



National Audit Office

Report

by the Comptroller
and Auditor General

Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

Ofsted's inspection of schools

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Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

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Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

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Sir Amyas Morse KCB
Comptroller and Auditor General
National Audit Office

21 May 2018

This report examines whether the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills' (Ofsted's) approach to inspecting schools is providing value for money.

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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

29%	proportion of Ofsted's total spending that went on inspecting state-funded schools in 2017-18
£7,200	estimated average total cost per school inspection in 2017-18
94%	proportion of planned school inspections that Ofsted completed in 2017-18, compared with 84% in 2016-17 and 65% in 2015-16
43 (0.2%)	number of schools for which Ofsted did not meet the statutory target to re-inspect within five years between 2012/13 and 2016/17
296	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
9	average number of days that each contracted inspector who was a serving teacher was deployed in 2016/17
84%	proportion of headteachers who responded to our survey and said that the outcome of their school's most recent inspection was fair
44%	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

Throughout this report, academic years are written as 20xx/yy and financial years are written as 20xx-yy.

Unless otherwise stated, all figures relate to state-funded schools only. Figures relating to numbers of inspections do not include monitoring visits unless they resulted in a change of grade.

Summary

1 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. In 2017-18, Ofsted spent £151 million.

2 This report focuses on Ofsted's inspection of schools. Approximately 21,500 state-funded schools in England are subject to inspection by Ofsted. They educate a total of some eight million pupils. Ofsted spent an estimated £44 million on inspecting state-funded schools in 2017-18. This is equivalent to 0.11% of the total funding for state-funded schools in the same year.

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 Ofsted is a non-ministerial government department, headed by HM Chief Inspector. HM Chief Inspector is accountable to Parliament for securing value for money for Ofsted's spending. At March 2018, Ofsted's school inspections were undertaken by 166 directly employed inspectors (HM inspectors) and approximately 1,470 contracted inspectors (Ofsted inspectors).

Focus of this report

5 Through its school inspections, Ofsted aims to raise the standards of education and improve the quality of life for children and young people. It plays a vital role in the functioning and assessment of the school system. The Department for Education (the Department) and local authorities rely on Ofsted's work to gain assurance about the quality of schools and teaching, and to intervene where schools are underperforming. Parents can use Ofsted reports to compare the performance of schools and help them make choices about schools for their children.

6 This report examines whether Ofsted's approach to inspecting schools is providing value for money. We assessed Ofsted's role (Part One), performance (Part Two) and impact (Part Three). We set out our audit approach in Appendix One and our evidence base in Appendix Two.

Key findings

Ofsted's role

7 Ofsted's remit has expanded significantly since 2000 but its spending has fallen in real terms since 2005-06. Since 2000, governments have given Ofsted a range of new responsibilities. As well as schools, its remit now covers other sectors, including children's social care, early years and childcare, and further education and skills providers. Successive governments have reduced Ofsted's overall budget. Its spending (at 2017-18 prices) fell from £280 million in 2005-06 to £167 million in 2015-16, a decrease of 40% in real terms. Ofsted's budget is expected to fall further to 2019-20. Inspecting state-funded schools accounts for the largest share of Ofsted's spending: an estimated £44 million in 2017-18, which was 29% of the total amount it spent (paragraphs 1.2 to 1.4).

8 The system for school improvement and accountability is fragmented and there is some confusion about Ofsted's role. A range of different bodies are involved in holding schools to account and supporting them to improve, with different arrangements for maintained schools, academies and independent schools. Ofsted does not decide what action should be taken after it has inspected a school and does not intervene to improve schools. These are matters for schools themselves, the Department, local authorities and multi-academy trusts. There is some overlap between the role of Ofsted and that of the Department's regional schools commissioners, who oversee academies' educational performance. The Department recognises the potential for confusion and duplication and, in May 2018, published principles for a clearer system of accountability. It plans to develop these into detailed proposals for consultation in autumn 2018 (paragraphs 1.13 to 1.17).

