

# A focus on improvement

An evaluation report: responses to Ofsted's consultation on proposed changes to maintained school inspections

---

Since January 2008, Ofsted has undertaken a wide-ranging consultation on the proposals for new maintained school inspection arrangements. The consultation has included the publication of a consultation document and a formal three month online consultation process. This evaluation report summarises the responses to Ofsted's consultation on the proposals for maintained school inspections from September 2009.

**Age group:** 5–18

---

**Published:** October 2008

---

**Reference no:** 080200

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects registered childcare and children's social care, including adoption and fostering agencies, residential schools, family centres and homes for children. It also inspects all state maintained schools, non-association independent schools, pupil referral units, further education, initial teacher education, and publicly funded adult skills and employment-based training, the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), and the overall level of services for children in local authority areas (through annual performance assessments and joint area reviews).

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE  
T 08456 404040

[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Reference no. 080200

© Crown Copyright 2008



# Contents

---

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The consultation methodology</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Annex A: analysis of consultation responses</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Annex B: analysis by type of respondent</b>	<b>23</b>

## Introduction

1. This evaluation report summarises the responses to Ofsted's consultation on the proposals for maintained school inspections from September 2009.
2. Since January 2008, Ofsted has undertaken a wide-ranging consultation on the proposals for new maintained school inspection arrangements. The consultation has included the publication of a consultation document and a formal three month online consultation process.
3. It is worth noting that the responses received through the formal consultation process generally mirror the feedback we have received through pilot inspections, formal meetings, conferences, seminars, discussions and focus groups.

## Background

4. In accordance with *Raising standards, improving lives* – our strategic plan for 2007–2010 – in spring 2008 we reviewed our arrangements for the inspection of schools.<sup>1</sup> During the same period, Ofsted began a broad programme of inspection development, looking across all its remits to find ways of ensuring better integration of inspection and greater consistency across inspection frameworks. The underpinning rationale for this work is to ensure that:
  - our frameworks for inspection focus sharply on improvement, particularly the outcomes for, and the needs of, underachieving groups and those in vulnerable circumstances
  - our work encourages the services we inspect to focus on the interests of children and parents who use them, and
  - the services we inspect are efficient and effective.
5. The proposals for changes to maintained school inspections were set out in Ofsted's consultation document *A focus on improvement: proposals for maintained school inspections from September 2009*.<sup>2</sup> In this consultation document we explained why we believe it is the right time to make changes to maintained school inspections. We also confirmed Ofsted's increasingly risk-proportionate approach to inspection. We intend to continue to reduce the scale of inspection for the best schools, to enable us to focus our efforts where they have the greatest impact.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Raising standards, improving lives: The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills Strategic Plan 2007–2010*, ref. no. 070179, [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070179](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070179).

<sup>2</sup> [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080200](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080200); please note this page hosts both the consultation and this document with the consultation responses.

## The consultation methodology

### Formal meetings, conferences, seminars, discussions and focus groups

6. During the past few months, we have met and consulted with headteachers and school staff; governors; local authorities (LAs); other professionals including inspectors; the Department for Schools, Children and Families (DCSF); government officials and Ministers; the National College for School Leadership (NCSL); and professional and national associations. We have also held discussions with focus groups of parents, carers and children, and national groups representing parents, carers and young people.

### Pilot inspections

7. Ofsted's pilot inspections, which are being carried out on a termly basis to test out the developments to the inspection methodology, are at the heart of the on-going consultation process. The summer term 2008 pilot inspections were based on a very small sample of schools, but nonetheless provided us with invaluable feedback. We held an evaluation conference for the schools, LAs and inspectors involved in July 2008 and we have produced a brief paper on the outcomes of these pilot inspections. This will be published on our website ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)) in the near future.
8. We will continue to invite all schools that receive a pilot inspection and representative officers from their LAs to attend evaluation conferences. Their feedback and views will feed into any adjustments we would need to consider in advance of the spring and summer term 2009 pilot inspections.

### Consultation document and formal online consultation process

9. On 19 May 2008, Ofsted published the formal proposals for the new arrangements in *A focus on improvement: proposals for maintained school inspections from September 2009*. At the same time, as part of an on-going engagement with stakeholders and the general public, a three month long consultation was launched. The consultation closed at 5pm Monday 11 August 2008, by which time a total of 1,666 responses had been received. These included responses from professional associations and organisations from the education and inspection sectors, who responded on behalf of their members or constituents.
10. The proposals for the new arrangements were set out in some detail in the consultation document and linked with 15 distinct questions. For each of the questions, respondents were asked to record whether they strongly agreed; agreed; neither agreed nor disagreed; disagreed; or strongly disagreed. They were also given the opportunity to add free text comments if they wished.

11. From the third week of the consultation onwards, respondents were also asked to indicate which of the following groups they represented:
- headteacher
  - teacher
  - other school staff
  - governor
  - local government representative
  - other service provider
  - parent/carer
  - pupil/student
  - inspector
  - other
  - prefer not to say.
12. This information was collected for over half the respondents (53%); we believe it is representative of the total and it is therefore included in the analysis of responses to each question. The analysis by type of respondent is set out in Annex B.

