

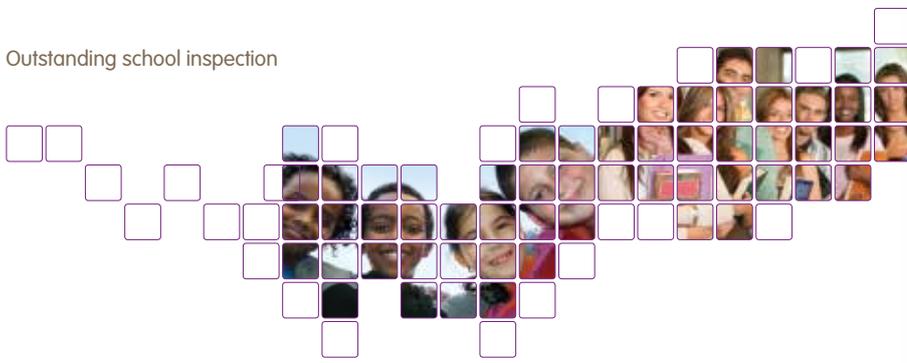


Outstanding school inspection

A study for CfBT Inspection Services

July 2012

Mike Raleigh



welcome...

...to CfBT Education Trust

CfBT Education Trust is a top 30* UK charity providing education services for public benefit in the UK and internationally. Established over 40 years ago, CfBT Education Trust has an annual turnover exceeding £100 million and employs more than 2,000 staff worldwide. We aspire to be the world's leading provider of education services, with a particular interest in school effectiveness.

Our work involves school improvement through inspection, school workforce development, and curriculum design for the UK's Department for Education, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), local authorities and an increasing number of independent and state schools, free schools and academies. We provide services direct to learners in our schools, through projects for excluded pupils and in young offender institutions.

Internationally we have successfully implemented education programmes for governments in the Middle East, North Africa and South East Asia and work on projects funded by donors such as the Department for International Development, the European Commission, the Australian Agency for International Development, the World Bank and the US Agency for International Development, in low- and middle-income countries.

Surpluses generated by our operations are reinvested in our educational research programme, Evidence for Education.

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*CfBT is ranked 27 out of 3,000 charities in the UK based on income in Top 3,000 Charities 2010/11 published by Caritas Data

...to CfBT Inspection Services

CfBT Inspection Services delivers inspections for Ofsted in the North of England. It has a workforce of over 600 contracted inspectors and a small team of employed managing inspectors who cover inspections across six remits, including both maintained and independent schools, Learning and Skills, ITE, Children's Centres and aspects of Early Years education on school sites. We are committed to delivering high-quality inspections, in every setting, in every case. Securing the best possible education for all is at the heart of our work.

About the author

Mike Raleigh led Ofsted's Secondary Education Division from 1999 to 2005 before becoming a Senior Regional Director of the National Strategies and an Education Adviser in the Department for Education. He is now an independent consultant. He co-authored CfBT's report *To the next level: good schools becoming outstanding*.



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Executive summary

The study analyses the work of outstanding inspectors employed by CfBT Education Trust in the inspection of maintained schools under contract to Ofsted. It was commissioned by CfBT Inspection Services and carried out by an independent consultant. The purpose of the study was to highlight the characteristics of outstanding inspection practice and advise how to increase the spread of such practice.

Outstanding inspection practice is common in CfBT's inspections. The 30 selected inspectors who were the focus of the study demonstrate it regularly in a range of inspection contexts. These inspectors generally specialise in one phase, although some work very effectively in more than one. They have substantial experience of inspection with CfBT and most carry out a significant number of inspections each year. Based on these identified outstanding features, recommendations have been made about how to reduce inconsistency and improve inspection practice.

The study identifies ten features of outstanding inspection practice under five headings:

Analysis

- ✦ Uses all the existing evidence to produce a highly perceptive analysis of pupils' achievement (progress and standards) and the factors that account for it.
- ✦ Selects the most appropriate techniques for gathering first-hand evidence and then adapts the approach where necessary.

Judgement

- ✦ Acts in the best interests of service users and understands and respects the contributions and achievements of service providers.
- ✦ Makes well-founded and constructive recommendations that the school can understand and act upon.

Communication

- ✦ Makes the inspection process transparent and communicates its value.
- ✦ Engages the inspection team and school staff in productive debate about the key factors in improving standards.

Conduct

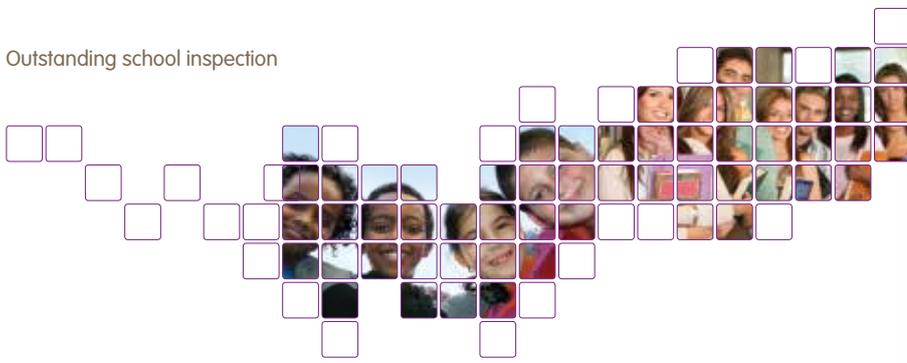
- ✦ Brings extensive experience and knowledge about education to bear on inspection and uses inspection to refresh professional understanding.
- ✦ Maintains high-quality practice in different contexts, whatever the challenge.

Leadership

- ✦ Demonstrates, demands and supports coherent, high-quality practice across the stages of inspection.
- ✦ Leaves the school in a much better position to improve standards than before.

The quality of their inspection practice is great credit to the inspectors themselves. It also reflects very well on the leadership and support CfBT gives them. CfBT's systems for the recruitment, deployment and development of inspectors are well established and rigorous. Its use of the performance framework for inspectors is coherent, thorough and well documented.

The report's conclusions and recommendations focus on: systematic identification of high-level inspector performance; enabling more additional inspectors to take on the lead inspector role; the recruitment and deployment of serving practitioners.



1 | Introduction

Purpose

This study of outstanding inspection practice was commissioned by CfBT Inspection Services and carried out by an independent consultant. The study set out to analyse and document the work of additional inspectors who demonstrate outstanding inspection practice and who are deployed by CfBT in the inspections of maintained schools in the north of England under contract to the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). The purpose of the study was to highlight the characteristics of outstanding inspection practice and advise how to increase the spread of such practice.

The report:

- ✦ explains how CfBT defines, identifies and develops outstanding inspection practice;
- ✦ covers the work of primary and secondary inspectors, including serving practitioners, in both lead and team inspector roles;
- ✦ documents excellent practice at different stages of the inspection process;
- ✦ makes recommendations on the deployment, training and development of inspectors;
- ✦ offers a basis for the development of CfBT's inspection practice in other countries.

