

Written evidence submitted by Schools North East

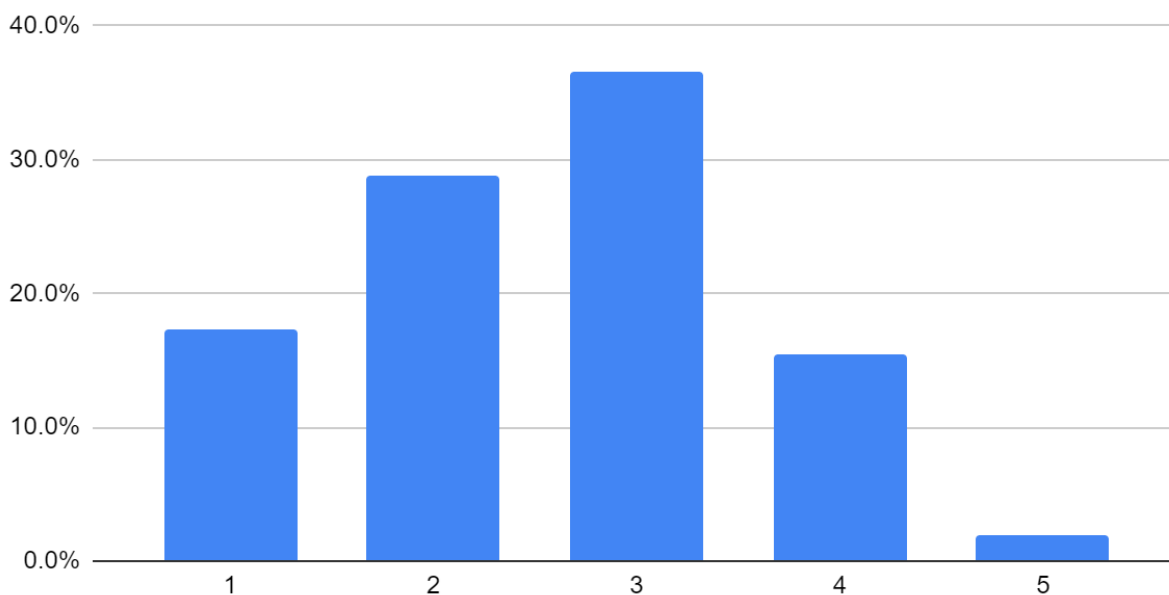
Schools North East is a charity set up in 2007 by schools and for schools. We are a movement for change, giving a voice to all 1,150 North East schools in the national education debate.

Schools North East surveyed school leaders using the Committee's discussion points. Responses to the survey represent 178 schools within the North East, from all stages and types of schools. This submission uses the responses from the survey and information from other Schools North East roundtables and data collection.

Education Inspection Framework

The chart below shows how respondents rated the new Education Inspection Framework on a scale of one to five, with one being very negative and five being very positive. Most responses saw the new framework as an improvement on the previous framework, with its move away from a focus solely on performance data.

How would you rate the impact of the new Education Inspection Framework, introduced in 2019?



However, significant concerns were raised about the pressure on staff. Inspections are still seen as high stakes, leading to schools focusing too much on being 'Ofsted ready'. This additional workload is taking teachers away from classroom teaching and driving the crisis in recruitment and retention.

Responses also felt that the current framework is more suitable for secondary schools. In primary schools, and smaller schools, subject leads often cover more than one subject. The accountability expectations on these staff creates unrealistic workloads.

Schools in the special and alternative provision sector had an inconsistent experience of inspections. This depended on the knowledge inspectors had of the special and AP sector. These schools said that it is crucial to have trained and experienced inspectors, to avoid the application of irrelevant mainstream expectations to special and AP.

Mainstream schools also raised concerns about the consistency of inspector experience and expectations. Schools felt that the application of the framework was dependent on the interpretations of the inspectors, which can still vary widely.