## Main findings from the online consultation

13. Overall, the proposals were received very positively. Of the 15 questions as many as 10 (two thirds) were received favourably, with 61% of respondents or more registering their support. Five of these 10 questions received support from between 71% and 82% of respondents. Three further questions received around 50% respondents' support. For question 7, the responses were split.
14. Only one question received a clear majority of negative responses. Sixty-two percent of respondents either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the proposal relating to unannounced inspections (question 4). This question elicited the greatest number of free text comments by a considerable margin.
15. The highest levels of support were recorded in relation to the following five questions:
- question 14: Should the inspectors' recommendations focus more precisely on the action the school should take to become good or better? 82%
  - question 10: Do you agree that inspection should take more account of the capacity of the school to improve? 80%
  - question 8: Should the senior management team of the school play a greater part in inspection by shadowing the inspectors? 77%
  - question 3: Are the proposals for targeting inspection at satisfactory and inadequate schools appropriate? 73%
  - question 6: Do you agree that we should put in place a survey which captures the views of school staff? 71%

16. Annex A provides a detailed analysis, by question, of the online responses to Ofsted's consultation document.

## Proposals for the way forward

17. Following our face-to-face consultations, the evaluation of the summer term pilot inspections and the analysis of the online responses, we intend to take action on the proposals in the following way. We will continue to:
- develop our proposals to inspect good and outstanding schools that maintain and/or continue to improve their performance once within a six year period; we will also explore the feasibility of a five-year period
  - consult schools, LAs and government agencies about the content of a published health check report
  - develop our proposals for monitoring schools judged to be satisfactory under the new arrangements
  - retain the current arrangements for monitoring inadequate schools
  - keep under review the impact of increased monitoring of satisfactory schools, from 2009
  - trial unannounced inspections in the forthcoming pilots, in order to test out the feasibility of no-notice and gain further feedback from key stakeholders
  - take forward proposals for school level surveys of the views of parents and pupils. A joint Ofsted/DCSF consultation paper<sup>3</sup> has been issued about the identification of Every Child Matters (ECM) well-being indicators for schools
  - trial the use of staff surveys in pilot inspections
  - trial greater involvement of the senior management team in inspection
  - test out, through pilot inspections, a greater focus on the achievement of different groups of pupils
  - develop and test criteria, descriptors and guidance for a separate judgement about the school's capacity to improve
  - use contextual value added (CVA) measures as an important source of information about the progress of pupils, while keeping these measures under regular review
  - develop, trial and consult on Ofsted's early work to define minimum standards
  - develop and trial methodology for the inspection of partnership activity
  - explore through pilot inspections, how inspectors' recommendations might focus more precisely on the action a school should take to become good or better
  - consult schools, parents/carers and pupils about the structure and format of the report throughout the autumn 2008 and spring 2009 pilot inspections.

---

<sup>3</sup> *Indicators of a school's contribution to well-being 9 Oct 2008*, ref. no. 080195, [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080195](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080195).

## Annex A: analysis of consultation responses

*Q1: Is it appropriate to leave the inspection of good and outstanding schools for an interval of six years between inspections?*

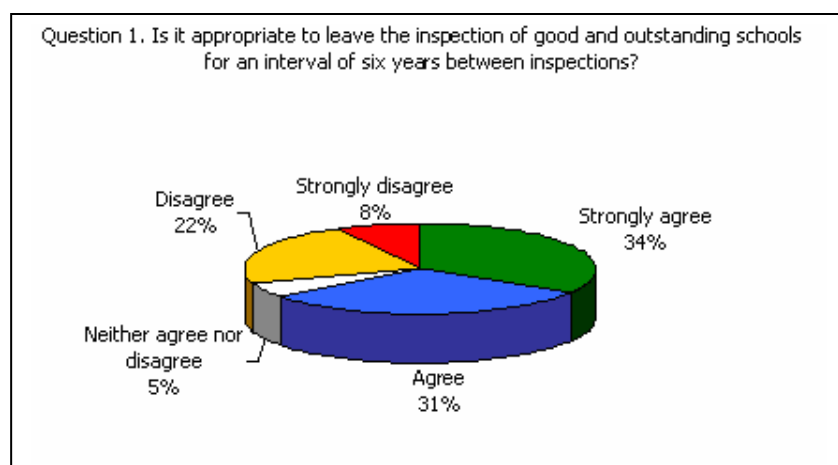
Three quarters of all headteachers and nearly as many teachers supported this proposal; nearly half of parents (48%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that by concentrating on those schools that most need improvement Ofsted will be making better use of inspection resources, while reducing the stress of 'preparing for inspection' for effective schools. The charts provide figures for overall response rates.

Common arguments against the proposal were that six years between inspections was too long; much could change in that period and standards could slip. However, recognising that parents should be offered more regular information about schools, our proposals envisage three yearly health check reports for good and outstanding schools to ensure high standards are maintained. Many respondents agreed with this proposal provided the proposed annual risk assessment and three yearly health check were robust. Risk assessments and health checks were generally considered helpful to identify schools facing difficulty and to prevent complacency. Some respondents believed this arrangement would work well in the context of increased challenge and support to schools by school improvement partners (SIPs).

Many who agreed with the proposed six-year interval between inspections of good and outstanding schools would like to see inspections triggered sooner when there is a change in headteacher and/or leadership team, or a drop in results/RAISE online.<sup>4</sup>

### Proposal for the way forward

We are still minded to inspect good and outstanding schools that maintain and/or continue to improve their performance once within a six-year period. However, we will also investigate the benefits and costs of inspection within five years.



<sup>4</sup> RAISEonline is the online data analysis tool for schools. For further information visit [www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/About-us/FAQs/RAISEonline2/\(language\)/eng-GB](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/About-us/FAQs/RAISEonline2/(language)/eng-GB).



*Q2. Are the proposals for what a health check should include appropriate?*

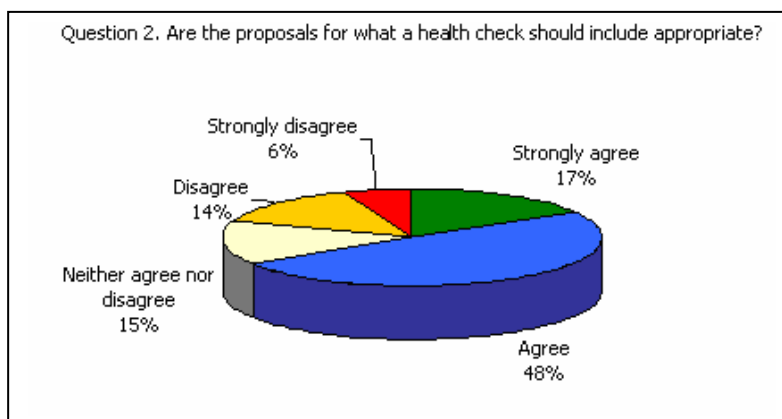
Almost two thirds of all respondents were in favour of this proposal. Support was consistent across the board. It was particularly strong among 'other service providers', governors and teachers. Overall, none of the identified groups of respondents was against.