9 Ofsted is independent but the Department influences the framework within which Ofsted works and how it uses its resources. Ofsted carries out its inspections independently of the Department and of the schools it inspects. However, the Department influences Ofsted's work in a number of ways. For example, it negotiates Ofsted's budget with HM Treasury and can direct Ofsted to carry out additional inspections. Ofsted believes that its remit has not kept pace with structural changes in the school system and that inspecting academy groups (the multi-academy trust and its schools) would make inspection more efficient and effective. The Department plans to seek views on how to improve the accountability of multi-academy trusts as part of its exercise to clarify the system of accountability for schools (paragraphs 1.18 to 1.21, and 1.25).

10 As a result of decisions by the Department and Ofsted, the level of independent assurance about schools' effectiveness has reduced. The Department proposes to Parliament legislation that determines aspects of Ofsted's work. 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 (paragraphs 1.10 to 1.12 and 1.22 to 1.24).

Ofsted's performance

11 Ofsted did not meet its statutory target to re-inspect schools within five years in 43 (0.2%) cases. Legislation states that Ofsted must re-inspect non-exempt schools within five academic years of the end of the academic year in which the last inspection took place. In its annual report and accounts for 2016-17, Ofsted reported that it had met its statutory inspection target in 2015/16 and was on track to meet it in 2016/17. However, our analysis found that, of the 17,503 schools that were not exempt from inspection between 2012/13 and 2016/17, Ofsted inspected 17,460 (99.8%) within the statutory timescale. It did not meet the statutory timescale for 43 schools (0.2%). There were 15,750 pupils in these schools. In March 2018, in light of our analysis, HM Chief Inspector wrote to the Secretary of State to tell him that Ofsted had not met its statutory target. She explained that in 32 of these cases the school had expanded or amalgamated with another school and Ofsted had incorrectly treated them as new schools; in the 11 other cases, Ofsted had judged that there were exceptional circumstances and had decided to defer re-inspection (paragraphs 2.8 and 2.9).

12 Ofsted has struggled to achieve its own targets for how often schools should be inspected but performance has improved. Performance has improved since Ofsted has deployed more inspectors. In addition, Ofsted has extended some of the timescales for re-inspection to allow schools more time to improve, and this has also allowed Ofsted to spread re-inspections over a longer period.

- Between 2012/13 and 2016/17, Ofsted 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 (6.0%). The target varies depending on whether the school is judged to have serious weaknesses or if it is placed in special measures.
- Ofsted aims to monitor schools graded as requires improvement and normally to re-inspect them within two years. Since September 2015, Ofsted has made extensive use of a new provision that allows it to extend the re-inspection timescale to 30 months. Taking 2015/16 and 2016/17 together, Ofsted re-inspected 692 schools (26.8%) in the period between two years and 30 months; it did not re-inspect 55 schools (1.3%) within 30 months.
- Between 2012/13 and 2014/15, Ofsted did not meet its target to inspect new schools generally within two years of opening in 95 cases (9.6%). It subsequently extended the target to inspection usually within three years, and achieved this for all but 36 schools (7.8%) between 2015/16 and 2016/17 (paragraphs 2.10 to 2.13).

13 Ofsted has completed fewer inspections than planned but performance has improved since 2015-16. Ofsted sets its inspection programme based on timescales set in legislation and its inspection framework, supplemented by its assessment of risk and local intelligence. In 2015-16, it completed 3,572 inspections of state-funded schools, 65% of planned inspections. The position improved in the two following years. Ofsted completed 5,098 inspections (84%) in 2016-17 and 6,079 inspections (94%) in 2017-18 (paragraphs 2.6 and 2.7).

14 Ofsted has generally increased the average time between inspections and missed its target for good schools by around a year.

Ofsted has not achieved its internal framework target to re-inspect schools graded as good approximately every three years. In 2016/17, the average time between inspections was 4.4 years for good primary schools and 4.0 years for good secondary schools. Ofsted told us that it has been increasing the time between inspections for good schools to free up resources for other activities, such as expanding its system-level research (paragraphs 2.14 to 2.16 and Figure 10).