Method

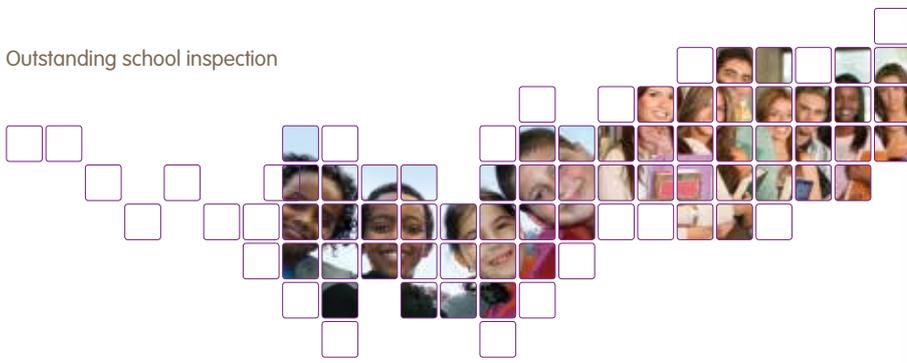
The study was carried out in autumn 2011. Most of the data and other information about inspection practice and outcomes used for the study were drawn from the period April 2010 to March 2011. A discrete set of visits to inspectors and inspections was also carried out in November and December 2011. The methodology and the findings of the study remain relevant to the new inspection framework introduced from January 2012, as it requires application of the same skills within their practice.

The study made use of the comprehensive sources of information within CfBT's inspection assessment and performance management systems in order to establish the means by which CfBT assesses the quality of inspectors' work. The process then:

- ✦ prompted CfBT to identify its best-performing inspectors and produce profiles and examples of their work;
- ✦ involved interviews of a sample of inspectors to discuss how they have built up and maintained the quality of their practice;
- ✦ included a discussion of outstanding inspection practice at the CfBT Inspection Services User Impact Forum¹;
- ✦ used visits by senior managing inspectors to capture current examples of inspection practice.

The study included a search for documented accounts of the characteristics of high-quality practice in the inspection systems of other countries. Little relevant analysis appears to have been published on the topic.

¹ The CfBT Inspection Services User Impact Forum comprises senior representatives of key stakeholders in the inspection process. Chaired by an independent consultant, it meets quarterly to debate and inform continuous improvement in CfBT inspection practice.



2 | The assessment of inspection skills

What Ofsted requires of inspectors

The Ofsted contract on which CfBT's inspections of maintained schools are based sets out (in Annex 1 of Schedule 6) the qualifications and experience that inspectors must have and the expectations they must fulfil. These criteria remain unchanged under the school inspection framework introduced from January 2012. They are reproduced in Appendix 1 of this report.

In terms of qualifications and experience, inspectors must have, among other things, 'credibility and up-to-date professional knowledge, for example of the remit, curriculum, recent developments in the sector, and statutory requirements (where appropriate) within the relevant area'. The requirements for the skills and conduct of inspectors are set out under four headings that apply to all inspectors. Inspectors must:

- ✦ gather, analyse, and interpret relevant evidence;
- ✦ make judgements that are objective, fair and based securely on evidence;
- ✦ communicate clearly, convincingly and succinctly, both orally and in writing;
- ✦ display high levels of professional conduct.

A fifth heading covers the requirements for inspectors leading teams.

Ofsted's requirements list 26 competencies for all inspectors and 14 additional competencies for lead inspectors. All the requirements are important and some are highly complex. Meeting all of the requirements adequately is challenging – and notably so when the inspection environment demands extensive coverage, clear focus and high speed.

CfBT's recruitment and training of inspectors

Like the other inspection service providers (ISPs), CfBT runs its own inspector recruitment process. The process is rigorous and extensive and involves a considerable investment on the part of the CfBT Inspection Services' senior management, administrative and senior inspector teams.

Throughout the stages of the process potential inspectors are assessed on their educational experience, their motivation to become inspectors, their skills in analysing and evaluating data and other information and their ability to make and communicate judgements. The stages include assessment centres and observation of and participation in inspections, as well as close scrutiny of their work in training inspections by CfBT's senior inspectors and by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI). Very few trainees drop out during training and virtually all meet the requirements presented for final assessment by HMI.

The assessment of serving inspectors

The system used by CfBT for assessing the performance of its inspectors is based on the framework set out by Ofsted. CfBT's application of the framework is coherent, thorough and well documented and includes customised elements of scrutiny and analysis. The performance of every inspector is benchmarked against CfBT inspector norms. Information is used by managing inspectors to pinpoint strengths and areas for improvement for inspectors in their teams. All CfBT's inspectors are subject to an annual appraisal, carried out by managing inspectors. The appraisal involves a self-assessment and draws on information from all the available sources of information.

The CfBT system includes assessment of:

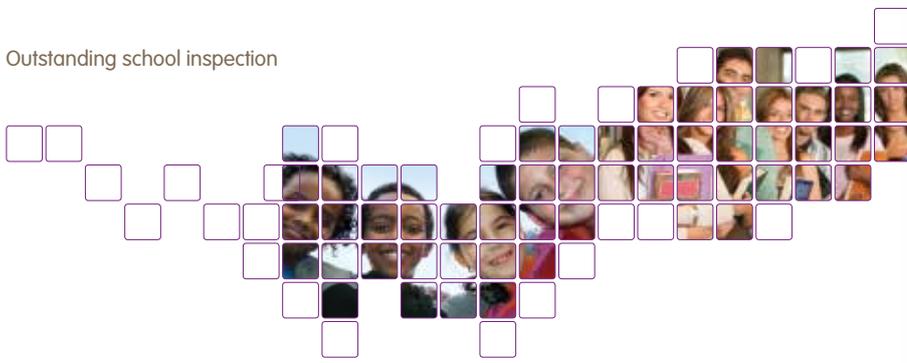
- ✿ inspection records and reports made by inspectors;
- ✿ the performance of team inspectors by lead inspectors;
- ✿ the performance of lead inspectors by team inspectors;
- ✿ the performance of lead and team inspectors by CfBT's quality assurance team;
- ✿ the performance of lead inspectors by HMI visiting inspections to carry out quality assurance of such events;
- ✿ the quality of inspection reports written by lead inspectors;
- ✿ the conduct and value of inspection as viewed by the heads of the schools inspected.

CfBT's assessment framework provides considerable information about the work of lead inspectors. The information tracks the conduct of inspections from start to finish. It includes the quality of the pre-inspection briefing, the nature of the engagement with the school, the management of the team and the writing of reports. It also includes the assessment made by the school after the inspection.

Assessments of the work of team inspectors include: analysis of inspection records and writing; commentary by lead inspectors; and judgements by CfBT quality assurance visitors and, more occasionally, by HMI quality assurance visitors. Particularly detailed assessment of the performance of team inspectors is carried out by CfBT managing inspectors or other senior inspectors where there are any grounds for concern.