Inspection reports

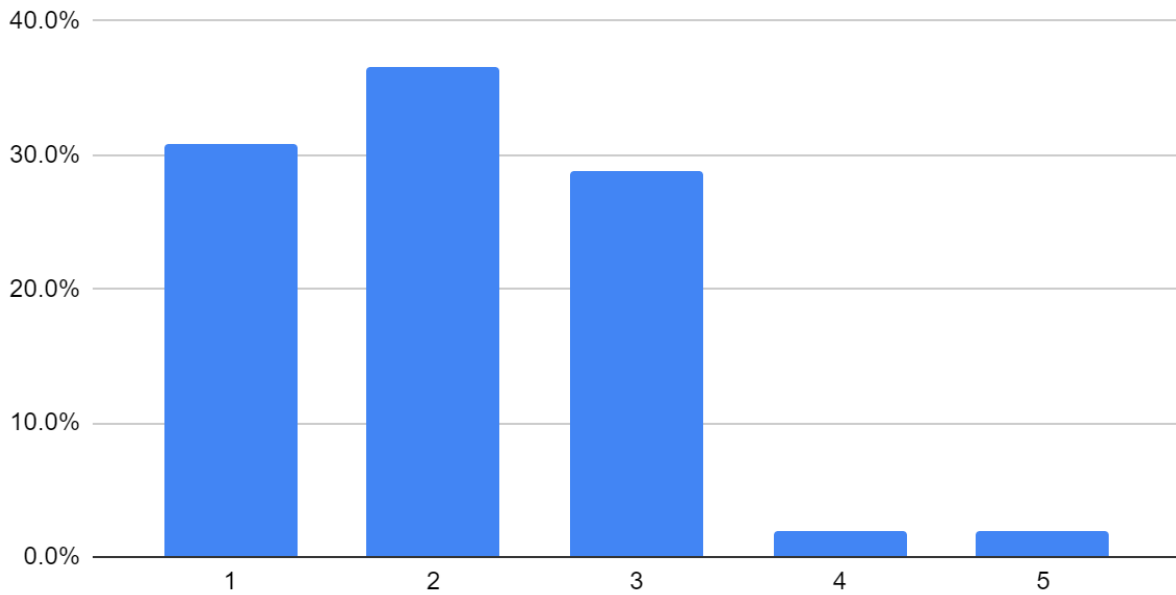
On Ofsted inspections and reports, schools said that these rarely helped with school improvement, and that one-word judgements were not fit for purpose. Reports only provide a snapshot of schools, and don't reflect the full breadth of work schools do.

The length of inspections was seen as too brief to support the high stakes nature of the current accountability system. Responses also discussed the negative impact inspections have on staff workload and wellbeing.