There was concern that the health check would result in over-reliance on data. Some suggested that the health check should include at least a one-day visit by an inspector. Others expressed the view that Ofsted needed to ensure that the health check did not involve extra paperwork for school staff.

Many of those who responded favourably stated that they would like to see schools have an input in the process. Some respondents reported they were reassured by the fact that the health check will not rely solely on the analysis of performance data as there are other variables which may have an impact. Others suggested the inclusion of the views of governors and school staff, whilst some proposed that the health check should be carried out in conjunction with the LA. Support was expressed for the use of financial data to help identify schools at risk.

### Proposal for the way forward

We will continue to consult schools, LAs and government agencies about the content of a published health check report.



*Q3. Are the proposals for targeting inspection at satisfactory and inadequate schools appropriate?*

Nearly three quarters of respondents registered their approval for this proposal; all groups favoured this approach, including two thirds of parents/carers. Ofsted's current monitoring arrangements for inadequate schools are seen as having a positive impact on school improvement and the initiative for monitoring satisfactory schools has been generally welcomed.

There was some concern that satisfactory schools might be monitored too much and that too much pressure could be put on staff making it difficult for these schools to recruit. Others felt that schools in challenging circumstances needed more time to change and that too frequent monitoring visits might end up being counter-productive. Ofsted will need to continue to review its current monitoring arrangements for satisfactory schools in order to identify any issues that might emerge.

While not directly related to the question, a number of respondents took the opportunity of the 'free text' boxes to state that 'satisfactory' is not a useful term in the context used by Ofsted.

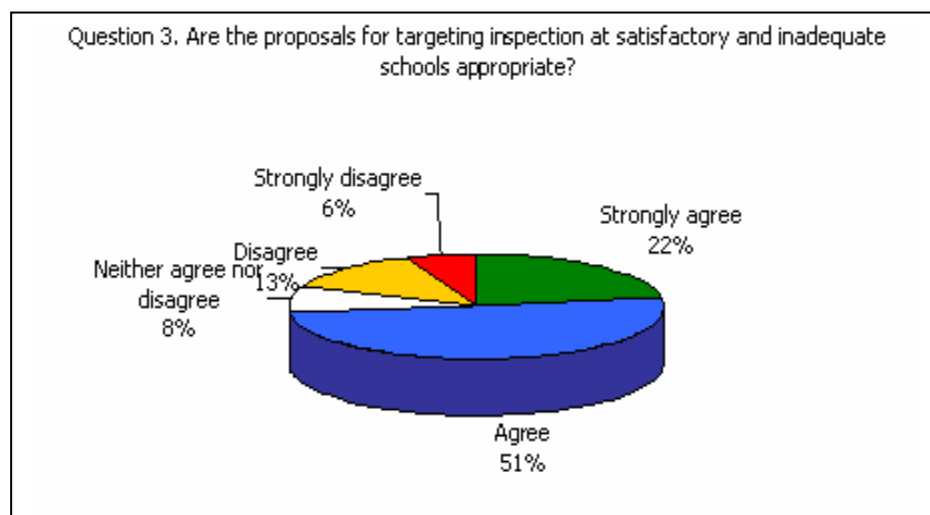
Nevertheless, the proposals were seen by many as a fair and more intelligent approach to inspection.

### Proposals for the way forward

We will inform schools judged to be satisfactory that they may receive a monitoring visit under the new arrangements.

The current arrangements for monitoring inadequate schools will continue. We will keep under review the impact of increased monitoring of satisfactory schools from 2009.

We will explore alternatives for the term 'satisfactory'.



*Q4. Is there a place for unannounced inspections?*

This was the only proposal where a clear majority (62%) recorded disagreement. Over three quarters (77%) of headteachers and almost three quarters (71%) of teachers either disagreed or strongly disagreed. In contrast, some 70% of parents/carers agreed or strongly agreed with no-notice inspection.

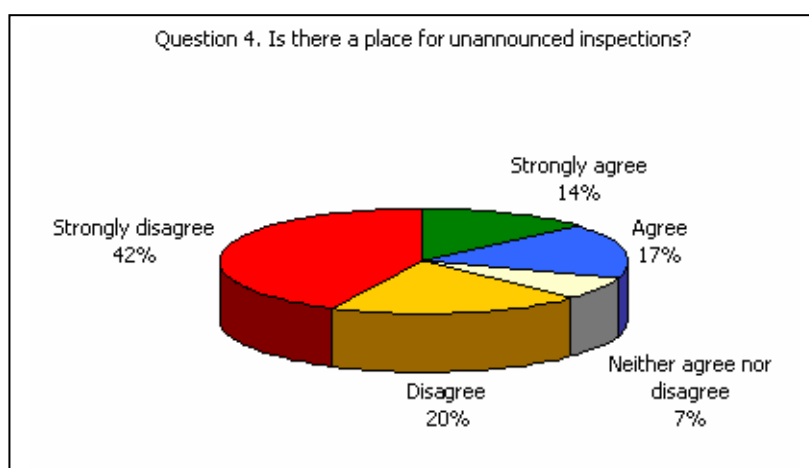
This question also attracted the highest number of 'free text' responses by some margin. The reasons most commonly cited for disagreeing with the proposal were lack of courtesy, distrust on the part of Ofsted and the perceived stress this might cause to headteachers and teachers. Many disagreed because of practical difficulties in implementing such a measure and the disruption it could bring. Others felt the current notice period was appropriate and worked well.

