

Book Scrutiny & Ofsted: Will it be a burden?

Every new school inspection framework has unintended consequences and, if we were betting types, we'd bet that book scrutiny will be at the root of the next time-gobbling activity.

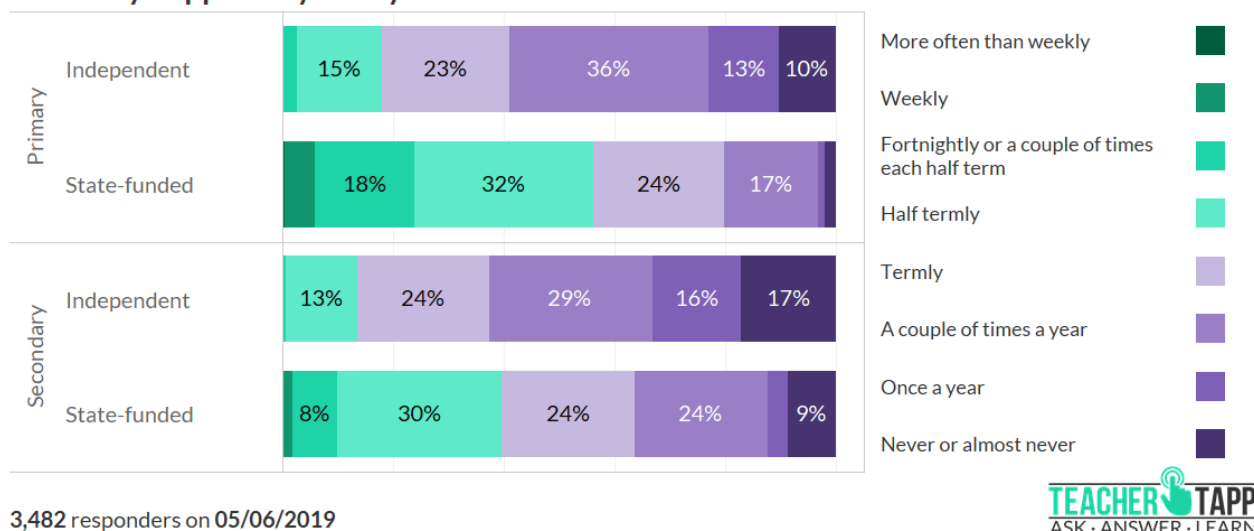
Ofsted have announced that book or work scrutiny will be an important part of the new inspection framework ([from para 102 here](#)). But how can headteachers feel secure that pupil books are fit for inspection? By ensuring regular book inspection itself, of course!

We wanted to create a baseline, against which we can check how book scrutiny in schools changes over the next few years in response to Ofsted. Let's start by finding out how frequently pupil work is reviewed by senior leadership or other teachers.

In state-funded primary schools, over one-in-five teachers have their pupils' work reviewed at least once a fortnight.