CfBT uses grading scales to summarise the readiness of trainees to undertake inspection and subsequently to assess the quality of inspectors' work. The scales vary from two-point (i.e. meeting the requirements or not) to three-point (i.e. meeting the requirements well/meeting the requirements/not meeting the requirements). A four-point scale is used in the provider inspection survey, in which respondents are asked to define the extent of their agreement with a set of statements. The grading scales and associated criteria are usually common to Ofsted and the other inspection providers.

In summary, its recruitment and performance management systems enable CfBT to identify and build on inspectors' strengths as well as pinpoint and minimise weaknesses. The systems provide CfBT managers of inspectors with excellent working knowledge of individuals in their performance management groups.



3 | Outstanding inspection practice

Profiles of outstanding inspectors

This study used all the evidence available to CfBT to identify inspectors who had:

- (a) completed at least five inspections (as team or lead inspectors) between April 2010 and March 2011; and
- (b) carried out inspections consistently very well, as indicated by the different assessments made by CfBT, HMI and schools.

There were 30 inspectors in this category. It is important to note that some undoubtedly strong inspectors working for CfBT, whether employed or contracted, were not included because they had not carried out at least five inspections in the year, often because of their broader responsibilities as inspector managers employed by CfBT.

The work of the 30 inspectors covered inspections of maintained primary, secondary and special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs). The spread across the sectors broadly reflected the weighting of CfBT's inspections towards primary schools.

The profiles of these inspectors indicate that they generally:

- ✦ specialise in one phase, although some work very effectively in both;
- ✦ have substantial experience of inspection with CfBT and sometimes with other providers;
- ✦ carry out a significant number of inspections each year.

The inspection responsibilities of the 30 inspectors were varied:

- ✦ 20 (66%) had been primary lead inspectors during the year;
- ✦ 15 (50%) had been primary team as well as primary lead inspectors;
- ✦ 9 (30%) had been team inspectors only when inspecting primary schools;
- ✦ 12 (40%) had been secondary lead or team inspectors;
- ✦ 7 (23%) had been lead or team inspectors in the inspection of special schools or pupil referral units.

The profiles of the 30 inspectors showed that:

- ✦ 14 (46%) have been contracted and/or employed (i.e. salaried) by CfBT since September 2005, when the regional inspection provider system was introduced;
- ✦ 7 others (23%) have been contracted and/or employed by CfBT for at least three years, with some of these having had previous inspection experience;
- ✦ 4 (13%) were serving practitioners, working mainly as team inspectors;
- ✦ the number of inspections of all types carried out in the year ranged from 5 to 34, with the average being 16.

Characteristics of outstanding inspection practice

Analysis of the assessments of these 30 highly effective inspectors and the further fieldwork on which this study was based highlighted ten key features of their practice. These ten features relate to the five areas of competence defined in Appendix 1: **analysis, judgement, communication, conduct** and **leadership**.

The importance of these features was emphasised in discussions with CfBT managers and senior inspectors and in interviews with a sample of the inspectors themselves. They were also confirmed in the discussion of outstanding inspection practice in the CfBT User Impact Forum. The definitions were then tested in special visits made by CfBT's quality assurance team to inspections involving 17 of the 30 inspectors.

The ten features are summarised in Table 1 below and then explored in the sections that follow. These sections can usefully be read alongside Appendix 2. Taken from the CfBT User Impact Forum discussion of outstanding inspection, this offers an account of the personal attributes of outstanding inspectors. It defines these attributes under six headings: moral purpose; empathy and imagination; creativity; integrity; presence and charisma; self-confidence and self-awareness.

Table 1

Ten features of outstanding inspection practice	
Analysis	Uses all the existing evidence to produce a highly perceptive analysis of pupils' achievement (progress and standards) and the factors that account for it
	Selects the most appropriate techniques for gathering first-hand evidence and then adapts the approach where necessary
Judgement	Acts in the best interests of service users and understands and respects the contributions and achievements of service providers
	Makes well-founded and constructive recommendations that the school can understand and act upon
Communication	Makes the inspection process transparent and communicates its value
	Engages the inspection team and school staff in productive debate about the key factors in improving standards
Conduct	Brings extensive experience and knowledge to bear on inspection and uses inspection to refresh professional understanding
	Maintains high-quality practice in different contexts, whatever the challenge
Leadership	Demonstrates, demands and supports coherent, high-quality practice across the stages of inspection
	Leaves the school in a much better position to improve standards than before

Commentary on the ten features of practice

Analysis

The foundation of high-quality inspection is that inspectors use all the existing evidence to produce a highly perceptive analysis of pupils' achievement (progress and standards) and the factors that account for it. Quality assurance commentaries on pre-inspection briefings and the inspectors' own accounts confirm that their preparation is meticulous. But more than that, their analysis of data and documentation and early discussion with headteachers illustrate the ability to synthesise and interpret information in order to home in on the key issues with clarity and acumen.

That does not, of course, mean that the inspection judgements are reached before the fieldwork begins: it means that the inspectors are clear about the focus of enquiries. The associated skill is the ability to decide how the enquiries can best be carried out, to select the most appropriate techniques for gathering first-hand evidence and then adapt the approach where necessary.

It can be tempting to adopt a standardised approach to inspection when time and other constraints are tight and the need to comply with specific requirements is paramount. Highly effective inspection depends to a considerable extent on the ability of inspectors to vary their tactics to match the context. Even allowing for the tight constraints within which inspections are conducted, the range of possible methods of inspection enquiry is wide. Decisions can be made, for example, about: the focus for discussions with staff, pupils and governors; where and how to use the precious resource of inspector time in observing lessons and scrutinising pupils' work; or about the extent to which behaviour and attendance, for instance, need to be more closely investigated.

While the inspectors are adept at setting out a plan in this way, it is also the case that they may vary the plan during the inspection, especially but not only at the end of the first day, if the emerging findings dictate a change. The willingness to make such a change and the capacity to handle the implications of it are two markers of high-quality inspection leadership and management.

Matching the inspection activities to the context of the school being inspected, whether in advance or en route, may involve some risk. It is, of course, crucial that the evidence on which inspection judgements are based is secure. Inspectors need to take decisions on which topics may need more detailed exploration than others. They also need to decide the best ways of gathering and analysing evidence. What the inspectors and their quality assurance visitors say is that a risk calculated to get to the heart of issues in the school is a risk worth taking.

Judgement

The best inspectors are absolutely committed to getting the judgements about the school right. This commitment comes through in their own accounts of their professional motivation in the work and the satisfaction they derive from it. It also underlies what the inspectors describe as their professional anxiety about the best way of conducting the inspection – an anxiety which their confident manners disguise.

Part of this proper professional anxiety derives from the tension, much rehearsed in discussion of inspection, between informing service users and helping service providers. The tension is sometimes quite evident and sometimes more subtle. It can surface wherever in the spectrum of overall effectiveness the inspection pitches the school. The fundamental purpose of inspection is to provide an accurate picture of standards and the quality of provision. The accuracy of that picture is crucial in maximising the impact of the inspection for pupils, parents and the wider community, as well as for school staff and governors. Inspection is also of value to service providers by recognising their strengths and calling attention to weaknesses they can improve.