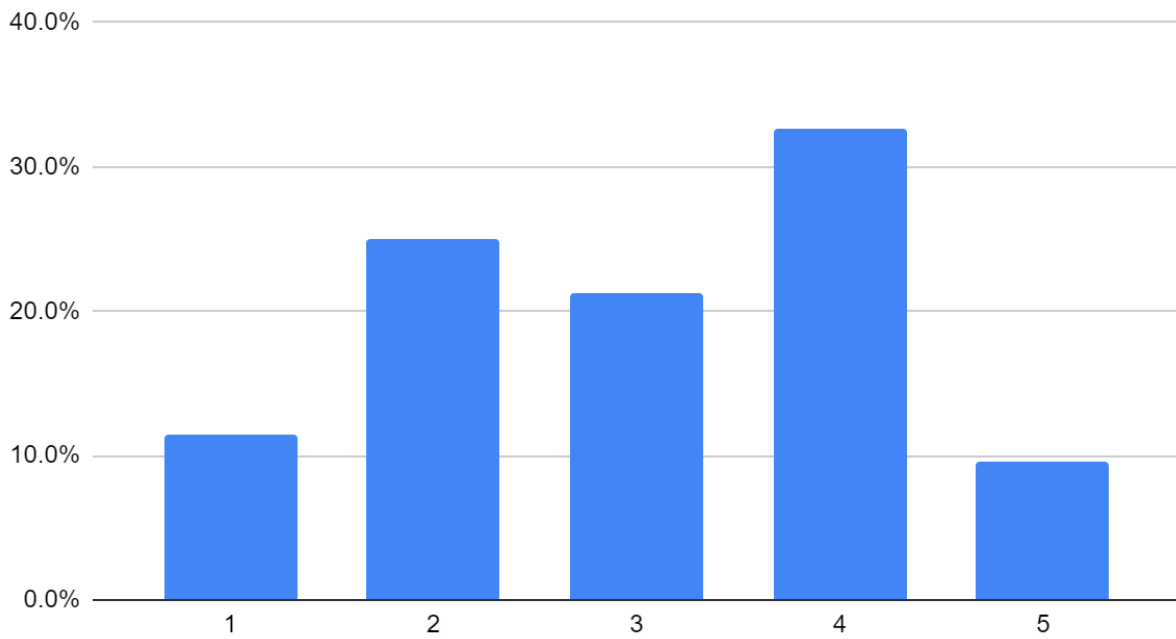
Concerns were raised by special and AP schools about the impact of negative Ofsted judgements on inclusion. Schools are seeing rising numbers of exclusions from mainstream, with the special and AP sector working at capacity. In some cases, special and AP schools have seen particular rises in exclusions from those mainstream schools that have recently received a lower grade.

As mentioned above, Ofsted inspections and reports are creating challenges in recruitment and retention. As well as the workload driving teachers out of the profession, school leaders' jobs can too often depend on a one-word judgement. This is impacting leader wellbeing, leading to a smaller pool of potential future school leaders.

How useful do you find Ofsted inspections and inspection reports?



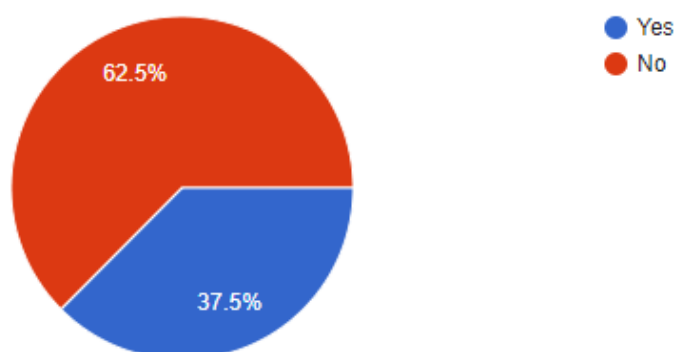
How important are Ofsted ratings to parents?



School improvement

The majority of schools said that there is not adequate support to enable them to improve following an Ofsted judgement. While schools emphasised that support was accessible from networks of schools or from the Local Authority, funding and resources were limited. Ofsted was not seen as playing an active role in school improvement by most schools.

Is the support schools can access adequate to enable them to improve following an Ofsted judgement?



Indeed, concerns around the high stakes nature of the system, the pressure put on schools during the Ofsted inspection window (and because of the short notice given for an inspection), and the inconsistency in which the framework is applied, especially in light of the fact that a single framework is applied to all settings, could militate against school improvement.

