

## NEWS RELEASE

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Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

### **Ofsted's inspection of schools**

Ofsted provides valuable independent assurance about schools' effectiveness but it has faced significant financial and staffing challenges in recent years and has struggled to meet its inspection targets, says today's report by the National Audit Office (NAO).

Ofsted's remit has expanded significantly since 2000 but its spending has fallen in real terms since 2005-06. Spending on inspecting the schools sector was 52% less in real terms in 2017-18 than in 1999-2000. In 2017-18, Ofsted spent £44 million on inspecting state-funded schools. Ofsted does not have reliable data on the efficiency of its state-funded school inspections over time. In 2017-18, the only year for which the calculation was possible, the NAO estimates that the average total cost per state-funded school inspection was £7,200.

The NAO found that Ofsted did not meet its statutory target to re-inspect schools within five years in 43 (0.2%) cases between 2012/13 and 2016/17. In March 2018, in light of the NAO's analysis, HM Chief Inspector informed the Secretary of State that Ofsted had not met its statutory target because it had incorrectly categorised 32 schools as new where they had expanded or amalgamated with another school; in the 11 other cases, Ofsted had deferred inspections for exceptional circumstances.

Ofsted has struggled to achieve its own targets for how often schools should be inspected. For example, between 2012/13 and 2016/17, it did not meet its target to re-inspect schools graded as inadequate, where the quality of education provision is most at risk, in 78 cases (6%). Ofsted has extended some of the targets to allow schools more time to improve. This has also allowed Ofsted to spread re-inspections over a longer period. For example, it now aims to re-inspect schools graded as requires improvement within 30 months when, prior to September 2015, it was within two years. Ofsted's performance against its targets has improved since it has deployed more inspectors. In 2017-18, it completed 94% of planned inspections, compared with 65% in 2015-16.

Ofsted has found it difficult to meet its inspection targets because it has not had enough inspectors. In 2015, it brought all inspection work in-house with the aim of improving quality. This left it with a shortfall of contracted inspectors although this improved in 2016/17. Ofsted has also employed fewer permanent HM inspectors than it budgeted for and, while turnover of HM inspectors has improved, it remains high (19% in 2017-18). One of the main reasons that HM inspectors give for leaving is workload, with some also dissatisfied that short inspections have made their role narrower, with less opportunity for improvement work with schools.

In response to the NAO's survey, 84% of headteachers whose schools had been inspected since September 2015 said that the outcome of the inspection was fair. Ofsted has a range of processes to assure the quality of its inspectors, inspections and inspection reports. Its data relating to three of the processes show that, between 2015/16 and 2017/18, over 90% of inspections were

assessed as meeting requirements.

Ofsted does not know whether its school inspections are having the intended impact: to raise the standards of education and improve the quality of children's and young people's lives. As Ofsted is only one player in the system, assessing the impact of school inspections is not straightforward. However, Ofsted set few targets to measure performance against its 2016 strategic plan and has provided limited information to allow others to assess its progress. In March 2018, it agreed an evaluation framework for assessing performance against its new strategy, including performance indicators and targets.

There is some evidence that inspections are helping schools to improve. In response to the NAO's survey, 44% of headteachers said that the inspection had led to improvements in the school, while 28% said that it had not. In addition, 71% of respondents agreed that inspectors provided useful feedback during and at the end of the inspection visit.

Ofsted's inspection reports are an important factor when parents choose a school for their children - the second most important factor (50%), after proximity to home (61%), according to Ofsted's 2017 survey of parents. Ofsted's research suggests parents would like inspection reports to reflect parents' views more. Ofsted seeks parents' views through an online survey but the response rate is low.

As a result of decisions by the Department and Ofsted, the level of independent assurance about schools' effectiveness has reduced. Under legislation, schools graded as outstanding are exempt from routine re-inspection. At August 2017, 1,620 schools had not been inspected for six years or more, including 296 schools that had not been inspected for 10 years or more. Ofsted re-inspects good schools through a short, one-day, inspection rather than a full, two-day, inspection. Short inspections provide less assurance and allow inspectors less time to discuss with schools how they might improve.