The two purposes are not always easy to reconcile. Excellent inspectors handle the issue very well: they act in the best interests of service users and understand and respect the contributions and achievements of service providers. The inspectors' commitment to getting the judgements right reflects both the need to provide an accurate picture and a recognition that these judgements are of great significance to school staff and governors and can make a considerable difference to school morale, reputation and prospects.

Managing the tension does not mean reaching a compromise between one purpose and another. The inspectors have no doubt that the veracity of the picture is what matters to both service users and providers, however uncomfortable in the short term this may be for the providers. The account of the discussion of outstanding inspection practice by the CfBT User Impact Forum exemplifies this as follows:

'Finally... there is the obligation to do whatever is best for pupils. But how? It will not always be the same, even in apparently similar circumstances. This gets to the heart of outstanding-ness in inspecting... an outstanding inspector is one who, on a school-by-school and inspection-by-inspection basis, identifies what pupils most require and reports it in such a clear and persuasive way that they are able to get it.'

The case studies, including the reports by quality assurance visitors, underline an important issue in this respect – an issue which relates back to the management of inspection enquiries. Clearly, some inspection judgements can be arrived at relatively readily: the evidence is sufficient and clear and the decision can be taken and maintained. In other cases, what is needed is another angle, better evidence and more detailed consideration, especially where the issue is critical to the overall picture of the school. Comments by team inspectors and quality assurance visitors confirm how important it can be to take the harder rather than the easier option in reaching judgements.

The ability to manage the tension between the interests of service users and service providers is highlighted in comments in the provider inspection survey. Headteachers often remark on the fact that while they did not necessarily agree (at least initially) with judgements they found uncomfortable, they understood (or came to understand) why they were made. In this context it is worth pointing to the reassuring fact highlighted by CfBT's analysis of the inspections carried out by the 30 inspectors in the study: namely that there is no clear correlation between headteachers' assessments of the quality of inspection and the inspectors' judgements of overall effectiveness of their school. In other words, headteachers compliment inspectors on their work regardless of whether the inspection judgements bring them immediate comfort.

Strongly associated with the issue of getting the judgements right is the capacity of the best inspectors to make well-founded and constructive recommendations that the school can understand and act upon. Forming useful recommendations in oral feedback and then in the written report requires considerable skill. The process tests all inspectors. It is one of the key elements around which the tension between accuracy of judgements and help to service providers can be resolved. As follow-up to inspection reports confirms, the way in which recommendations are formed and phrased can make all the difference to the action that schools take.

The point is underlined in the assessments by schools of the inspections in which CfBT's inspectors were involved. They almost always give high ratings in response to the statement 'The inspection identified clear recommendations for improvement'. As evidence from quality assurance visits illustrates, the skill lies not just in the way the recommendations are written but in the way they are communicated and discussed in the feedback with school staff and governors.

Communication

The comments on the work of highly effective inspectors made by colleagues, quality assurance visitors and school staff refer time and again to their ability to make the inspection process transparent and to communicate its value. They say that the school inspection framework and the published documents associated with it make a considerable contribution to explaining inspection. What the best inspectors do is bring the process alive, demonstrate what it is about and show how it works. They do this for their inspector colleagues as well as for school staff, but the greatest benefit is usually to the headteachers of the schools being inspected. Even the most experienced and confident heads do not necessarily find the inspection process easy. The inspectors take great trouble in how they explain in advance what will be done, they take into account what the school has to say and offer, and then they maintain dialogue as the process unfolds.

Effective communication is not simply about explaining the process. Crucially, it involves real effort to engage the inspection team and school staff in productive debate about the key factors in improving standards. This is a feature of practice to which team inspectors often point when they are asked to comment on the performance of a highly effective lead inspector. They feel that they have been encouraged and challenged to analyse and discuss key issues in school practice and, from time to time, to reconsider what may seem to be obvious explanations and connections between what schools do and what they achieve. This is most certainly the case for headteachers who record their views in the provider inspection survey. They often refer to the value of the inspection for their professional development and that of their staff.

Communication covers the written report as well as the oral transactions during the inspection. Naturally enough, the reports written by the lead inspectors covered in the study met the requirements set, almost always without significant amendment at the drafting stage. A small sample of them showed that, while they all followed the standard report format, the nature of the coverage and the styles of writing varied, as is to be expected. The most impressive of the reports provided an engaging account of the school's story, with exemplification and other helpful detail on key points.

Conduct

Ofsted's requirements specify that all inspectors must be knowledgeable, well prepared, contributors to team work, professional in manner and alert to matters of safeguarding, equality and diversity. All the evidence indicates that inspectors meet this high standard of conduct. There are two features that seem to mark out highly effective inspectors.

The first feature is about professional knowledge and understanding. In this respect the inspectors bring their experience and knowledge about education to bear on inspection and use inspection to refresh their own professional understanding. Evidence shows that they do not parade their professional knowledge in the course of an inspection: what they do is apply their understanding thoughtfully to the particular context of the school under inspection, showing an appropriate combination of appreciation and questioning of the school's provision and achievements. But inspection also prompts and refreshes understanding: the inspectors learn from what they see and hear and take that learning on to other inspections.

The second feature is the capacity to maintain high-quality practice in different contexts, whatever the challenge. As the inspectors themselves readily say, inspections have different characteristics and they do not always run smoothly. They can be particularly challenging for any combination of reasons. To take some examples: the running of the school may be seriously disrupted by circumstances outside its control; the school may have new leadership that is not well-informed about its provision and performance; staff or governors may be hostile; there may be acute problems of relationships within the school that make interviews hard to manage; the provision may be exceptionally and unexpectedly complex or otherwise difficult to assess; or the school may be in rapid transition, with some of its provision very different from the rest.

The case studies illustrate how the inspectors handled such issues with skilful management which can include, for example, straight talking, rapid re-planning of inspection activity or exemplary calmness in dealing with hostility or a breakdown in relationships. What comes through in these accounts is not simply the desire to ensure the inspection is completed but the commitment to delivering an inspection which tells an accurate story about the school, despite the distractions.

Leadership

Most of the inspectors in the survey lead inspections regularly, although some also act as team inspectors. Coming across strongly from the case studies involving lead inspectors is that they routinely demonstrate, demand and support coherent, high-quality practice across the stages of inspection.

Referring to the experience of working with a very effective lead inspector, one team inspector put it this way:

'She simply made me work better. I knew what to do and I could see from the way she was handling her own responsibilities how I could best go about mine in what was a difficult place to inspect.'