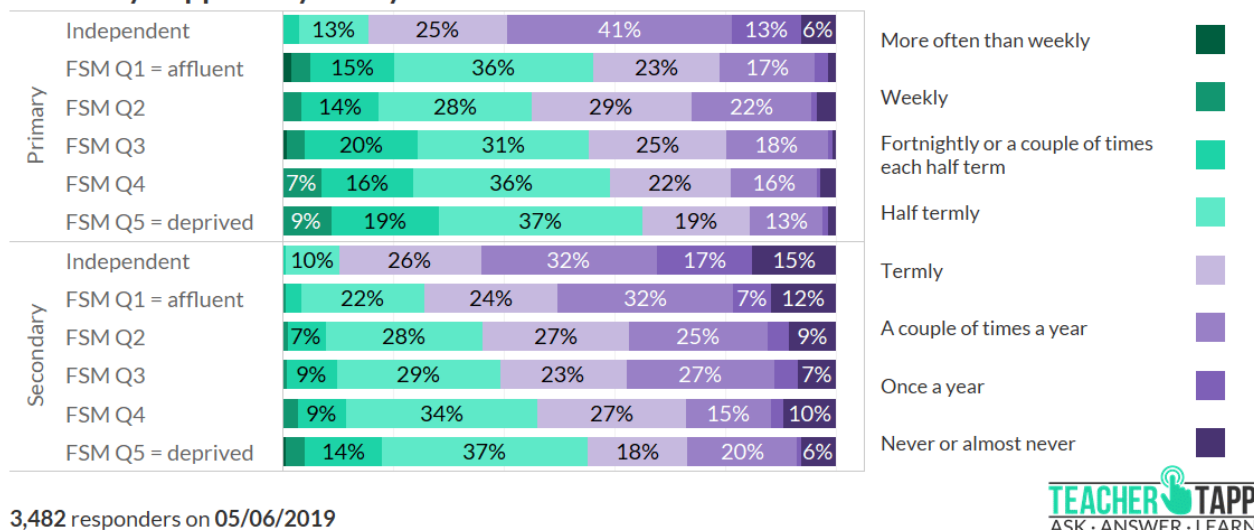
This frequency of review is essentially unheard of in the private sector. It is also far less common in state secondary schools. Almost one-in-five teachers in the independent secondary sector say they don't have book scrutiny at all! As is also the case in almost one-in-ten state schools.

Over the next three days we are asking questions about book scrutiny! This is when another teacher/SLT reviews the standard of pupil work in books. How often does this currently happen to you in your school?



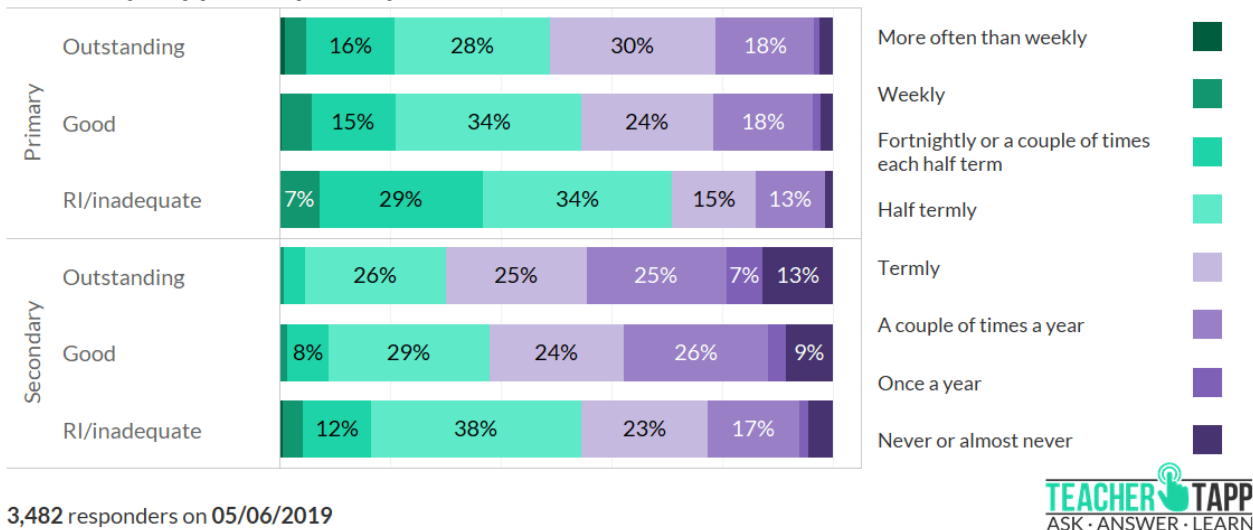
The frequency of book scrutiny also depends on the type of school in which you teach. In the most affluent secondaries, book scrutinies are termly or less, whereas it is typically half-termly in more disadvantaged schools.

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This could be a part of wider 'school improvement' activities in these schools as they are more commonly labelled as requires improvement and inadequate – and we see book scrutiny is more common in those schools too.