Some respondents felt this was a good idea that would enable inspectors to see schools as they really were. Again, it must be noted that some who agreed with this proposal in principle also acknowledged the challenges posed. Of those, some thought this arrangement should only apply to good and outstanding schools. Others felt it would only be feasible if schools published a calendar of events, to ensure that inspections would be convenient. Some believed the idea should be trialled.

We believe that the responses to this proposal should be carefully considered. Parents/carers constituted only about 5% of all respondents, but we think that their view is likely to be representative. This is because in conferences, seminars and meetings parents have emphasised their support for unannounced inspection. Interestingly, over half of inspectors (55%) were in favour. Ofsted will trial this proposal through the forthcoming pilot inspections, before a final decision is made about whether to adopt 'no-notice' inspections for schools.

### **Proposal for the way forward**

In view of the strong response from schools against this proposal and the contrasting response from parents/carers, Ofsted will trial no-notice inspections, to test feasibility and gain further feedback from key stakeholders.



*Q5. Do you agree that we should put in place a national survey which captures the views of children and young people?*

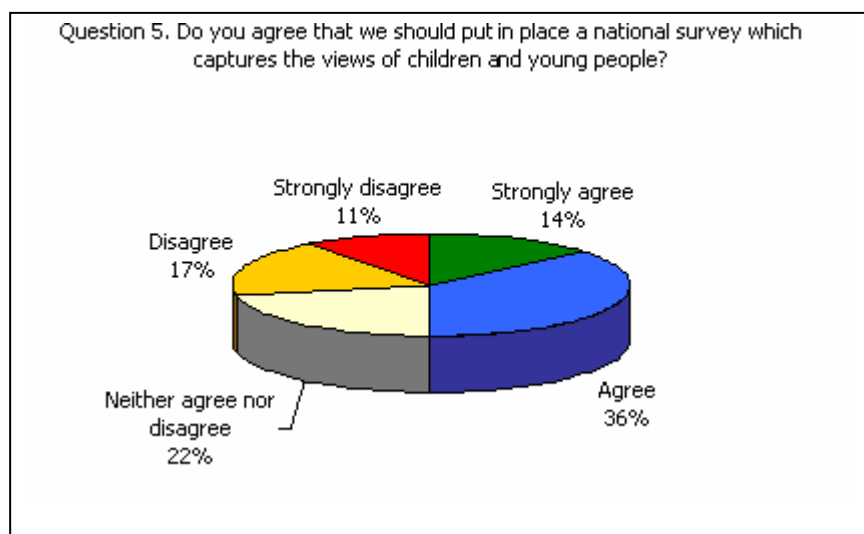
Responses to this question were mixed. Half of respondents were in favour; more than a fifth (22%) expressed no preference. Although many felt that, as the end-users, pupils must have a voice in inspection and could provide invaluable insight into life at the school, others questioned whether such surveys could be truly accessible to all learners. Some suggested that such a survey might be appropriate for secondary schools but not for primary.

Common arguments against the proposal were that most schools already carried out surveys and that there was little use for such surveys unless they were tailored to individual schools. Some felt such exercises added to the administrative burden while being a waste of resources, or that children were not mature enough to know what was best for them. Although there was less support for the survey among headteachers and teachers than there was among the other categories of respondent – most notably, 70% parents supported this idea – it is worth noting that none of the respondent groups registered a majority against it.

In the period since the consultation paper was launched, Ofsted has engaged in joint work with the DCSF to consider the potential benefits of national and school level 'perception surveys' which could yield information about ECM outcomes for children and young people. As a result of this joint work, Ofsted and the DCSF now propose to consult on ways of collecting information on the views of parents and pupils by building on existing school-level surveys and existing good practice in schools.

## Proposal for the way forward

We will take forward proposals for school level surveys of the views of parents and pupils. A joint Ofsted/DCSF consultation paper has been issued about the identification of ECM well-being indicators for schools.



*Q6. Do you agree that we should put in place a survey which captures the views of school staff?*

At 71%, there was considerable support for this proposal. Teachers and school staff were overwhelmingly in favour, with more than 80% either strongly agreeing or agreeing.

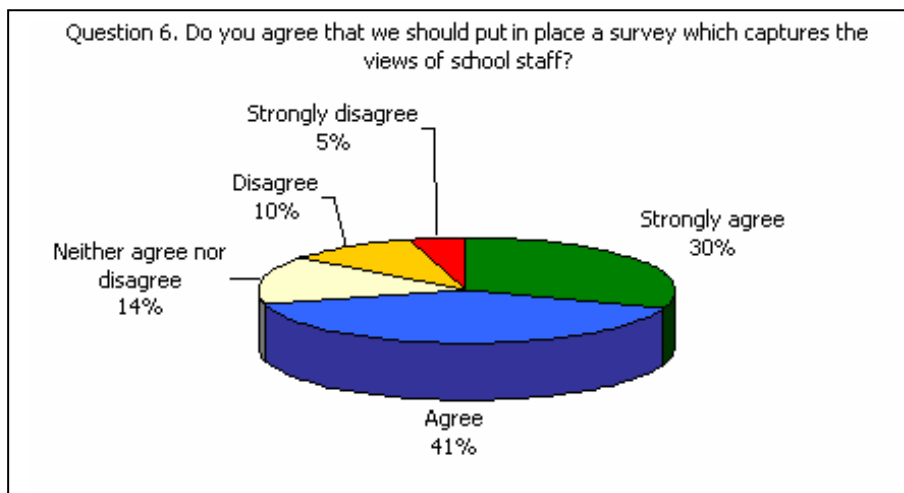
Many respondents thought this a 'fantastic idea' as staff views were both valuable and important. Others welcomed this development as they felt that staff views were often left out of the inspection process. Among those who registered their support, many stressed the need for Ofsted to ensure the confidentiality of such surveys.