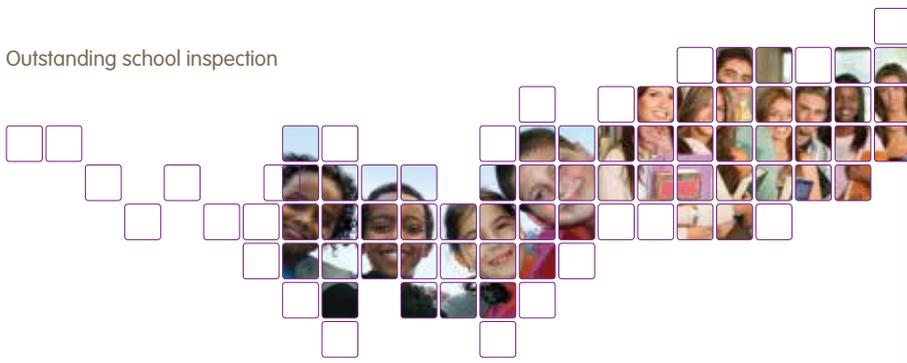
Commentaries made in quality assurance visits explored in detail how leadership of this kind was provided at different stages of the inspection through:

- ✦ analysis, writing and behaviour that gave models to others;
- ✦ straightforward guidance;
- ✦ prompting and encouragement to explore issues in depth;
- ✦ insistence on clear evaluation and unambiguous decisions on judgements;
- ✦ support on challenging tasks, including delivering uncomfortable feedback, but given without taking over the team inspector's role.

The inspectors also demonstrate leadership of another kind in relation to the schools they inspect. They do this by confirming, and in some cases inspiring, a productive approach to self-evaluation and improvement planning. They:

- ✿ prompt, encourage and challenge school staff to explain what they believe about the school and to analyse its strengths and weaknesses;
- ✿ inform and expand the perspectives staff have on standards and provision and encourage questioning and debate;
- ✿ provide models and informal coaching around evaluative processes such as lesson observation and the scrutiny of pupils' work;
- ✿ ensure that inspection judgements are understood and that recommendations make good sense.

By these means they leave the school in a much better position to improve standards than before. This is, of course, a highly desirable outcome of all inspection, whatever the nature of the judgement about the school's overall effectiveness. Those completing the school survey form are asked to rate their agreement with the statement 'I will use the inspection recommendations to move the school/my teaching forward'. In the inspections run by the inspectors covered in this study, the level of assent to this statement was almost always very high.



4 | Outstanding inspectors: case studies

This section of the report illustrates the work of four of the 30 inspectors covered in the study. It draws on a number of sources of information: routine quality assurance of inspections carried out by HMI and CfBT's senior inspectors; comments from inspector colleagues; the views of schools collected through the provider survey; special visits by CfBT's senior inspectors carried out in the course of this study; and interviews with the inspectors themselves.

Inspector A

This inspector's work over the year included lead and team roles in primary and secondary schools.

An HMI quality assurance visit to one inspection particularly noted the thoroughness of inspection planning, the skilful deployment of the team, the use of evidence from a range of sources and the fact that team meetings ensured that key issues were discussed fully. It also picked out the relationship with the school:

'The excellent professional relationship established with the school and their involvement in the process ensured an honest and open approach to inspection; this was confirmed by the headteacher who considered the inspection had been "rigorous with very sharp inspectors".'

Responses to key questions in the provider survey were exceptionally positive on the accuracy of judgements and on the usefulness of recommendations. Comments included:

'I would like to thank everyone for making the experience a productive one. I now have clear ideas on how I can move the school forward.'

'The lead inspector and his team made our inspection a really positive experience. The comments and judgements made were fair and accurate. I was very pleased with the professionalism of the team, and the way in which our senior leadership team was included in the process was excellent.'

The special quality assurance visit for the exercise on outstanding inspection identified particularly strong features of the inspector's practice:

- ✦ excellent and sufficiently detailed communication with the headteacher through very well prepared pre-inspection briefing and telephone conversations;
- ✦ good personal relationships characterised by integrity, facilitating a constructive partnership with the head;
- ✦ a specially requested staff meeting on the first day of the inspection to introduce the inspection and put teaching staff at ease;
- ✦ the sharp focus on school improvement and provision and outcomes that are in pupils' best interests;
- ✦ full engagement of the headteacher in identifying areas for improvement of greatest benefit to the school.

Inspector B

This inspector's work over the year involved lead inspection in primary and secondary schools.

A CfBT quality assurance visit to one inspection noted:

'An inspection of the very highest quality; excellent prep for this inspection; very clear and helpful joining instructions; swiftly came to accurate judgements based on very secure evidence and years of experience. Team meeting exceptionally well handled – a model of outstanding practice to all!'

Responses to key questions in the school survey were generally highly positive on the accuracy of judgements and the usefulness of recommendations. The comments included:

'The inspectors were personable and positive whilst remaining thorough and rigorous. Their professional approach was helpful and enabled me to reflect and answer questions to the best of my ability – which as a new headteacher I really appreciated. I was made fully aware of how an objective, external professional views the school and where I should focus the school's resources and expertise, to make further improvements to achievement standards and care.'

'The approach shown throughout by our lead inspector was exemplary: she was the consummate professional; honest, fair and transparent in her judgements and by providing recognition of the efforts being put into our work gave us the self-belief to continue to a final conclusion.'

The special quality assurance visit for the exercise identified strong features of the inspector's practice:

- ✿ The lead inspector's joining instructions, draft timetable and detailed pre-inspection briefing were evidence of the meticulous preparation involved in successful inspection. Her well-organised approach inspired confidence in the team members who welcomed the direction given at the team meeting at the start of the second day. Team activities such as lesson observations, work scrutiny and interviews, were allocated with clearly identified foci.
- ✿ Throughout the inspection the lead inspector struck a good balance in maintaining regular contact with the team for capturing emerging evidence while not distracting from inspection activities.
- ✿ The lead inspector's pleasant manner was evident in interviews setting interviewees at ease. She was appreciative of interviewees' time and contribution and treated them with respect and sensitivity while asking probing questions. The questioning style gave interviewees opportunity to reflect, respond and contribute further unrequested evidence.
- ✿ Sensitive probing questioning was evident in the lead inspector's discussions with a local authority officer – for example, identifying the strengths of the local authority's tracking systems before offering a clearly understood critique that was confirmed by the local authority officer.
- ✿ The interview with the chair of governors developed more as a conversation than interview that engaged the chair in effective partnership on the inspection.
- ✿ In a difficult interview with the headteacher the lead inspector showed great patience in detailing the evidence that had informed a decision with which the head disagreed. Subsequently the head commented that the inspection was rigorous and that there had been opportunity to provide additional evidence throughout the inspection.
- ✿ A team member was appreciative of the lead inspector's calm manner in a difficult team meeting and of good systems for cataloguing of evidence forms being well organised and not overwhelming the team with paperwork.

An interview with the inspector highlighted these points about her practice:

- ✦ There is no substitute for detailed knowledge of current and previous developments in education – and while inspection is itself an important source of knowledge, inspectors need to gain knowledge from other sources too.
- ✦ There does not need to be any struggle between being professional and being personable or between being well-organised and being flexible.
- ✦ Effective inspection cannot involve shortcuts: you often need to go the extra distance in the preparation and management of the inspection to make sure you have got to the heart of the issues.
- ✦ It is vital to show respect for the provider's contributions and achievements, not least when there are difficult messages to give.