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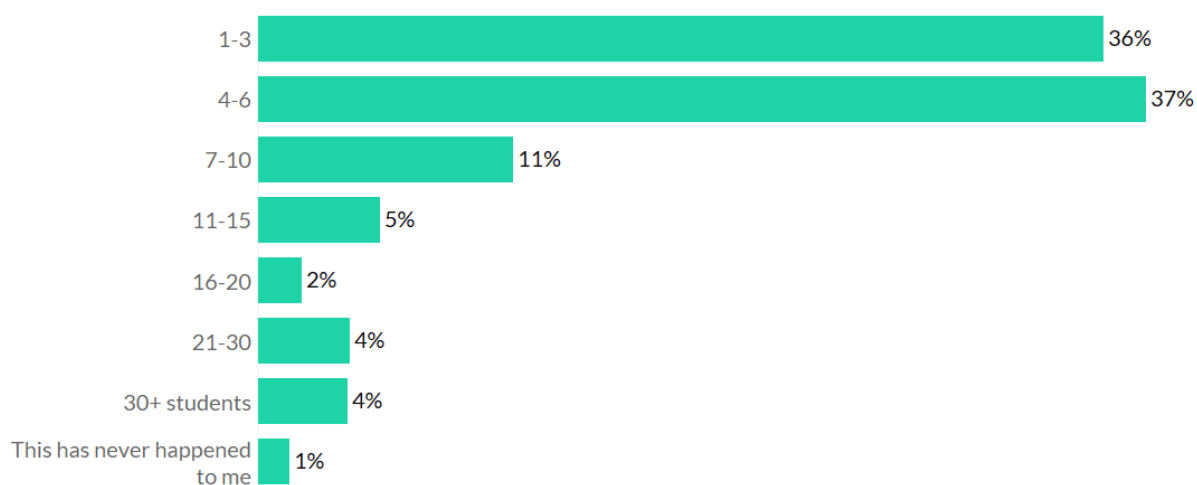


How many books are reviewed in scrutiny?

Every time books are taken in there's a workload for the person who has to review them, as well as for the teacher who marks them. Take too few, and it's hard to get an accurate sense of what's going on in a class (as you may have taken some outliers). Take too many and the time spent on the review will increase.

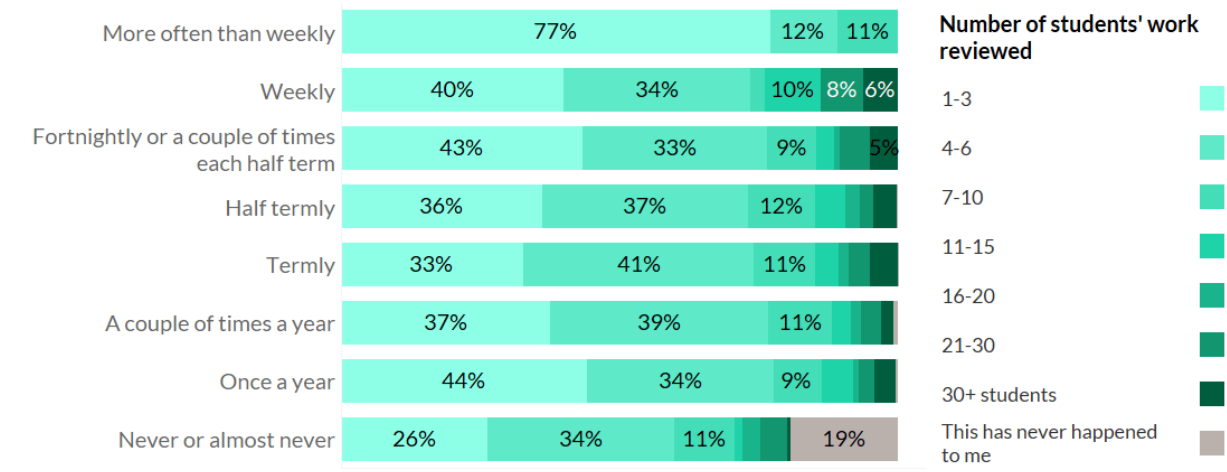
In more than a third of cases, SLT are reviewing just 1-3 books. This is tiny!