Overall the NAO concludes that Ofsted cannot demonstrate that its inspection of schools represents value for money. The NAO's recommendations for Ofsted include: monitoring and reporting publicly on the extent to which it is meeting targets for both processes and impact; identifying how it can engage more with parents and make inspection reports more useful for parents; and setting out a plan for recruiting and retaining the inspectors it needs to undertake school inspections.

**Amyas Morse, the head of the NAO, said today:**

**“Ofsted's role as an independent inspector is valued by parents, headteachers think its judgements are fair, and it is making headway against recent performance shortfalls. However, it needs better information to be able to demonstrate that its inspection of schools represents value for money.**

**“The fact that Ofsted has been subject to constant cuts over more than a decade, and regular shifts in focus, speaks volumes. It indicates a lack of clarity about how best to obtain assurance about the quality of schools. The Department needs to be mindful that cheaper inspection is not necessarily better inspection. To demonstrate its commitment, the Department needs a clear vision for school inspection and to resource it accordingly.”**

## **Key facts**

**6,079**

number of inspections of state-funded schools that Ofsted completed in 2017-18

**£44m**

estimated amount that Ofsted spent on the 6,079 inspections of state-funded schools in 2017-18

**166**

number of school inspectors that Ofsted employed directly at March 2018

<b>29%</b>	proportion of Ofsted's total spending that went on inspecting state-funded schools in 2017-18
<b>£7,200</b>	estimated average total cost per school inspection in 2017-18
<b>94%</b>	proportion of planned school inspections that Ofsted completed in 2017-18, compared with 84% in 2016-17 and 65% in 2015-16
<b>43 (0.2%)</b>	number of schools for which Ofsted did not meet the statutory target to re-inspect within five years between 2012/13 and 2016/17
<b>296</b>	number of schools that had not been inspected for 10 years or more because they were previously graded as outstanding and are therefore exempt from routine re-inspection, at August 2017
<b>9</b>	average number of days that each contracted inspector who was a serving teacher was deployed in 2016/17
<b>84%</b>	proportion of headteachers who responded to our survey and said that the outcome of their school's most recent inspection was fair
<b>44%</b>	proportion of headteachers who responded to our survey and said that their school's most recent inspection had led to improvements, compared with 28% who said that it had not

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### Notes for Editors

1. Press notices and reports are available from the date of publication on the [NAO website](#). Hard copies can be obtained by using the relevant links on our website.
2. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people and services that provide education and skills for learners of all ages. Ofsted seeks to be "a force for improvement through intelligent, responsible and focused inspection and regulation". It publishes reports of its findings and reports to ministers on the effectiveness of services. Approximately 21,500 state-funded schools in England are subject to inspection by Ofsted. They educate a total of some 8 million pupils. Ofsted spent an estimated £44 million on inspecting state-funded schools in 2017-18.
3. Ofsted reports on and grades schools on their overall effectiveness and on four specific areas (the effectiveness of leadership and management; the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; personal development, behaviour and welfare; and outcomes for pupils). It grades using a four-point scale: outstanding; good; requires improvement; and inadequate. Of state-funded schools open in August 2017, Ofsted had graded 18,330 (85%) as good or outstanding.
4. The National Audit Office scrutinises public spending for Parliament and is independent of government. The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG), Sir Amyas Morse KCB, is an Officer of the House of Commons and leads the NAO, which employs some 785 people. The C&AG certifies the accounts of all government departments and many other public sector

bodies. He has statutory authority to examine and report to Parliament on whether departments and the bodies they fund have used their resources efficiently, effectively, and with economy. Our studies evaluate the value for money of public spending, nationally and locally. Our recommendations and reports on good practice help government improve public services. Our work led to audited savings of £734 million in 2016.

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