Nevertheless, there were those who were sceptical, who cautioned against opening up the inspection process to possible abuse by staff with a grievance, or who doubted that such a survey would serve any meaningful purpose.

Ofsted will continue to trial the use of staff surveys in pilot inspections in order to test out their value. Particular attention should be paid to issues of confidentiality.

### **Proposal for the way forward**

We will trial the use of staff surveys in pilot inspections.



*Q7. Do you agree that a national survey of parents should take place annually?*

Responses to this proposal were almost evenly split with 40% against and 38% in favour. As with the proposal about a survey of children and young people, more than a fifth of respondents (22%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

There was very strong support from parents/carers, with nearly three quarters either agreeing or strongly agreeing. There was also a considerably favourable response from 'other service providers'. However, there was much less enthusiasm from the other groups of respondents, with a majority of headteachers (53%) against – the only group to register such a majority.

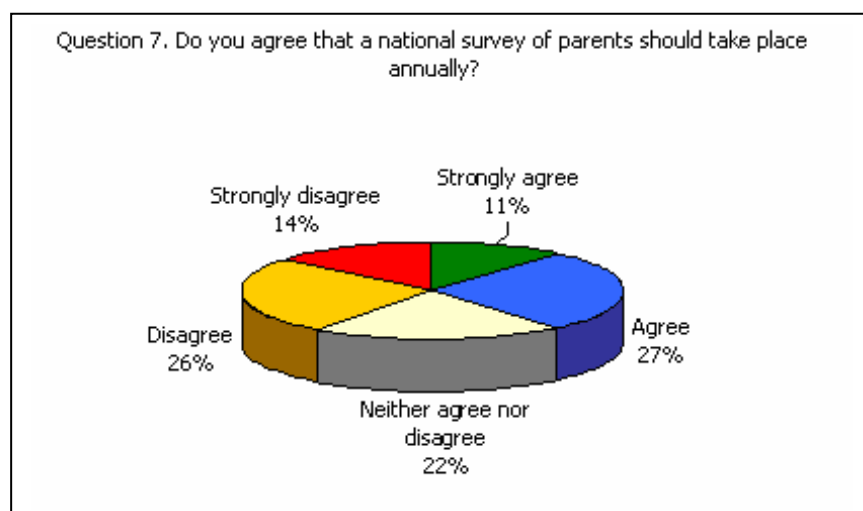
Concerns were expressed about such surveys being a waste of money or bureaucratic, as well as their results being skewed by those with an 'axe to grind' – the argument being that those who are content by and large do not take the trouble to respond.

Similarly to the issues highlighted in relation to the children and young people's survey, many felt that a parents' survey would not be accessible to all, specifically those who were more difficult for schools to contact. It was also felt that many schools already canvassed the views of parents effectively.

Given the joint Ofsted/DCSF decision to consult on ways of collecting information on the views of parents and pupils, the recommendation for question 7 is the same as that for question 5.

### Proposal for the way forward

As stated, we will take forward proposals for school level surveys of the views of parents and pupils. A joint Ofsted/DCSF consultation paper has been issued about the identification of Every Child Matters well-being indicators for schools.



*Q8. Should the senior management team of the school play a greater part in inspection by shadowing the inspectors?*

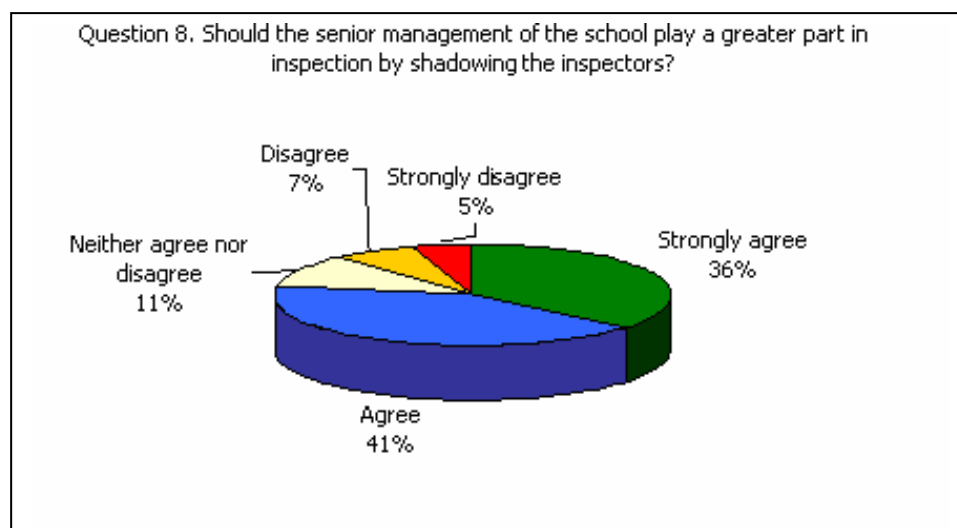
Over three quarters of all respondents were in favour of this approach. Support was strongest among local government representatives, governors, headteachers and 'other service providers'. Although parents/carers were the least enthusiastic about this proposal, the majority (57%) were in favour.

This approach was generally thought to be a good idea as the senior management team know the school and staff very well and can provide valuable information to inspectors. Also, it was felt that this arrangement would further promote professional dialogue between inspectors and school senior management, help remove distrust and encourage a collaborative approach to inspection.

However, some stressed that this arrangement should not be compulsory while others pointed to difficulties in implementing it in small schools where members of the senior management team also had teaching duties. It could be difficult to organise at short notice or in a no-notice inspection, and joint observations might put extra pressure on teaching staff. Others were of the view that greater involvement of senior managers in the inspection – for example, by routinely attending team meetings – had the potential to risk compromising the integrity of the inspection. We propose to give further consideration to these important issues by continuing to trial this approach through the autumn 2008 and spring 2009 pilot inspections.