Think about the last time a colleague/SLT reviewed the standard of your students' work in books (i.e. book scrutiny). How many students' work were reviewed?



And when we looked, even in schools where scrutiny only happens a couple of times or once a year, it is still regularly the case that only 1-3 books are looked at. This sounds about as reliable as Ofsted's plan for book scrutiny!

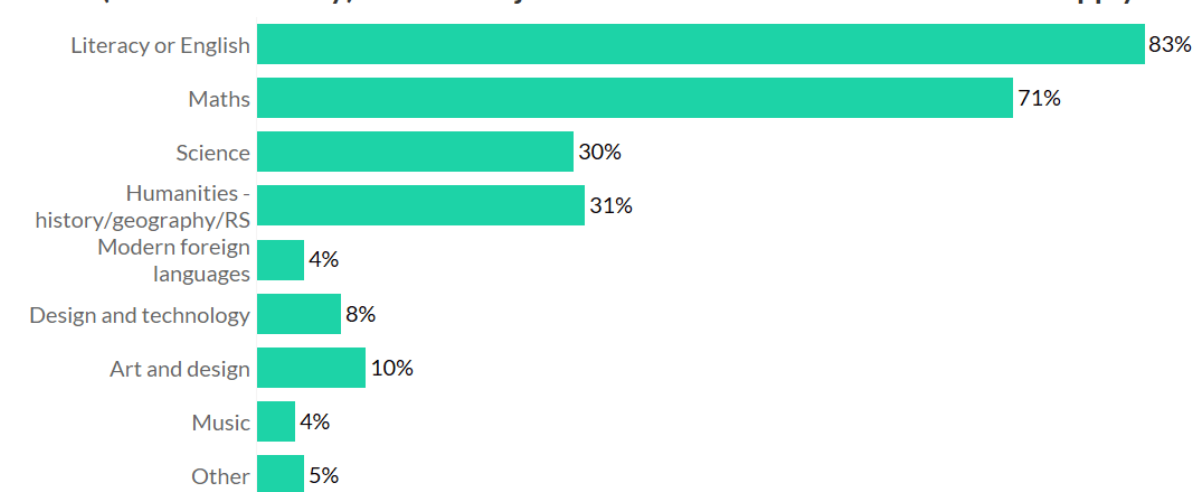
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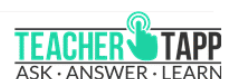
3,482 responders on 05/06/2019

At primary we found the focus is predominantly on English/literacy and maths books. With modern foreign language work practically ignored. So much for a broad and balanced curriculum!

Think about the last time a colleague/SLT reviewed the standard of students' work in books (i.e. book scrutiny). Which subjects did it focus on? Please tick all that apply.

