

## Written Evidence by Parentkind

1. Seen as the voice of parents in relation to children's education, Parentkind is one of the largest federated charities in the UK. Its network of almost 13,000 Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), and more than 100,000 parent volunteers, is the strongest of advocates for the delivery of a world class education system. Its member PTAs account for approaching 6% of all UK charities and raised 2.3% of all charitable giving in 2022. Despite the pandemic, PTAs have raised more than £1 billion during the past decade to provide their schools with vital educational equipment, services and opportunities, placing the impact of Parentkind alongside some of the largest charities in the UK.

2. To respond to the inquiry and provide the Education Select Committee with evidence of parent voice, Parentkind ran a poll on Ofsted's inspection of schools. It was carried out online between 20th June and 5th July 2023. Recruitment was conducted through Parentkind's panel of parent contacts and through social media. Responses from both channels were almost identical. In total, 819 parents with school-aged children in England responded. The results of the parent poll are used to answer the call for evidence below.

### **The usefulness of Ofsted inspections and inspection reports, and whether inspections are carried out in sufficient depth to meet the expectations of schools, governors and parents.**

3. An emerging theme from the polling results is that parents value Ofsted inspections in principle, as a way of holding schools to account, but they have reservations about what this looks like in practice. A majority of parents would therefore be amenable to a reform of the school's inspectorate, but would be less likely to support its abolition. Indeed, more than six in ten parents (62%) value having an inspection body assessing how well their child's school is performing, versus only just over one quarter (26%) who disagree.

4. In terms of the usefulness of inspection reports and their depth, the poll found that only 24% agree that reports are useful to them as parents, where nearly six in ten (59%) disagree. The high degree of parental scepticism about the value of Ofsted reports is not entirely due to accessibility barriers. More parents (40%) agree that reports are easy to understand than disagree (36%). Slightly more parents (39%) don't look at Ofsted reports at all when choosing a school for their child than do (38%), though an additional 17% look at the overall grade without reading the rest of the report, so the proportion of parents interacting with the school's Ofsted report to some degree is higher than those who say they do not consider it at all.

5. When it comes to questions about the usefulness of specific aspects of Ofsted's inspection reports, only a quarter of parents (25%) agree that reports help them to understand a school's strengths and weaknesses, but more than six in ten (61%) disagree. Similar proportions (23% versus 60%) agree or disagree that reports help a school to make improvements to the quality of education. More fundamentally, as small a proportion as 17% of parents agree that Ofsted reports tell them the most important things they need to know about a school's performance, against 71% who disagree (out of which almost half of all parents indicate that they strongly disagree). There is similarly stark parental analysis of whether or not reports provide an accurate assessment of a school's performance. Only 13% agree with this proposition, but more than three quarters (76%) disagree, and almost half (48%) disagree strongly. Further research would be needed to understand exactly why parents are dubious that Ofsted's appraisal of schools is accurate.

6. Parents generally do not consider a school's latest Ofsted inspection to be the most important factor when considering a school for their child. Instead, they prioritise the school offering a broad and balanced curriculum (60%), its reputation (43%), the ease of travel to the school (39%) and the views of parents who have a child at the school (35%). The latest Ofsted report came much further down the list, selected by just 8% of parents.

7. It's possible to surmise from the polling that a key reason that parents largely do not find Ofsted reports useful or sufficiently in-depth is because they don't reflect what parents' concerns are or what they wish to see in the reports. This is a fairer conclusion to draw than believing that parents are disengaged from the inspection process altogether. Indeed, most parents (86%) agree, and more than half (56%) strongly agree, that it's important for parents to be informed about school inspections and have the opportunity to give their views. An accountability gap exists between parents wanting to be involved and consulted during the inspection process and what parents perceive in actuality. Less than a quarter (24%) agree that school inspections take into account parents' views, but more than half (51%) disagree.

8. One suggestion for how Ofsted reports could be better tailored towards the needs and expectations of parents is to include feedback about how well a school communicates and engages with parents. In Parentkind's poll, 85% indicated that they would find this useful, measured against 7% who disagree.

9. Parents also indicate that they would find changes to the way in which Ofsted results are communicated with them useful. When it comes to perhaps the most contested of questions about Ofsted's current framework, Parentkind found that only 16% of parents were satisfied by the single overall grade for the school. Nearly three quarters (72%) were dissatisfied with this model, where almost half (49%) indicated that they were 'very dissatisfied'. However, parents were more amenable to a school being awarded an overall grade plus separate grades for each of the inspection areas (such as Quality of Education, Leadership and Management). For this hypothetical model, nearly half of parents (47%) indicated their support, compared to 41% who disagreed with the proposal. A more popular option was for Ofsted to provide separate grades for each of the inspection areas without giving an overall grade for the school as a whole (which 55% of parents supported compared to 28% who disagreed with it). The most popular hypothetical inspection model was to give schools a three-month period following an inspection to fix any issues before being reinspected, with a report published after the reinspection. This was supported by 70% of respondents, with 14% registering dissatisfaction with the proposal.