### Proposal for the way forward

We will continue to trial greater involvement of the senior management team in inspection.



*Q9. Do you agree that inspectors should focus more attention on the achievement of different groups of pupils?*

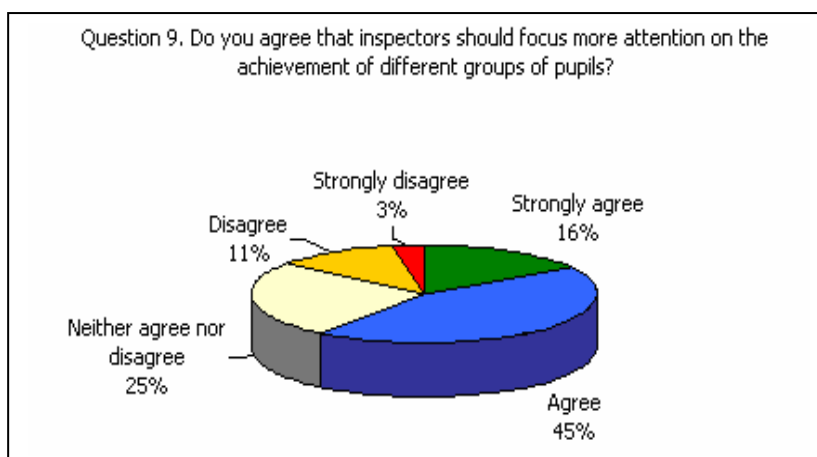
A considerable majority were in favour of this proposal. A quarter of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. Significantly, only 14% were against, with a mere 3% strongly so. There was very strong support from local government representatives, 'other service providers' and governors. Although in favour overall, headteachers, teachers and parents/carers were less supportive. However, 27% of headteachers, 29% of teachers and 34% of parents/carers neither agreed nor disagreed. 'Other school staff' was the only group without a majority in favour, although nearly half expressed no preference.

A number of respondents expressed concern that a focus on specific groups might be to the detriment of the majority and stressed that all pupils mattered, including for example, the most vulnerable, minority ethnic groups, and able gifted and talented pupils. Others felt that this was already a feature of the current inspection regime. Some who supported the proposal were of the view that the groups selected should be statistically significant to the school.

It is recommended that we place an increased emphasis on the achievement of different groups and make this a key feature of the new arrangements. In addition to the consultation responses, the early pilot inspections in the summer term 2008 supported this view. In developing the methodology for this proposal, we will look carefully at the amount of time that should be spent on classroom observation during inspection. Observation 'on the ground' is the distinct and unique contribution made by inspection to the school improvement process, although comparative data also help to get a clear view of how well a school is meeting the needs of different groups of pupils.

### **Proposal for the way forward**

Pilot inspections will focus more on the achievement of different groups of pupils. This will involve more time spent in the classroom, observing teaching and learning.





*Q10. Do you agree that inspection should take more account of the capacity of the school to improve?*

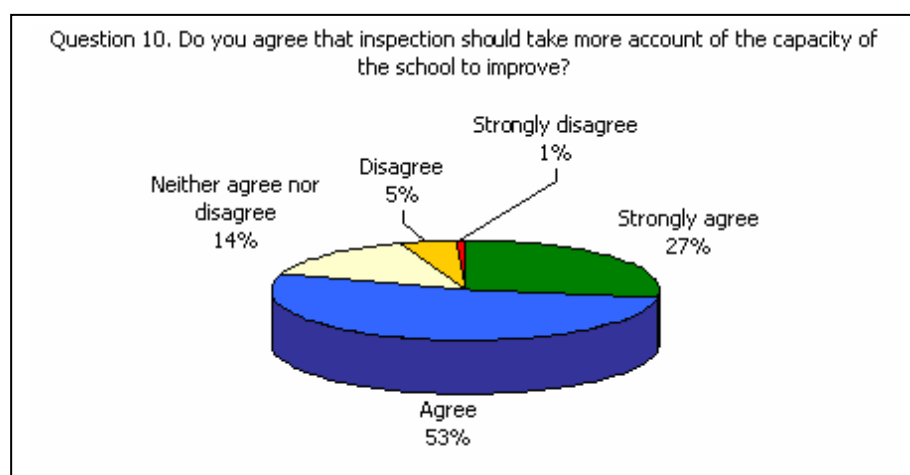
Most groups of respondents were in favour of this proposal by a considerable margin. Significantly, 83% of headteachers, 80% of teachers and 77% of parents/carers either agreed or strongly agreed. Some 15% of teachers disagreed but none strongly so. Overall, this question attracted the smallest percentage of respondents who were against, 6% overall with a mere 1% who strongly disagreed.

Nevertheless, there were those who were unclear how 'capacity to improve' could be defined, how such a judgement would be substantiated and what this proposal would mean for schools that were outstanding. Some were of the view that more inspection time would be required to judge this aspect effectively and clear criteria would be needed. Some common suggestions about what should be taken into account, when considering this aspect of the school, were a change of headteacher, levels of funding and other external factors.

General comments related to the quality of leadership and management at all levels, especially the quality of self-evaluation and the track record in securing improvement. These were seen as key factors in determining the school's capacity to improve. Among those who were in favour, many felt that the capacity of the school to improve should be the focus of the inspection process; this was seen as vital in the context of the proposed interval between inspections for good and outstanding schools. Ofsted has been trialling the effectiveness of a separate judgement for the capacity to improve and we would agree with the need for clear criteria, descriptors and guidance for this aspect of schools' performance.

## Proposal for the way forward

We will develop and test criteria, descriptors and guidance for a separate judgement about the school's capacity to improve.