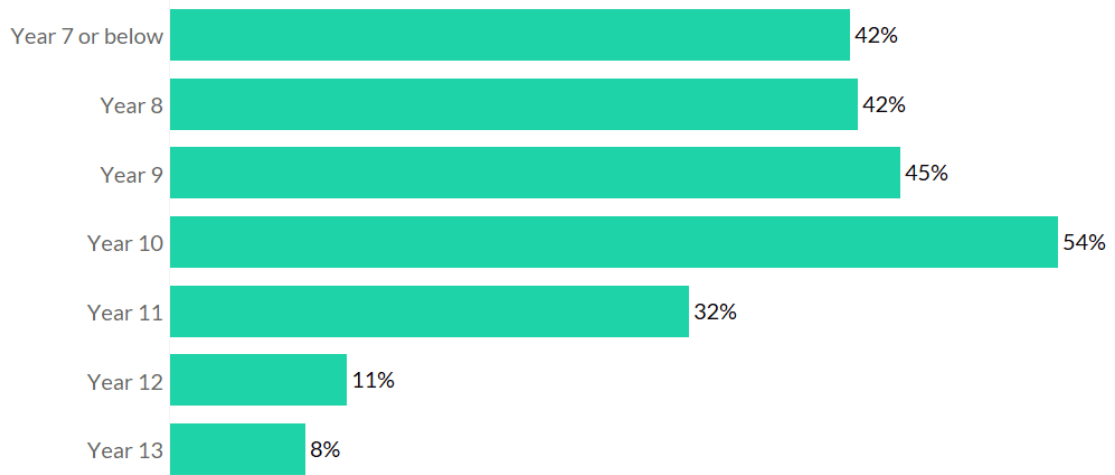


980 responders on 06/06/2019



At secondary, we asked after Year 11 had already gone so this may be a bit skewed, but we see a more even focus with only a marginal focus on KS4 (Year 10).

Think about the last time a colleague/SLT reviewed the standard of your students' work in books (i.e. book scrutiny). Which year groups did it focus on? Please tick all that apply.



1,967 responders on 06/06/2019

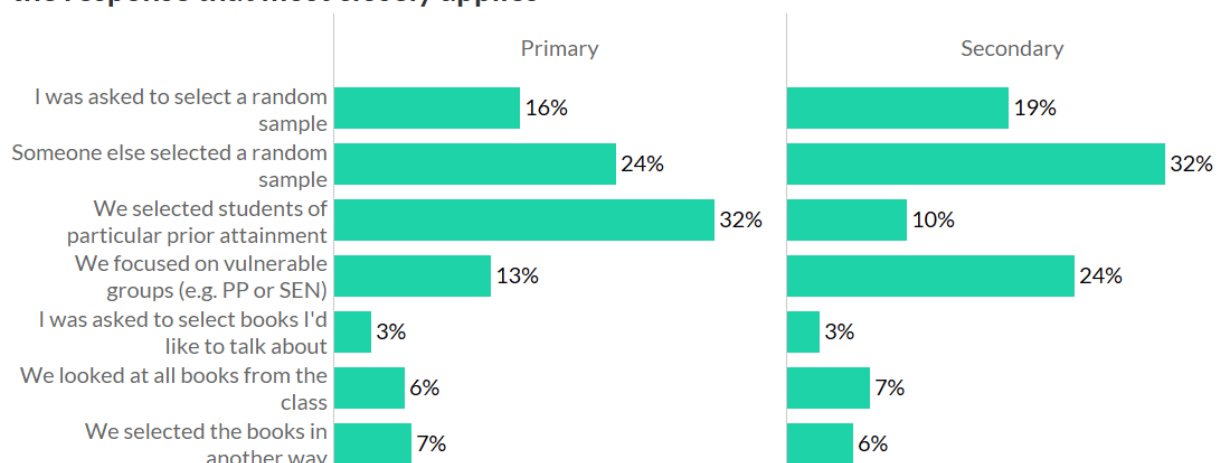


Random vs Selection

How are schools selecting the books they check? In a small percentage of schools the teacher is asked to select a 'random sample'. Do we really think they pick randomly? Really?

In primary the most popular answers was that students of particular prior attainment were selected, whereas secondary schools had another staff member select a random sample.

