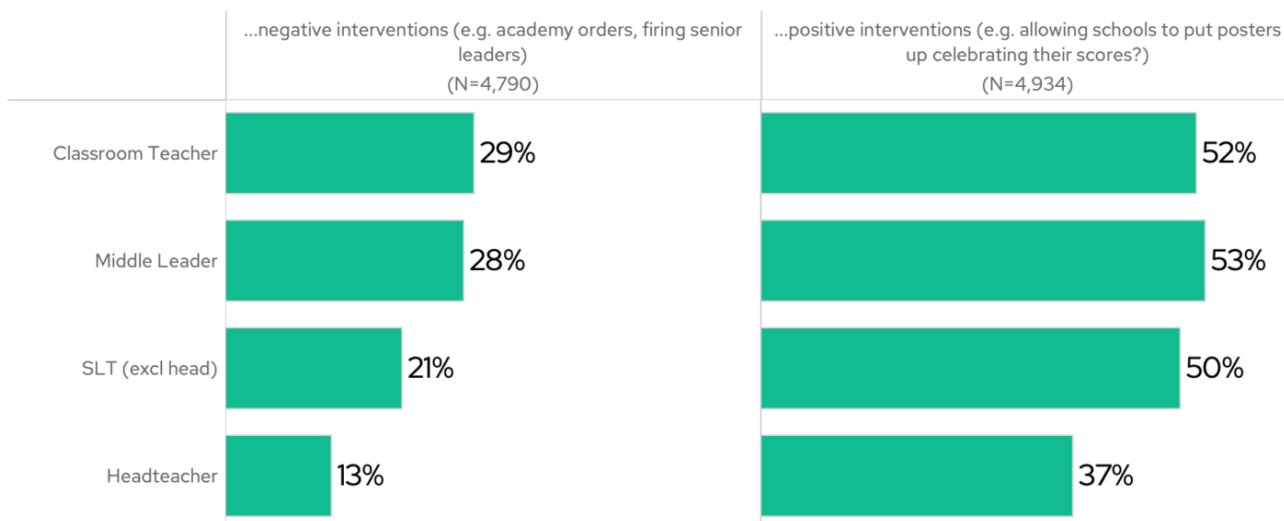
- Classroom teachers were the most split. While 52% supported positive consequences, only 29% backed negative ones.
- Headteachers were the least supportive of both. Just 37% were in favour of positive interventions, and only 13% supported negative ones.

Given leaders were more likely to think the judgments could be reliable it's interesting that they nevertheless were the least happy with any outcomes!

Although 52% of classroom teachers supported positive interventions, just 29% supported negative interventions.

This difference highlights how teachers' trust in inspection outcomes plays out in practice. Even when Ofsted grades are seen as unreliable, there's a natural willingness to embrace positive news—but a far greater scepticism (and caution) when it comes to negative consequences.

If Ofsted grades were reliable, should they be used for...



Question answered by 4,790 to 4,934 teachers on 24/11/2024 (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

4. Who should be using the Ofsted grades?

Out of all the groups, it was politicians who came out top, with 39% of primary and 26% of secondary teachers believing the grades would be 'very useful' to them.

Ofsted grades are often defended as being essential for parents choosing schools. But do teachers agree that parents would find even reliable grades useful? It turns out, not really.

Only 17% of primary teachers and just 10% of secondary teachers believed parents would find reliable Ofsted grades very useful. This challenges one of the key justifications for the existence of inspections: helping parents make informed decisions.

So, who do teachers think would benefit most? Surprisingly, politicians topped the list.

39% of primary teachers and 26% of secondary teachers believed reliable grades would be very useful to politicians.