*Q11. Should we continue to use CVA as a measure of schools' progress?*

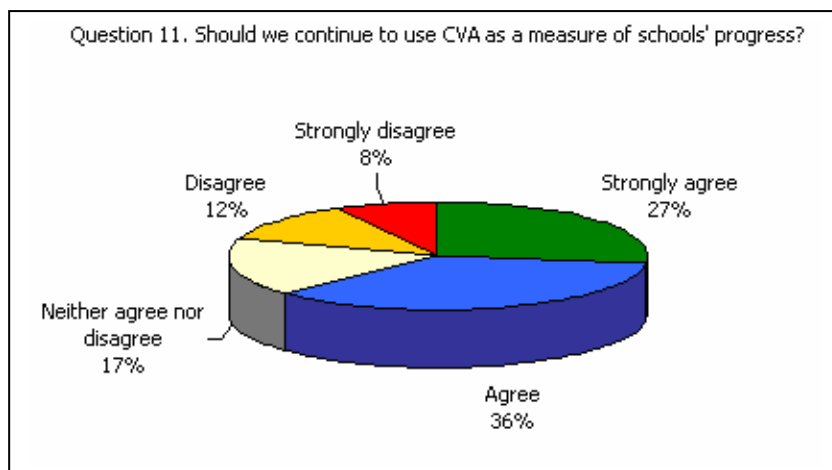
Some 63% of respondents were in favour of using CVA as a measure of schools' progress. Those who were against and those who neither agreed nor disagreed were almost evenly split, at 20% and 17% respectively. Support was strongest among governors and 'other service providers'.

There appears to be a wide range of opinion on the accuracy and/or usefulness of this measure. At one end of the continuum are those who feel it provides a more accurate picture of the value added by a school. Other views expressed were that CVA has the potential to depress aspiration in some schools and that it can undervalue the achievement of able pupils.

In general, the majority of respondents recognise that while CVA is not a perfect measure, it is nonetheless useful. In judging the quality of a school's work, the context in which it is operating is an essential component of any judgement, and CVA data can signpost areas requiring attention even when other measures suggest that standards are high. Overall, CVA is seen as playing a helpful role when considered in conjunction with other indicators and should be one of the factors taken into account when judging pupils' progress.

### Proposal for the way forward

We will continue to use CVA as an important source of information about the progress of pupils, but will keep it under regular review.



*Q12. Do you agree that we should define minimum standards for learners' outcomes?*

Responses to this question were mixed: 46% of respondents were in favour and 37% against. Support was strongest among governors and parents/carers. Although no group of respondents registered a clear majority against this approach, more headteachers and teachers responded negatively than positively.

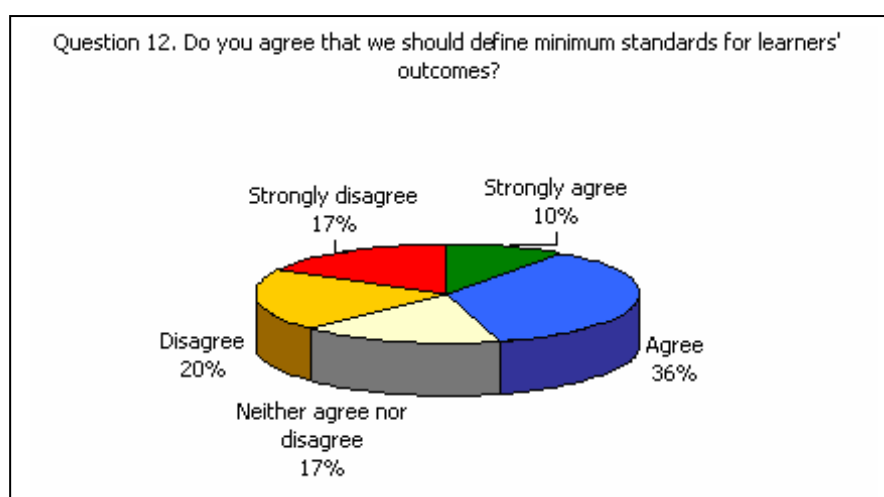
Common arguments against were that this measure would be unfair to schools working in the most challenging contexts, that it would penalise weaker or more vulnerable learners, that it was not a good idea to have a 'one-size-fits-all' approach and that it was unrealistic to define minimum standards for every learner. Therefore, some respondents were of the view that, given that every child is different, individual starting points would have to be considered and that inspection teams would need to exercise their professional judgement in this matter.

Some felt that if this was to be implemented then CVA and other progress measures should be taken into account. Others commented that it would be useful to use minimum standards to establish a 'satisfactory' benchmark against which to evaluate performance.

Early work in the summer term 2008 indicated that it is too soon to make final decisions about this proposal. Ofsted's work on minimum standards should continue to be developed, tested and discussed with schools, LAs and other key stakeholders, through on-going pilot inspection activity.

### Proposal for the way forward

We will develop, trial and consult on our early work to define minimum standards.



*Q13. Should we inspect the impact of partnerships on outcomes for pupils?*

A clear majority of respondents were in favour of this approach. More than a quarter (27%) neither agreed nor disagreed – the highest number of undecided recorded for any of the questions. Only 11% were actually opposed.

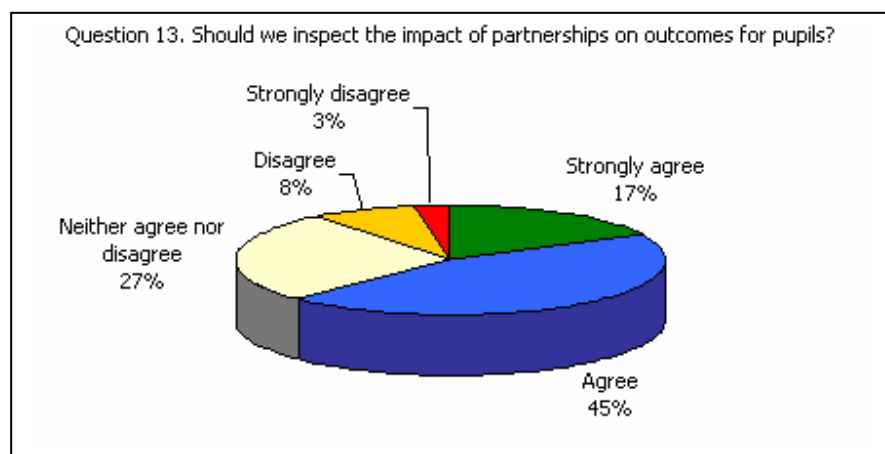
Less enthusiastic respondents pointed to logistical difficulties in carrying this out or the complexities involved in evaluating the impact that partnerships have on outcomes for pupils. Comments such as ‘Would need more inspection time?’ and ‘Great idea in theory but logistically would be difficult to manage’ were fairly typical.