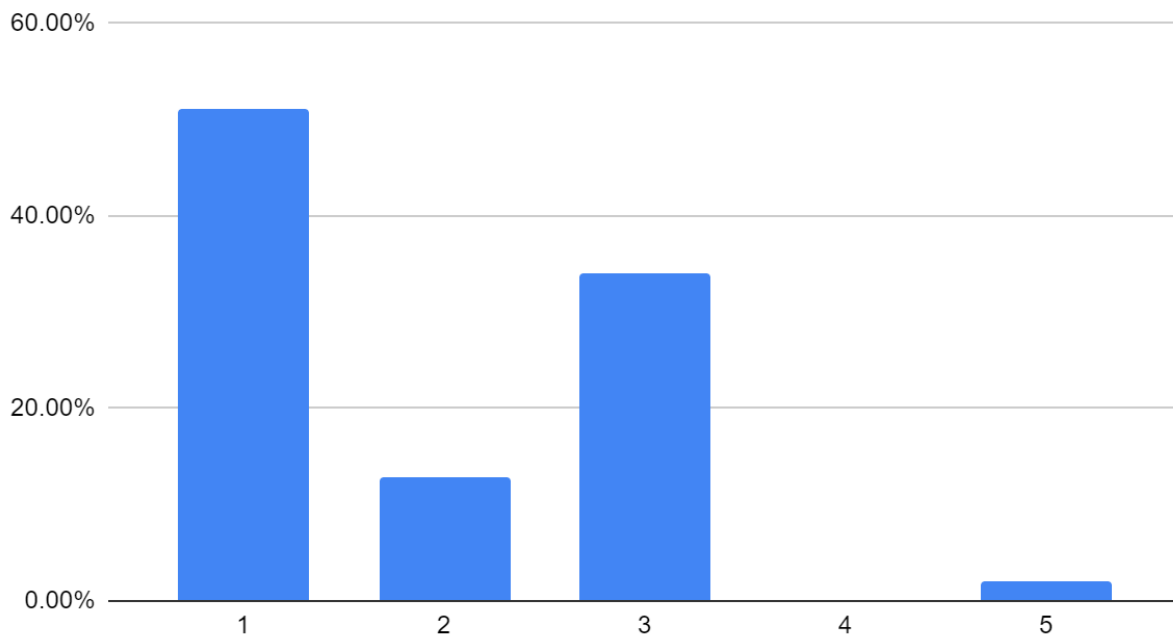
Pressure on school leaders and their staff means Ofsted fails to provide constructive support for school improvement. Ofsted's current role was seen as punitive, and not as a critical friend.

To improve the system, schools wanted to see an accountability system focussed on supportive school improvement, with experienced inspectors. Doing so would show greater trust in the profession to deliver the support children and young people need. Some responses argued that more frequent and rigorous inspections would be beneficial, provided the focus was on creating a culture of collaboration and improvement. Such periodic inspections would have to be fair and transparent, providing support for educational professionals, as well as information for parents to make objective decisions about their children's education.