Inspector C

This inspector's work over the year involved lead and team roles in primary schools.

An HMI quality assurance visit to one inspection noted:

'The inspection was very well led. Members of the team were well briefed and clear in their roles. Judgements were challenged and moderated in meetings and the lead inspector successfully monitored the evidence base of team members, providing feedback etc. The conduct of the team was very much in line with the code of conduct.'

Responses to key questions in the school survey were exceptionally positive. The comments included:

'I found the inspection a very positive and professional experience. It was a rare opportunity to engage in professional dialogue related directly to the school's individual strengths and issues. The lead inspector was highly professional, extremely competent with credible background experience, extensive knowledge and yet very approachable. She was willing and able to discuss in detail the SEF and justify all judgements. At the end of the inspection I felt it had been a fair and honest process. I felt we had been judged by someone "worthy".'

The special quality assurance visit for the exercise identified these particularly strong features of the inspector's practice:

- ✦ The production of the pre-inspection briefing and subsequent analysis of performance data demonstrated that the inspector uses a range of evidence to produce a highly perceptive analysis of standards and the factors that account for them. The evidence produced by the inspector was highly evaluative and showed in-depth knowledge of effective Early Years practice. The inspector left those she spoke to in no doubt where the analysis and judgements were coming from.
- ✦ The inspector demonstrated a wide range of techniques for gathering evidence and adapted practice to enable her to select the most appropriate for the context, like altering meetings and lesson observations as she knew there were assessment and management issues to follow up.
- ✦ The inspector worked collaboratively with the school to enable it to see where the recommendations for best practice were coming from and also gently pointed out issues that required action. All issues and points were founded on secure evidence and the school understood what was required.
- ✦ The inspector left the school on day one in a much better position to understand the expected standards. The information she shared with the school was invaluable and the acting headteacher appreciated this approach.
- ✦ The main strength of this inspection was the productive relationships developed by the inspector with the school team. This enabled the team to find and demonstrate the best of their practice and also to accept and respond to challenge from the inspector.

- ✦ The acting headteacher said she appreciated the flexibility demonstrated by the inspector to tailor the inspection to the setting's needs. She stated that she felt fully involved in the process and was able to leave meetings and reflect, and then return with clearer information.
- ✦ This inspection unfolded in a slightly unusual way and, due to the excellent relationships, the lead inspector was able to tease out during the first day the main issues that were causing confusion. The lead inspector carefully developed a relationship with the acting headteacher to put her at ease and to enable her to share important points honestly.
- ✦ The lead inspector honestly shared inadequate and satisfactory practice to enable the school to find further evidence. The lead inspector's ability to engage the school staff in productive debate about the key factors enabled the school to see where gaps in the evidence lay.

Inspector D

This inspector's work over the year involved lead and team inspections in primary schools.

A CfBT quality assurance visit to one inspection noted:

'Your detailed scrutiny of work and comparison of work to teaching, assessment and the school tracking system was invaluable in helping the team to build an increasingly accurate picture of learning and progress in lessons and over time. [...] Your contributions to the team meeting with senior leaders were impressive. Your ability to home in on the specifics of the evidence without having to continually refer to the evaluation schedule helped to reassure leaders that this inspection was specifically tailored to this school. As such, you were also appropriately focused on ensuring that the school was well aware of the extent of the evidence that was required for day two.'

Responses to key questions in the school survey were generally highly positive. The comments included:

'The lead inspector and her team worked hard to ensure that the inspection process had a positive impact on the school's development. The opportunity for the head and deputy to observe inspection team meetings was particularly valuable and added a useful dimension. The lead inspector is to be commended for the conduct of the inspection – this was Ofsted at its best!'

'Although a very intense process I found the inspection to be productive and positive in its outcome. The inspectors were polite, helpful and challenging. The process couldn't be described as pleasant, but findings were fair and reflected the self-evaluation of the school. Governors were fully involved. The most helpful aspect of the inspection was opportunities I had to do joint observations and attend team meetings/briefings.'

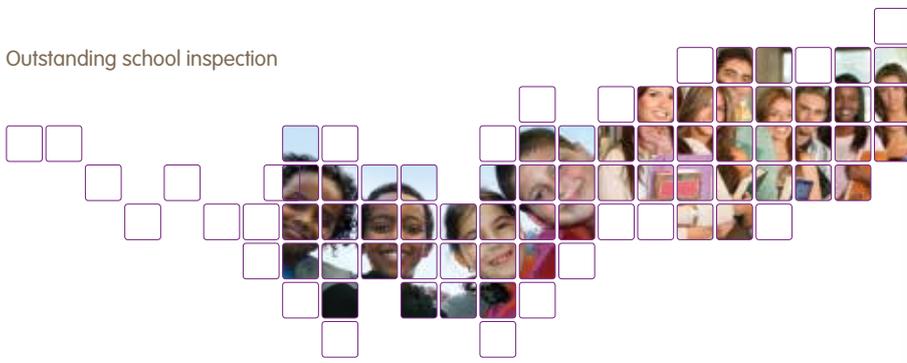
The special quality assurance visit for the exercise identified these strong features of the inspector's practice:

- ✦ The lead inspector's pre-inspection contact with the team, including joining instructions, inspection plan, team responsibilities and the school's revised self-evaluation grades ensured that expectations were clear and all were up to speed with the requirements for this specific inspection. They reflected detailed, incisive analysis of the available pre-inspection information, including that provided by the headteacher. This contact effectively set the initial scene and tone for the inspection.
- ✦ The 'evidence required' section of the pre-inspection briefing was carefully recorded as scaffolding questions that left no doubt as to the direction of the inspection. All were dovetailed into focused trails to be pursued. Four of these emerged as areas for improvement or stems within these.

- ✦ Key to the inspection was the need to secure the current attainment and progress levels for all groups across the school. The inspection plan was designed to support this.
- ✦ In an early meeting, the lead inspector struck a clear balance between working alongside the school as they shared their evidence, using probing questioning to clarify understanding of 'outstanding' and 'good' progress and getting the head's agreement with the inspectors' evaluation of what the evidence was actually showing. This was a difficult conversation, exacerbated by the head who, despite much support from the lead inspector, was not grasping the issue. The lead inspector handled this situation sensitively.
- ✦ The team meeting with the senior leadership team at the end of day one was challenging as the school was aware that, despite many pupil outcomes celebrated and acknowledged as outstanding, other evidence was tentatively pointing towards good for many areas. The lead inspector's manner was reflective and supportive as she guided the school leaders to the evidence they had presented and to that gathered by the team. These tentative key judgements, despite the best efforts of the lead inspector and discussions with the team, were not fully acknowledged by the school, although they did 'see where they were coming from'.
- ✦ This was a very well-run inspection by an experienced, high-quality lead inspector. Despite the difficulties encountered, the lead inspector managed the tricky moments with school staff very well, ably and competently supported by a strong team inspector, forming a collaborative team.