15 Ofsted has found it difficult to meet its inspection targets because it has not had enough inspectors.

At March 2018, Ofsted had 30 (15%) fewer employed HM inspectors than it had budgeted for. There was also a shortfall in each of the two previous years. Turnover of HM inspectors improved in 2017-18 (19%, compared with 26% in 2016-17) but the rate still indicates a high level of churn in the workforce. One of the main reasons that HM inspectors give for leaving is workload. Some inspectors are also dissatisfied that the introduction of short inspections has made their role narrower, with less opportunity for improvement work with schools (paragraphs 2.22 to 2.24 and Figure 11).

16 In 2015, Ofsted brought all inspection work in-house with the aim of improving quality and this left it with a shortfall of contracted inspectors.

- Since September 2015, Ofsted has contracted directly with serving practitioners and other external inspectors. Previously it had outsourced much of its inspection work to private companies, but it was not satisfied with the level of control this arrangement gave it over quality. Bringing school inspection in-house gave Ofsted more control over the selection, training and monitoring of inspectors.
- The change left Ofsted with an unexpected shortfall of contracted inspectors, partly because less than half of the existing contracted workforce who applied were assessed as meeting the standards and offered contracts. In addition, Ofsted has deployed its contracted inspectors for less time than it intended. During 2016/17, it deployed each serving practitioner for nine days, and each non-serving practitioner for 23 days, on average, compared with its targets of 16 days and 32 days respectively. Ofsted is training more contracted inspectors to lead inspections to help cover the shortfall of HM inspectors and allow it to deploy Ofsted team inspectors for more days.
- Most contracted Ofsted inspectors are serving or former headteachers or deputy headteachers. Contracted inspectors provide Ofsted with flexibility in staffing and a direct connection with schools. Comments from a small number of respondents to our survey of headteachers mentioned the benefits of having serving teachers on inspection teams, such as a better understanding of current practice (paragraphs 2.20, and 2.27 to 2.30).

17 Ofsted has assessed that over 90% of inspections meet its quality

requirements. Ofsted has a range of processes to assure the quality of its inspectors, inspections and inspection reports. By sampling and observing inspectors' work, it tests the quality of inspections and the evidence underpinning the conclusions reached. Ofsted's quality assurance processes generate data, which it uses to track whether the quality of inspections is improving. Ofsted's data relating to three of the processes show that, between 2015/16 and 2017/18, over 90% of inspections were assessed as meeting requirements; there was no clear trend in performance. In 2016/17, quality assurance led to the overall effectiveness grade being changed following 17 inspections (equivalent to one in 420 inspections). Data from the first eight months of 2017/18 indicate that quality may be improving (paragraphs 2.38 to 2.40).

18 In our survey of headteachers, 84% of respondents said that the outcome of their school's most recent inspection was fair.

As would be expected, the better the inspection grade awarded, the higher the proportion of respondents who considered that the outcome of their most recent inspection was fair: the proportion varied from 100% of outstanding schools to 51% of inadequate schools. Less than half of the respondents who did not consider that the outcome of their inspection was fair complained to Ofsted. In 2017-18, Ofsted received formal complaints (cases which were not resolved during the inspection) relating to 310 (5%) of its school inspections. Of these, 105 complaints (34%) were fully or partly upheld. Ofsted changed three grades in each of 2013-14 and 2014-15, and none in subsequent years. Ofsted views this as a positive reflection on its inspections and quality assurance. In our survey of headteachers, 85% of those who had complained were not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint (paragraphs 2.32, and 2.42 to 2.44).

19 Our analysis indicates that Ofsted's spending on inspecting the schools sector has fallen significantly.

The full cost of inspecting the schools sector in 2017-18 (an estimated £60 million) was 52% less in real terms than in 1999-2000 (£125 million, adjusted to 2017-18 prices). 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, we estimate that the average total cost per state-funded school inspection was £7,200 (paragraphs 1.3 to 1.5, and 2.2).

Ofsted's impact

20 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.

Ofsted is one player in a complicated system so assessing the impact of school inspections is not straightforward but would be valuable. Ofsted set few targets to measure performance against its 2016 strategic plan, and has provided limited information to allow others to assess its progress. Its performance measures have instead focused mainly on activity and processes. In September 2017, Ofsted published a new strategy for 2017–2022. In March 2018, it agreed an evaluation framework for assessing performance against the strategy, including performance indicators and targets. The measures include the percentage of parents who consider that Ofsted is a valuable source of information, and the percentage of teachers who see Ofsted as a force for improvement (paragraphs 3.2 to 3.4).