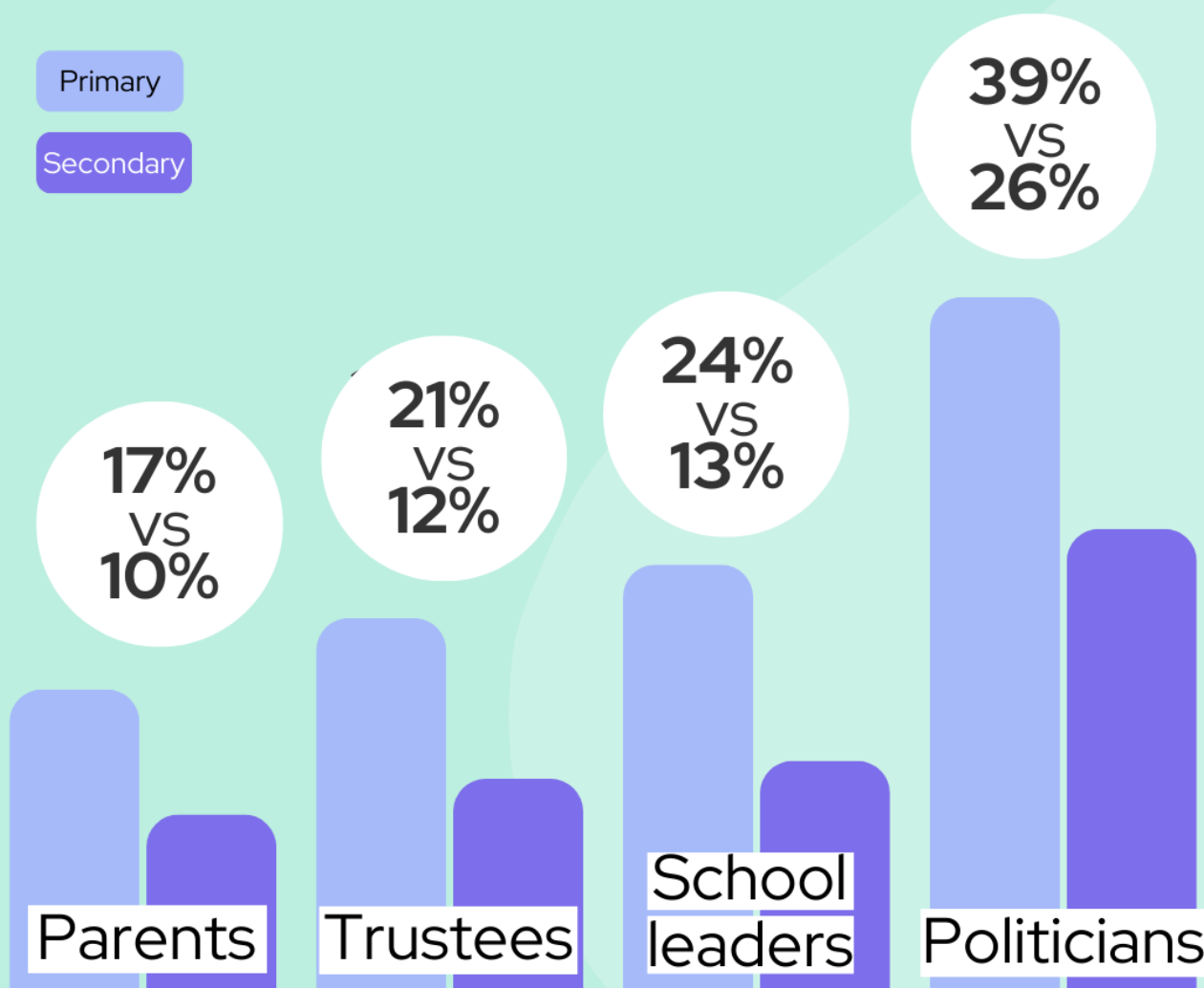
If the groups who inspections are designed to help (like parents) aren't seen as benefiting, but groups further removed (like politicians) are, it raises an important question—who are inspections really for? And does this make it even harder to prove their legitimacy to the people faced with undergoing them?

Who would reliable Ofsted grades be 'very useful' for?



Primary

Secondary



5. New inspections are coming...what should they inspect?

Last month, the Financial Times reported on a [leaked Ofsted proposal](#) to inspect ten areas of school life and grade each one on a five-point scale. While we don't know if this will happen, we decided to dig into your views on:

1. Which of the 10 areas can be reliably inspected?
2. Which of the 10 areas should be inspected?

We assumed teachers would only support inspections of areas they thought could be reliably assessed. We were wrong!

The Gaps Between "Should" and "Could"

At both primary and secondary levels, five areas emerged as the ones felt should be inspected:

- Safeguarding (60% prim, 70% sec)
- Leadership (49%, 61%)
- Behaviour and values (42%, 56%)
- Curriculum (40%, 51%)
- Teaching (38%, 51%)

However, confidence in Ofsted's ability to reliably inspect these areas was far lower. For example:

- Safeguarding: 70% of secondary teachers said it should be inspected, but only 47% believed it could be done reliably.
- Leadership: 61% of secondary teachers felt it should be inspected, yet only 26% thought it could be.
- Similar gaps appeared across behaviour, curriculum, and teaching—underscoring significant scepticism about the accuracy of inspections.

A Bigger Gap at Primary

What's particularly striking is that the reliability gaps are consistent across both primary and secondary schools. Whether it's safeguarding, leadership, behaviour, or teaching, teachers in both phases agree these areas should be inspected, but far fewer believe inspections can assess them accurately.

This shared scepticism suggests a system-wide issue: while the priorities remain the same, teachers' trust in Ofsted's ability to deliver fair and accurate judgements is fragile at best.

Should There Even Be Grades?

When asked if inspections should include any grading at all, some teachers pushed back:

- 34% of primary teachers would prefer a grade-free system.
- 23% of secondary teachers agreed.

These findings highlight a core tension. Teachers broadly support inspections of critical areas, but without confidence in their reliability, trust remains fragile. That said, there's not a great deal of support for no grades at all.

What does this mean for Ofsted?

The results make one thing clear: Ofsted will struggle to design an inspection system that wins teachers' trust.

Teachers agree that key areas like safeguarding, leadership, and teaching should be inspected—but few believe Ofsted can do so reliably, especially for leadership and teaching. A significant 41% think no inspection, regardless of length or expertise, can ever be accurate. Even those who accept inspections lean heavily towards positive consequences while

avoiding negative ones.

Then there's the purpose problem. While inspections are framed as tools for parents, only 17% of primary and 10% of secondary teachers think parents find grades useful. Instead, teachers see politicians as the main beneficiaries. If the system doesn't serve its intended purpose, how can it win the trust of those being judged?

If Ofsted truly wants teachers on board, it's not just the framework that needs to change—it's trust that needs rebuilding.