However, there were some very positive comments. Many were of the view that the proposal made good sense, that schools should not be held accountable for things they had no control over, and that it was important to evaluate such partnerships particularly where funding was allocated to them.

Overall, this was seen as a more intelligent way to inspect, with the potential to reduce the overall burden of inspection. Since the consultation document was launched in May, work has begun to develop methodology for this proposal. Early discussions with schools, LAs, post-16 providers, children’s centre staff and other key stakeholders indicate that the inspection of partnerships is viewed as an appropriate way to evaluate the impact of collective responsibility.

## Proposal for the way forward

We will develop and trial methodology for the inspection of partnership activity.



*Q14. Should the inspectors' recommendations focus more precisely on the action the school should take to become good or better?*

This proposal received overwhelming support, with 82% of all respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing – the most favourable response recorded. A very small percentage of responses were against, only 9% overall with a mere 3% strongly disagreeing. This approach was popular with both the school sector and with parents/carers, with over 90% of the latter in favour.

There were a few negative responses by those who felt that it was the role of the school to decide what action was needed to bring about improvement. Some questioned whether inspectors would be sufficiently well-informed to make more precise recommendations after only two days at the school, and others cautioned that recommendations should not be so precise as to be prescriptive.

Comments such as 'Constructive criticism is helpful' and 'Helping schools to improve is what it's all about' were fairly typical. Many stated that this was exactly what inspection should be about and that such recommendations, as long as they were achievable, would be very helpful to schools. The outcomes of the summer term 2008 pilot inspections supported this positive view and provided Ofsted with a strong mandate to continue to develop this approach.

## Proposal for the way forward

Pilot inspections will explore how inspectors' recommendations might focus more precisely on the action a school should take to become good or better.



*Q15. Should we write a letter to parents, setting out what the school should achieve by the next inspection and the actions the school needs to take to make that improvement?*

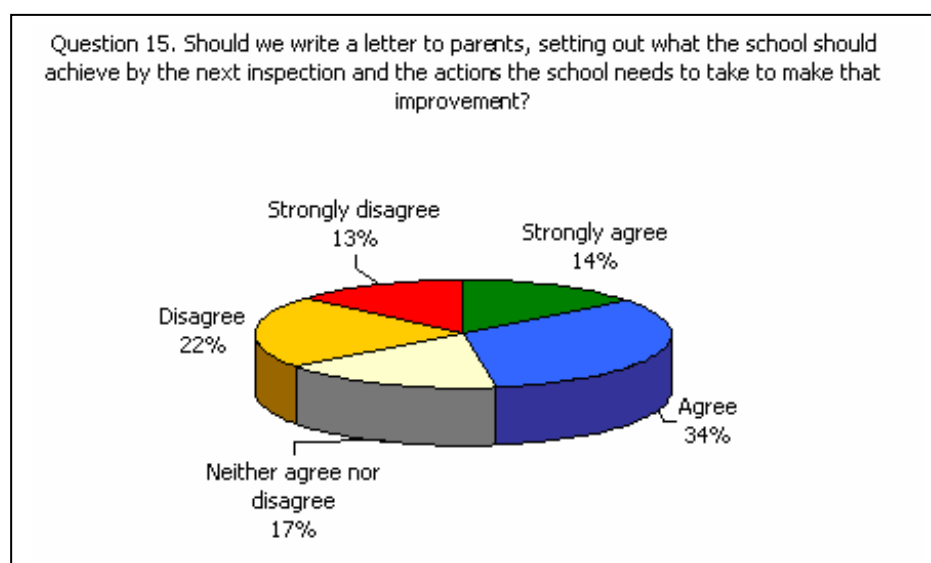
The response to this proposal was mixed, with 48% of respondents in favour and 35% against. As might be expected, it received support from parents. Responses from governors, 'other service providers', 'other school staff', local government representatives and inspectors were all favourable overall. However, headteachers and teachers, by far the largest groups represented, were split, with just over a fifth of both neither agreeing, nor disagreeing.

There were many positive comments received about how parents had a right to key information about schools. There were also helpful suggestions, for example that the letter should be clear and jargon free, and that it should also identify what parents and pupils could do to help the school to improve.

Although there were many whose comments were opposed to the introduction of the proposed letter, it is worth noting that, by and large, they felt that this was already achieved by the inspection report and the letter would, therefore, be unnecessary repetition. Such responses suggested that as long as the report was clear in its findings and recommendations, there was no need to introduce the proposed letter. It is interesting to note that these comments mirror precisely the findings of the summer term 2008 pilot inspections and echo the views of the schools, LAs and inspectors that took part. Given the mixed responses to the consultation and feedback from the summer pilot inspections, we propose to continue to consult schools, parents/carers and pupils about the structure and format of the report throughout the autumn 2008 and spring 2009 pilot inspections.

## Proposal for the way forward

We will continue to consult on the structure and format of the inspection report.



## Annex B: analysis by type of respondent

Overwhelmingly, the respondents represented the school sector. Some 78% of responses were received from headteachers, teachers, governors and school staff. Headteachers, at 42%, and teachers, at 24%, together made up two thirds of all respondents. The chart below provides a full breakdown of the contributions made by each of the groups.

