



Parental engagement in Ofsted inspections: Recommendations for the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted

Executive Summary

Ofsted has a statutory duty to solicit parents' views during inspections. Schools notify parents about inspections and invite them to share their views through the Ofsted Parent View survey. Inspectors triangulate these views alongside other evidence when evaluating the school.

Parental engagement is on the margins of school inspections. Only 5-7% of parents complete the survey on average. It is, at best, 'a temperature check' sitting alongside all the other evidence.

To enhance parental engagement in Ofsted school inspections, policies should focus on transparency, accessibility, and meaningful involvement rather than rely on a standalone questionnaire.

Policy Recommendations

1. Enhance Communication and Transparency:

Ofsted should provide clear, concise information for parents about the purpose and process of inspections, including what inspectors look for and how parents can contribute.

Ofsted can encourage wider participation in the Parent View survey by making it more accessible, including providing versions in languages other than English, and by ensuring that parents understand their feedback is valued in inspections.

After an inspection, schools should communicate the key findings and any

actions taken in response to parental feedback to parents in a separate, additional document.

2. Improve Accessibility and Inclusivity:

Ofsted provides support for parents who may face barriers to engaging with the inspection process—for example, by gathering parents' views through phone calls and paper surveys, offering translation services, and organising in-person meetings that are accessible to parents.

Ofsted should ensure that inspectors are sensitive to the concerns and perspectives of all parents, including those from diverse backgrounds and with children who have special educational needs (SEND).

3. Foster Meaningful Engagement:

Schools should demonstrate how they are using various parental engagement channels to improve their practice and address any concerns raised. Ofsted commends and disseminates effective and innovative approaches to parental engagement in its inspection reports.

4. Ensure Accountability and Scrutiny:

Ofsted should regularly review the Parent View questionnaire and incorporate contemporary parental concerns, such as online bullying and extremist content. Key concepts such as 'bullying' and 'inclusion' should be briefly defined for non-specialist parents. Additionally, the questionnaire could include items that gather parents'

views on national-level education policies.

5. Enhance Independent Oversight and Transparency in Inspections

Establish an independent body to review complaints about Ofsted inspections arising from parents and addressing concerns about the current system of the inspectorate "marking its own homework".

Allow schools to access the evidence base used by Ofsted when making a complaint about an inspection by publishing a version online.

About the research

The above recommendations are drawn from our QR Policy Support Fund project, The Future of Inspections. The study involved a systematic literature review of 435 policy documents and research publications, complemented by three focus groups and one conference with 48 participants representing Ofsted, Education Scotland, Estyn, the National Governance Association (NGA), academy trusts, schools, local authorities, professional associations, international consultants, and universities.

Our research found that the current Parent View survey has a low response rate and is often considered a tokenistic exercise that adds little value to the validity of inspections. How parents use this tool is influenced by their personal relationships with school staff, interpretation of particular key concepts, consumerism, and even concerns about Ofsted-rating-dependent house prices within a market economy. These complex power relations should be carefully

considered by Ofsted when designing parental engagement tools.

The Parent View survey instrument should be regularly updated to reflect contemporary issues that genuinely concern parents. The survey should be translated into different languages and accommodate parents who cannot easily access the online survey by providing paper surveys by post, conducting phone calls, and organising parent meetings during inspections.

To incentivise parental engagement, Ofsted should specify how parents' views are solicited and used to inform the inspection process and decisions. This should be followed by the school's response and actions addressing parents' feedback.

Conclusion

By implementing these policy recommendations, Ofsted can enhance its engagement with parents, leading to more effective school inspections and improved outcomes for pupils.

Contact

Dr Meng Tian, Associate Professor in Educational Leadership, University of Birmingham

m.tian@bham.ac.uk

Professor Colin Diamond, Professor in Educational Leadership, University of Birmingham

c.diamond@bham.ac.uk

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