Think about the last time a colleague/SLT reviewed the standard of your students' work in books (i.e. book scrutiny). How was it decided which work would be reviewed? Tick the response that most closely applies

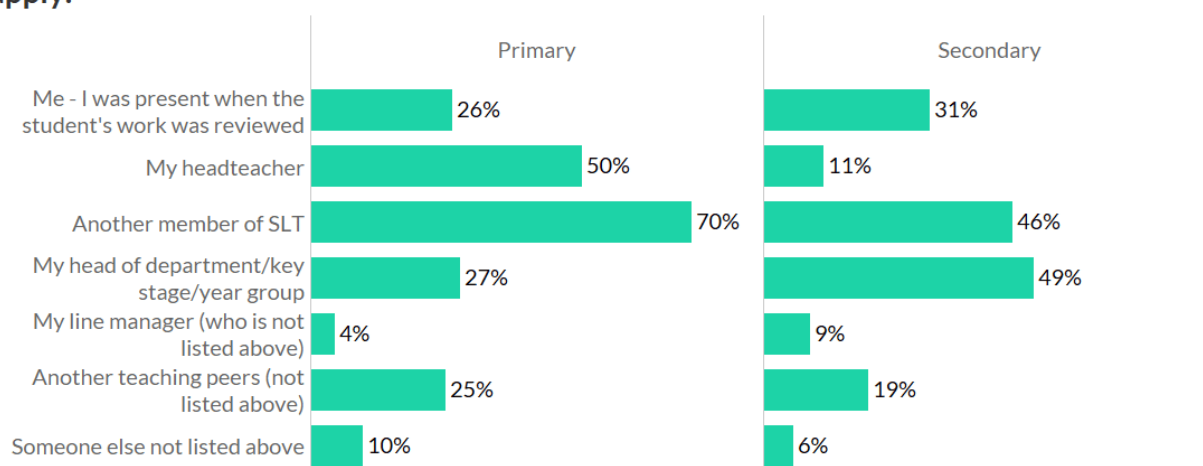


3,034 responders on 07/06/2019

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Most teachers are not present when the book scrutiny happens. Just 26% of primary and 31% of secondary staff were in on the review. On the one hand, this is efficient. Why have the staff member standing around when they could be teaching? On the other hand, it misses an important opportunity for adding context and for the teacher to learn from the scrutiny.

Think about the last time a colleague/SLT reviewed the standard of your students' work in books (i.e. book scrutiny). Who was present when this happened? Please tick all that apply.



2,861 responders on 06/06/2019

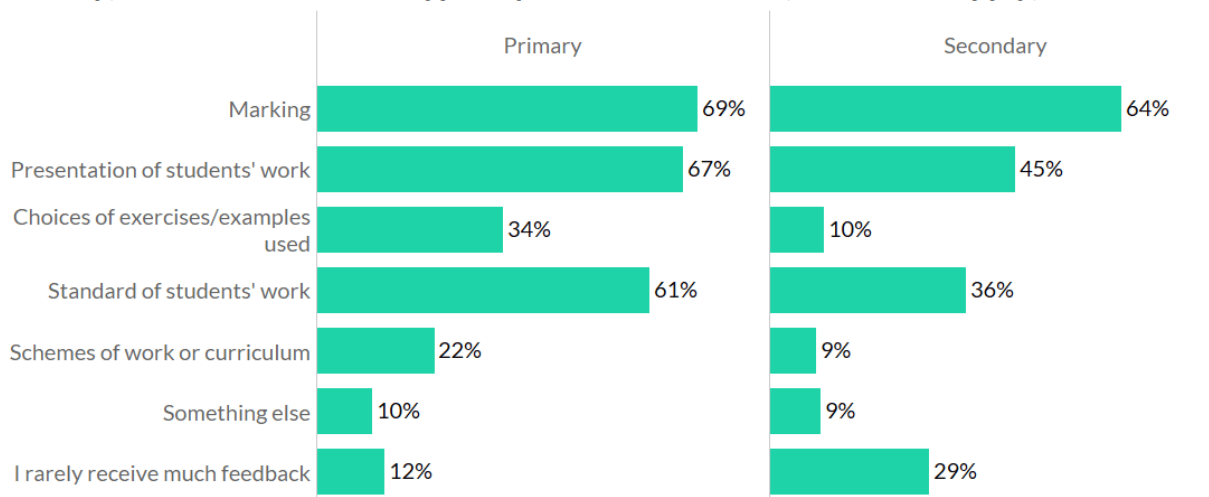
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Closing the Feedback Loop

What is it that SLT are looking for? Teachers say their 'marking' is the main focus of a review, closely followed by the presentation of students' work.