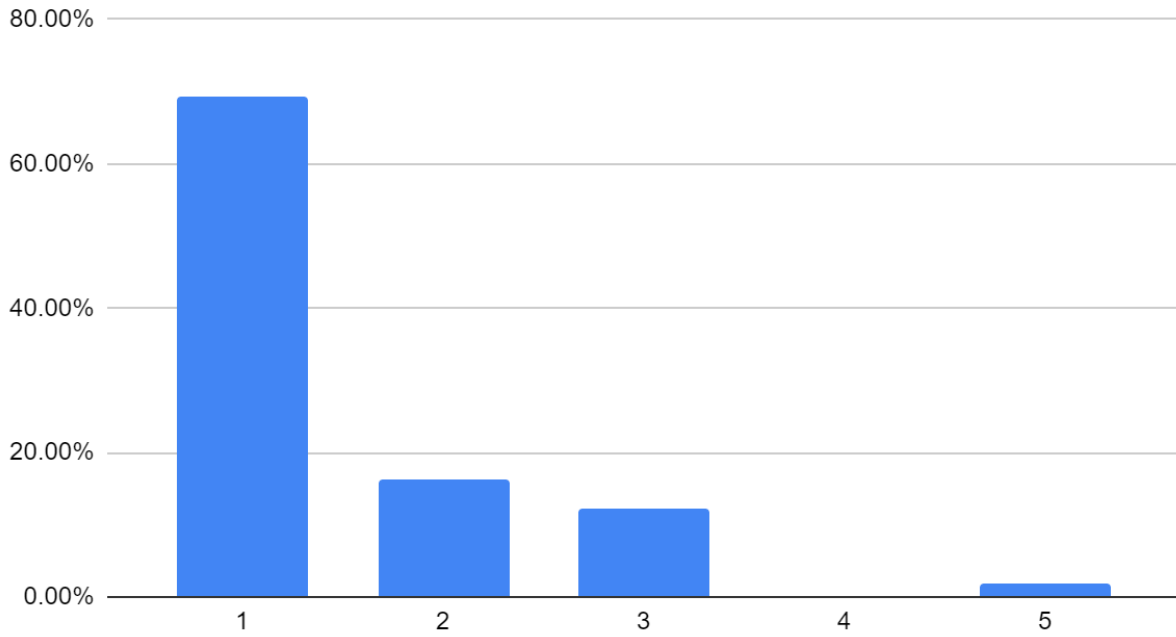
Ofsted transparency

Schools that have complained said that Ofsted rarely valued the opinions or experiences of schools. Additionally, schools are unclear as to how Ofsted is held to account. On transparency, schools said that while the inspection framework is clear, its application is inconsistent, with judgements depending on the inspector rather than the framework.

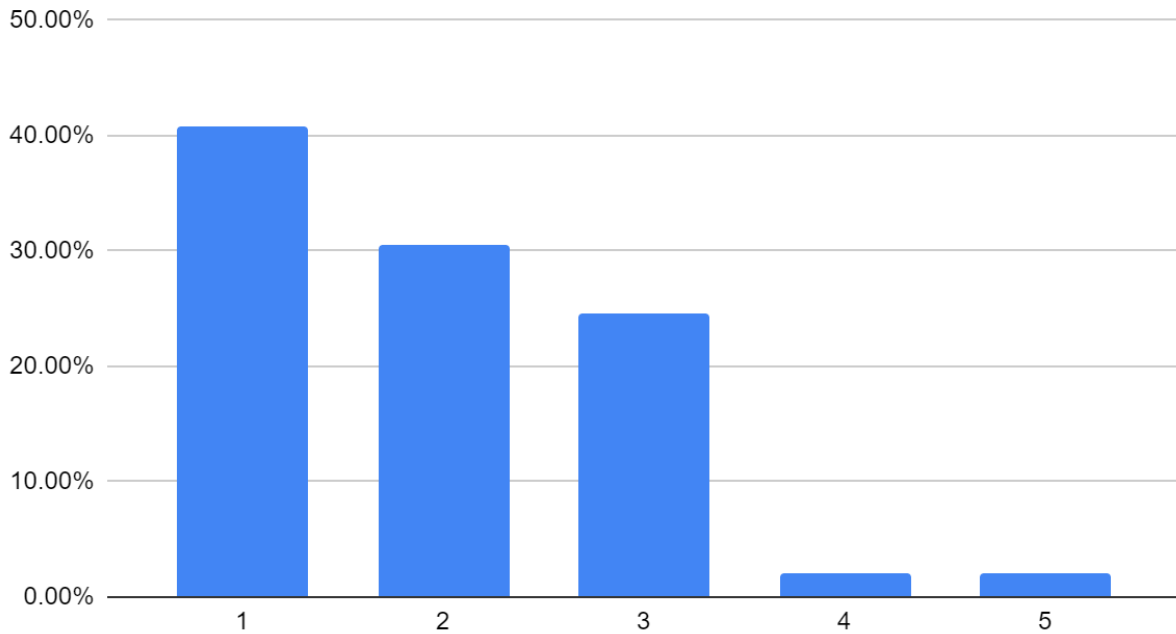
How effective is Ofsted's complaints procedure?



How accountable is Ofsted?



How transparent is Ofsted?



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