An interview with the inspector highlighted these points about her practice:

- ✦ the vital importance of the pre-inspection briefing in establishing detailed lines of enquiry and fixing the inspection plan, at least for the first day, in order to pursue them;
- ✦ the need for full engagement with the school, including meeting all staff as early as possible, and exploring key issues with the senior leaders in an open fashion;
- ✦ the need to avoid getting bogged down in data and losing sight of the big picture;
- ✦ building in time with the inspection team in stages to reflect on judgements.



5 | Conclusions

The challenge of better inspection

The skills and energy required to inspect well and in the ways that Ofsted requires are prodigious. The inspector workforce, as a whole, is to be congratulated on the effectiveness and reliability with which the job is done routinely. The tempo of inspections leaves little time for reflection and it is right for inspectors to find the most efficient ways to work, and to look for the quickest possible routes across the ground they are asked to cover. Outstanding inspectors absorb the pressures to comply with the formal requirements and achieve the quality standards, yet still retain the capacity to focus sharply on grasping the unique circumstances and meeting the unique needs of each school and its pupils.’ CfBT User Impact Forum discussion of outstanding inspection

Among the instructive points made by senior managers and inspectors interviewed in the study were reminders about the factors which can make outstanding practice in school inspections hard to achieve. However, as this study confirms, outstanding inspection practice is common in CfBT’s inspections, rather than only appearing on an occasional basis. The inspectors who were the focus of the study manage it, if not quite all of the time, then most of the time, and they can reproduce it in a wide range of inspection contexts.

CfBT’s approach to the recruitment, deployment and development of inspectors is well established and thorough. It makes a major contribution to success in meeting Ofsted’s targets for inspection quality. As the indicators show, the number of CfBT’s inspections that do not meet requirements is very small and the amount of ineffective inspection practice is minimal.

Against this background, CfBT is right to shift the emphasis of its own quality assurance and development work to the promotion of more outstanding inspection practice. CfBT can pursue this work for itself but its efforts could usefully be linked to development activity involving Ofsted and the other inspection service providers.

Identifying and grading outstanding inspection practice

The framework that is currently used to assess inspections does not systematically distinguish practice which does better than ‘meet the requirements’. The assessment process uses two-point and three-point scales, with most being two-point. This keeps the assessment relatively simple. On the other hand, specifying ‘better-than-compliant’ standards for key features of inspection practice could help to promote high-quality inspection. Applying a three-point scale could well be enough, with the scale using phrases such as ‘inadequate’, ‘meets the requirement’ and ‘meets the requirement to a high level’.

Introducing discrimination of performance in this way would have potential benefits by:

- ✦ giving a clearer and more coherent basis for assessments;
- ✦ recognising high-quality performance, often achieved in difficult circumstances;
- ✦ providing a basis for training and other development work;
- ✦ offering a further incentive to inspectors to evaluate and step up their performance.

The roles of lead and team inspectors

The new framework for school inspection from January 2012 makes greater demands on inspection teams. One is to emphasise the need for inspectors to tailor inspection processes to suit the enquiries that need to be made, rather than to follow set routines. Another is that team inspectors play a fuller role in gathering evidence for and making judgements about the key themes – which means that, even more than in the past, team inspectors need to adopt the whole-school perspective which lead inspectors have always be called upon to take. This capacity is, of course, why, as this sample of inspectors indicates, excellent lead inspectors almost always make excellent team inspectors. While lead inspectors continue to have specific responsibilities, the new framework steps up expectations on their colleagues.

If it is the case that expectations on team inspectors are increased, then it has implications for their training, deployment and assessment. It raises the question of whether all team inspectors should be expected to become lead inspectors and be trained as such. In principle this looks like the right approach to take, certainly in relation to the inspection of primary schools. There may still be a case for specialism in particular aspects of schools' work but there is a strong argument for specialists to be capable of and experienced in inspection leadership. It would also make a difference to the way they are assessed. CfBT has considerable information about the performance of its lead inspectors and it does an excellent job of pulling this together. Information on the performance of team inspectors is gathered from a range of sources and is used to inform professional dialogue and development, but their role in inspection means that their engagement with the school and the reporting of the inspection is of a different order from that of lead inspectors. The balance would change, of course, if all or most inspectors lead inspections.

The use of serving practitioners

The question of whether all inspectors should normally be expected to lead inspections poses itself most sharply in relation to the use of current practitioners. In common with the other inspection providers, CfBT has traditionally used most of its current practitioners as team inspectors.

A CfBT study published in 2008, *The Practitioner Inspector*, focused on the impact of inspection training and practice on the practitioners' schools. The study endorsed the value current practitioners bring to inspection, with the vast majority of those surveyed feeling that their expertise was used to good advantage on inspection. There was also strong support for the proposition that inspection training and experience enhanced the practitioner-inspectors' approach to improving their own schools, in particular by sharpening their school self-evaluation.

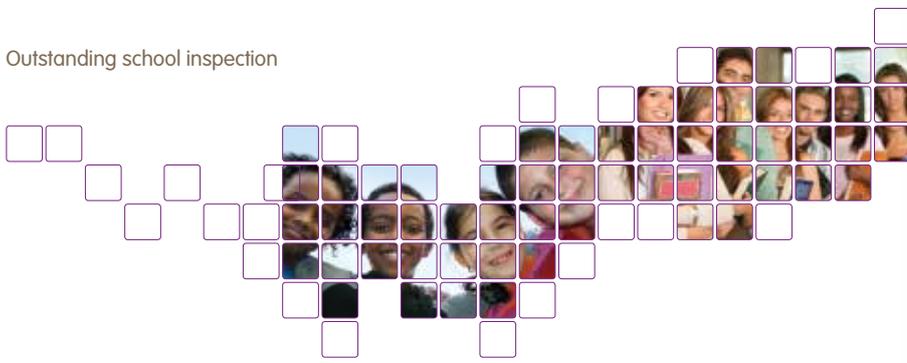
However, few current practitioners since then have been happy to undertake inspection leadership on a regular basis, mainly because it calls for more preparation and follow-up time than they feel able to provide. Whatever the reasons, it seems clear that the inspection system would gain more value from the use of current practitioners if they led inspections.

Inspector training and development

Taking into account the financial regime within which school inspection operates, CfBT runs a successful and well-organised programme of formal inspector training and development. This covers induction and other initial stages, ongoing training for all inspectors in inspection issues, and training to become lead inspectors.

Inspectors interviewed in the course of this study pointed to the value of other sources of professional development, including the opportunity for lead inspectors to work as team inspectors alongside other lead inspectors, and the more incidental benefits of informal professional discussion with colleagues on other occasions. In this respect, more could perhaps be done to establish or step up opportunities for inspectors to learn from one another about the educational developments and issues they see in the course of inspection as well as about inspection processes.