Primary teachers felt the standard of students' work was highlighted a substantial proportion of the time (61%) but only around a third of secondary teachers agreed. How depressing that presentation is looked at more than quality!

When a colleague/SLT reviews the standard of student work in books (i.e. book scrutiny), the feedback I most typically receive is about... (tick all that apply)



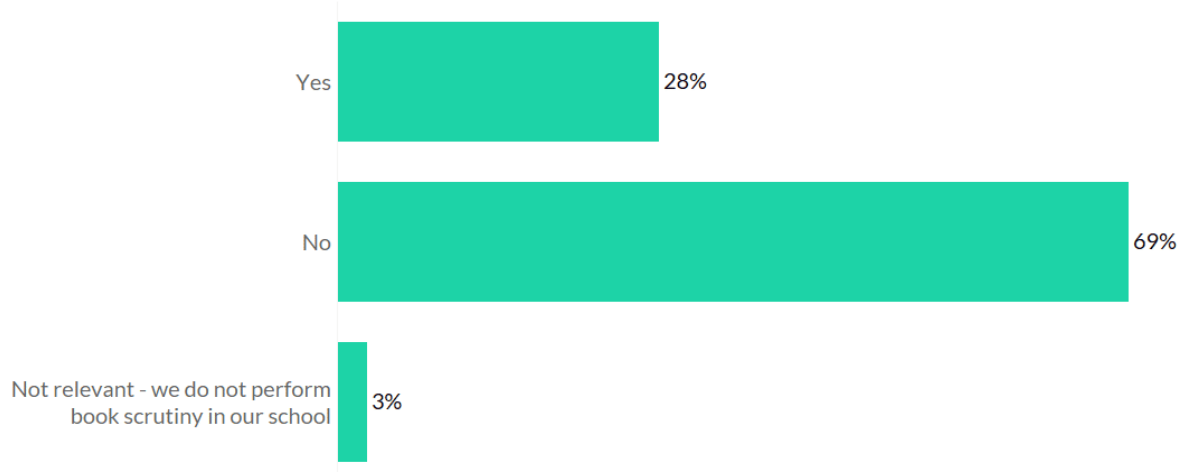
3,303 responders on 05/06/2019



Does book scrutiny affect your pay? Yes, sometimes.

In 28% of schools, book scrutiny is part of a teacher's overall performance management. This did not vary by school type or Ofsted category.

Reviewing students' books with a colleague or SLT (i.e. book scrutiny) is part of my performance management