**The impact of Ofsted judgements on schools and pupils, and the adequacy of the support schools can access to enable them to improve following an Ofsted judgement.**

10. Parents recognise keenly the impact of Ofsted inspections on school staff. Rightly, the whole school community can be immensely proud of an 'Outstanding' rating, but equally a 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate' rating causes concern among staff, parents and pupils. Parents therefore recognise that when an Ofsted inspection is unfavourable, it is not a label that benefits anybody, and that the inspection process should allow schools to improve on that judgment in a timely manner. The vast majority of parents (84%) agree, with a full half (50%) strongly agreeing that schools receiving low Ofsted ratings should be given the opportunity to be reassessed more quickly to demonstrate that they have resolved issues raised in the previous inspection.

11. As noted in the answer to the previous area of inquiry, there is parental scepticism in the extent to which Ofsted inspections help a school to make improvements to the quality of education

provided. Only 23% agree that this was the case, where more than twice as many (60%) disagree. Adjustments to the current model would have to be made to change the parental perception that the inspection process aids schools to make improvements.

**The impact of Ofsted inspections on workload and wellbeing for teachers, school leaders, governors and pupils, specifically relating to workload required by the inspection process, and what measures are put in place to mitigate this.**

12. Although parents are acutely aware that inspections can be stressful for school staff, they nevertheless see the value of holding schools to account. For example, only 17% of parents agree that schools with the highest Ofsted rating don't need to be inspected as frequently as others (and 71% disagree, with 51% strongly disagreeing). There could be a number of reasons for this, such as the wish to see all schools treated equally, and none placed above scrutiny; but underlying the rationale is likely to be a recognition of the fact that schools are constantly changing. Staff turnover, for example, can be considerable from one Ofsted inspection to the next. There is good evidence to show that leadership from the head teacher, for good or ill, can make a huge difference to the fortunes of a school. There may also be the sense that where there is the safety from scrutiny, standards are more likely to slip, and therefore no school should be able to avoid inspection for any longer than another school.

13. When we asked for parental views on how often schools should be inspected, we found that safeguarding inspections were prioritised. Parents tended to think that safeguarding processes should be inspected by Ofsted every year (36%) or every two years (29%). By the option of every five years, only 6% were supporting that timeframe.

14. However, parents indicated that they preferred less urgency when it came to giving schools a full graded Ofsted inspection. For that question, five years was by some distance the most popular response (selected by 34%), followed by three years (20%), four years (14%), two years (12%) and every year (6%). Parents therefore recognise a hierarchy of motivations for school inspection and would support the prioritisation of safeguarding-related Ofsted visits to schools.

15. The results show that it isn't just in the timeframe of inspections that parents wish to categorise safeguarding differently to inspections in general. Parentkind's poll presented respondents with a range of scenarios on safeguarding, asking them to indicate the level to which they agreed or disagreed with the proposal. It found that:

- 78% of parents agree (53% strongly agree) that safeguarding should be inspected separately by Ofsted and not form part of a school's overall Ofsted rating, with schools failing on safeguarding required to resolve issues within a fixed time period (14% disagreed with this proposal).
- Almost as many (71%) agree that safeguarding should be inspected and rated separately by Ofsted, with the most recent safeguarding rating included in full Ofsted reports but graded separately to the overall Ofsted rating (18% disagree).
- A smaller majority of parents (61%) agree that safeguarding should be inspected as part of overall Ofsted inspections and taken into account in the overall grade, but with failings assessed in terms of seriousness rather than automatically resulting in an overall "requires improvement" or "inadequate" rating, where 25% disagree.
- Only 25% of parents agree with the current approach (safeguarding is inspected as part of overall Ofsted inspections and any failure on safeguarding should prevent a school from being given a "good" or "outstanding" rating). Nearly six in ten parents (59%) indicate that

they disagree with this model. It was not pointed out to respondents in the question that this scenario was the current inspection model so as not to bias responses.

16. The Parentkind poll ended with a free-text question, asking respondents, “Do you have anything else you would like to add about inspections, or how they could be changed?” Several of the responses touched on the stressful and adversarial nature of inspections as perceived by the respondents. The top themes to emerge were:

- Ofsted inspections should be more collaborative/supportive (127 mentions)
- The inspection system needs overhauling/is not fit for purpose (114 mentions)
- Ofsted inspections are too pressurised and stressful for teachers (109 mentions)
- Reports don't truly represent how good the school is (108 mentions)
- Additional factors should be taken into account in inspections (70 mentions)
- The inspection system has the wrong priorities (58 mentions)

#### **The impact of the new Education Inspection Framework introduced in 2019**

17. This question was beyond the scope of the parent poll that Parentkind recently conducted. However, Parentkind put out a survey to parents in 2019 when the new Education Inspection Framework was consulted on. It found that, out of 316 parents, 83% agreed that Ofsted's proposed shift towards an assessment of curriculum and away from a focus on exam results is a good approach. Parentkind may return to researching this area in future.

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