As a number of those interviewed agreed, there is a case for introducing an advanced programme of inspection training deliberately designed to promote excellent practice. This programme need not be elaborate or time-consuming. It could helpfully focus on the features of high-quality inspection leadership identified in this study, doing so, for example, through a combination of face-to-face debate about inspection case studies, online study and focused phone-conference discussion by inspection team members after a shared inspection. CfBT's remit leads and senior managing inspectors could play a key role in such a programme, as they already do in relation to other aspects of inspector and inspection development. There may be value in building a programme towards certification as a 'senior inspector' or 'advanced inspector', without necessarily linking that certification to pay bands.



6 | Recommendations

These recommendations recognise that, while CfBT can adapt its own organisational practices, significant modifications are likely to need to be taken forward in conjunction with Ofsted and the other inspection providers.

In the light of this study, CfBT should consider:

- ✦ rationalising the approach used to assess inspection conduct and outcomes by introducing a common three-point grading system that better identifies high-level performance in the work of both lead and team inspectors;
- ✦ focusing future training for all inspectors, including their initial training, on developing the perspective and skills needed to lead inspections;
- ✦ changing over time the assumptions of inspector deployment so that all inspectors, at least in the primary phase, are normally expected to take on the lead inspector role;
- ✦ adopting a customised approach to the recruitment and deployment of current practitioners as inspectors, based on the principle that more will lead inspections;
- ✦ developing a programme of advanced training that promotes high-quality inspection leadership by providing more opportunities for inspectors to learn from one another.

Appendix I: Ofsted’s requirements of inspectors

Gather, analyse, and interpret relevant evidence	Make judgements that are objective, fair and based securely on evidence
<p>Inspectors must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ gather sufficient and appropriate evidence efficiently; ✦ analyse information, including performance data, accurately; ✦ interpret information to formulate sound hypotheses; ✦ identify and pursue further sources of relevant evidence and test out assertions; ✦ select evidence relevant to the criteria on which judgements are to be based; and ✦ keep accurate and evaluative record of evidence that can withstand scrutiny and challenge and which substantiates judgements. 	<p>Inspectors must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ make perceptive diagnoses of what has most impact on children, young people and learners; ✦ understand and use evaluation criteria reliably to make judgements; ✦ reach unequivocal and coherent judgements that are fully consistent with the evidence; ✦ moderate/modify individual judgements where necessary; and ✦ weigh up conflicting evidence and reach balanced and objective judgements.
Communicate clearly, convincingly and succinctly, both orally and in writing	Display high levels of professional conduct
<p>Inspectors must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ be competent in the use of IT; ✦ respond professionally and calmly to challenge; ✦ explain and illustrate judgements convincingly; ✦ formulate and communicate critical judgements sensitively; ✦ adapt their oral and written communication styles to the audience; and ✦ produce written records that are fit for purpose within the required time scale. 	<p>Inspectors must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ be professionally knowledgeable in relation to the work that they undertake, including having a good working knowledge of the relevant frameworks for inspection; ✦ update their professional knowledge continuously and as necessary; ✦ prepare carefully for inspection activities in accordance with the demands of the relevant frameworks; ✦ be active and reliable team members contributing fully to corporate judgements; ✦ behave professionally, adapting flexibly to the role assigned; ✦ establish open and professional relationships; ✦ reflect Ofsted’s values and Code of Conduct; ✦ comply with Ofsted’s policy and procedures on safeguarding and protecting children, young people and learners; and ✦ comply with Ofsted’s policy and procedures on equality and diversity.

Ofsted's requirements of inspectors (continued)

When leading others to achieve high quality outcomes

Inspectors must:

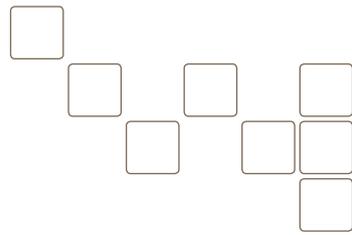
- ✦ have a clear understanding of the goals to be achieved;
- ✦ carry out a clear analysis of main risks and issues to be addressed by the inspection team;
- ✦ conduct effective pre-inspection planning meetings where appropriate;
- ✦ build and support a team that achieves its goals consistently and to a good standard;
- ✦ establish a positive, professional and productive climate in which team members are able to operate collaboratively and openly;
- ✦ establish and communicate clear expectations;
- ✦ plan and organise the work of others efficiently, making best use of time;
- ✦ recognise and build on the strengths and expertise of team members, giving regular feedback and recognition;
- ✦ coach and contribute to the development of others' competencies;
- ✦ identify weaknesses and challenge practice within the team, taking appropriate action to bring about improvement;
- ✦ assure the quality of the team's work and the timeliness of delivery;
- ✦ work effectively in partnership with the Contractor;
- ✦ edit the work of others incisively and to Ofsted's standards; and
- ✦ take responsibility for the quality of their own work and for that of the team.

Appendix 2: The personal attributes of outstanding inspectors

From the notes taken of the CfBT User Impact Forum discussion of outstanding inspection

Technical excellence, full possession of the skills and competencies Ofsted has listed, is necessary but not sufficient to be an outstanding inspector. A range of other personal qualities, not always easily defined, is essential. The way these qualities express themselves in different individuals is variable and there is no blueprint.

- ✿ *Moral purpose.* Inspection is not just a job to be done conscientiously; it is something with a high purpose and doing it as well as possible is the minimum acceptable. Just doing it well is not good enough. Outstanding inspectors are not clock watchers and reliably go the extra mile.
- ✿ *Empathy and imagination.* When inspectors lack empathy they are unlikely to acquire a reliable evidence base because they are treated with suspicion. Understanding a school perceptively requires imagination. Outstanding inspectors listen and register what is not said as well as what is, 'noticing when a dog fails to bark'. They prompt without leading. They are objective without being intimidating.
- ✿ *Creativity.* Outstanding inspecting is creative. It requires an involvement that goes far beyond box-ticking and writing evidence forms well (important as this undoubtedly is). Expressing conclusions clearly and communicating them persuasively is not formulaic; it asks for the intellectual effort of any act of creation.
- ✿ *Integrity.* An outstanding inspector is clearly and demonstrably honest, impartial and upright.
- ✿ *Presence and charisma.* Image matters. Perhaps it should not, but few people are unaffected by it. Outstanding inspectors inspire trust and confidence in those they meet. They understand that small things can make a big difference. For instance, the Forum was told by a previous group of parent witnesses that when inspectors wear suits and are seen as 'civil servants' a swathe of parents, especially the generally hard to reach, are intimidated. This is not an argument against suits, but outstanding inspectors are alert to the impact of their manner and appearance.
- ✿ *Self-confidence and self-awareness.* This follows from the previous paragraph. Outstanding inspectors radiate confidence, without arrogance. They understand Ofsted's requirements and meet them confidently, without being inhibited by them. They have an appreciation of how they appear to others. They have an accurate picture of their own particular strengths and weaknesses, and manage them effectively.



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