3,135 responders on 07/06/2019

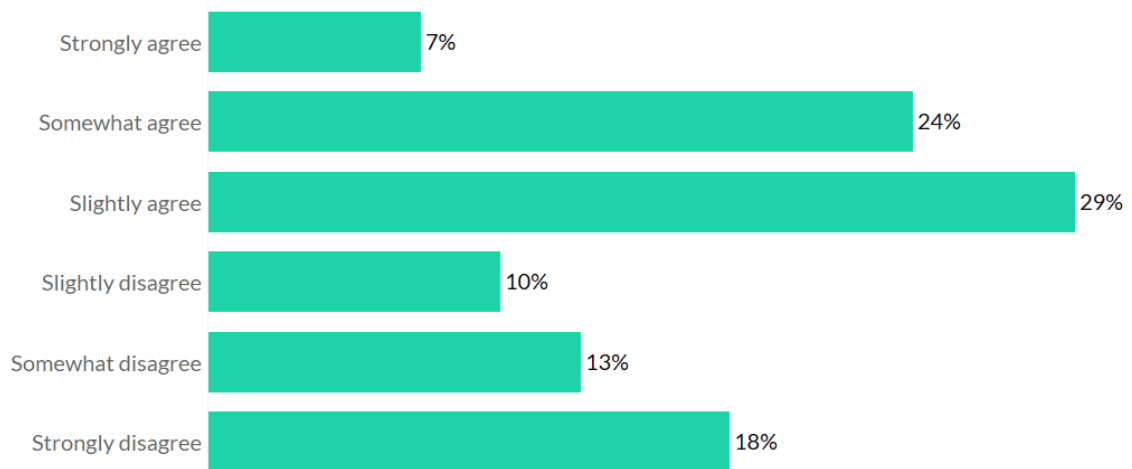


Finally, what's the point of book scrutiny?

Here's a positive point: 60% of teachers feel that book scrutiny helps improve their teaching.

Primary teachers are A LOT more positive about reviewing students' work than secondary ones. Of course, one advantage they have is that their own senior leadership team is much more likely to understand the students' work since primary teachers teach most subjects. In secondary schools, scrutiny is often carried out by a non-specialists.

Reviewing students' books with a colleague or SLT (i.e. book scrutiny) helps me to improve my teaching

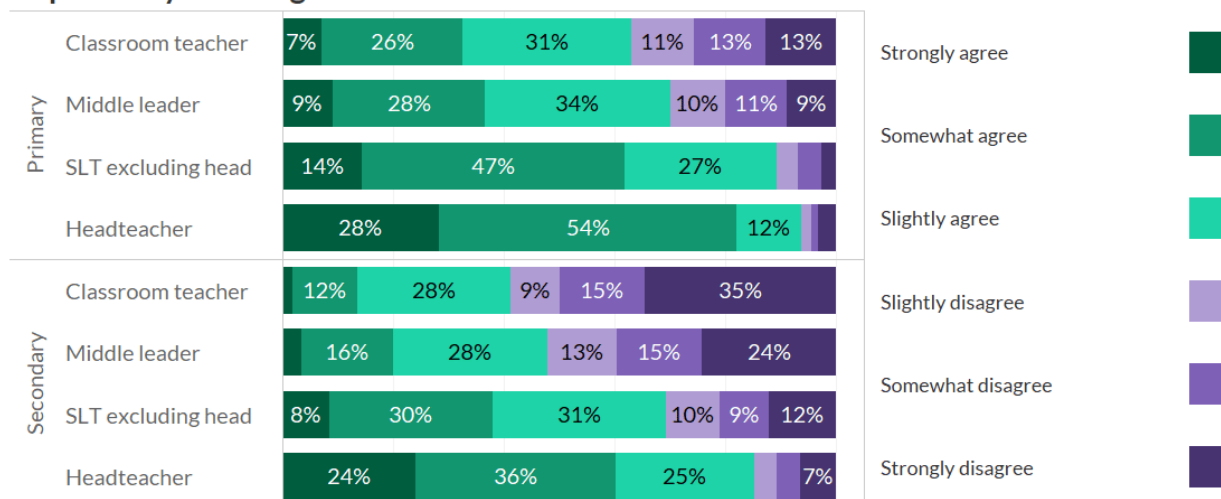


3,220 responders on 05/06/2019



However, as is often the case, the less you actually teach, the more likely you are to be positive about book scrutiny! Headteachers overwhelmingly think it is helpful; 6-in-10 secondary teachers without any management responsibilities feel it is not.

Reviewing students' books with a colleague or SLT (i.e. book scrutiny) helps me to improve my teaching



3,220 responders on 05/06/2019



Note also that 35% of secondary classroom teachers strongly disagree that book scrutiny helps their teaching, and middle leaders are not far behind in their negativity. Heads in the secondary sector, meanwhile, remain reasonably positive.

Finally, finally... we know you love the tips so here is what was on the app last week:

[Classroom research and cargo cult](#)

[Same policy, different behavioural outcomes](#)

[Classroom displays](#)

[Teacher effectiveness](#)

[The importance of oral teaching](#)

[Critical thinking](#)