21 Ofsted's inspection reports are an important factor when parents choose a school, but parents would like the reports to reflect parents' views more. Focus group research in 2017 concluded that parents were positive towards Ofsted: it is respected, trusted and seen as independent. Ofsted's 2017 survey of parents found that the top three factors when choosing a school were: proximity to home (61%); Ofsted judgement (50%); and siblings at the school (25%). Research by Ofsted and Parentkind suggests that parents would like more opportunity to comment on schools, and would like more views of parents in Ofsted reports. Ofsted seeks parents' views through an online survey but the response rate is low. It received an average of 17 submissions for each stated-funded school in the year to January 2018 (paragraphs 3.5 to 3.8).

22 There is some evidence that inspections are helping schools to improve. In our survey of headteachers, 44% 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 post-inspection survey of schools inspected since 2015 found that 91% thought that the inspection findings would help the school to improve. Ofsted also helps to build capability and support school improvement by using serving teachers as contracted inspectors. In its 2017 survey of Ofsted inspectors, 99% of serving practitioners agreed that the knowledge and experience they had gained as an inspector would be of benefit to their own provider and to the wider sector that they served (paragraphs 3.9 to 3.11).

23 Ofsted has taken action to reduce the burden of inspections on schools but the messages have not reached all teachers. In our survey of headteachers whose schools had been inspected since September 2015, 54% of respondents agreed that the burdens placed on the school were proportionate in order for Ofsted to form a reliable judgement, while 29% disagreed. Ofsted has sought to lessen demands on schools, including by reducing the notice period for an inspection to half a day and emphasising that inspection requires no special preparation. In January 2016, Ofsted launched a 'myth-busting' campaign to dispel common misconceptions about what it expects to see during an inspection that can result in schools doing unnecessary work. The campaign has been welcomed by teaching unions but its messages have not permeated throughout the school system. Ofsted's 2017 teacher attitude survey found that 69% of teachers had not heard anything about the campaign (paragraphs 3.14 to 3.17).

Conclusion on value for money

24 Ofsted provides valuable independent assurance about schools' effectiveness and as such is a vital part of the school system. It has faced significant challenges in recent years, as its budget has reduced and it has struggled to retain staff and deploy enough contracted inspectors. The ultimate measure of the value for money of Ofsted's inspection of schools is the impact it has on the quality of education, relative to the cost. Ofsted's spending on school inspection has fallen significantly but it does not have reliable information on efficiency. It also has limited information on impact. Until Ofsted has better information it will be unable to demonstrate that its inspection of schools represents value for money.

25 The Department plays an important part in whether the inspection of schools is value for money. The Department affects Ofsted's funding, how it uses its resources and what it can inspect. The current inspection model, with some schools exempt from re-inspection, others subject to light-touch inspection and the average time between inspections rising, raises questions about whether there is enough independent assurance about schools' effectiveness to meet the needs of parents, taxpayers and the Department itself. Although government has protected the overall schools budget, it has reduced Ofsted's budget every year for over a decade while asking it to do more. We think that government needs to be clearer about how it sees Ofsted's present and future inspection role in the school system as a whole, and resource it accordingly.

Recommendations

- a** **The Department should work with Ofsted to review the extent to which the inspection framework and resourcing allow Ofsted to provide enough independent assurance about the quality of schools.** This should consider how long schools should be able to go without being inspected and whether Ofsted's remit should be extended to include multi-academy trusts.
- b** **As the Department develops its proposals for school accountability, it should work with Ofsted to set out clearly and communicate the different roles of those involved in overseeing schools.** In particular, they should differentiate the roles of Ofsted and the regional schools commissioners.
- c** **Ofsted should set out a plan for recruiting and retaining the inspectors it needs to undertake school inspections.** The plan should include what Ofsted is aiming to achieve and by when, the interventions it will use to achieve its aims and how much it expects them to cost, and how it will measure progress.

- d Ofsted should review the effectiveness of its complaints process.** This should include reviewing whether the process is sufficiently fair and independent, and whether Ofsted could allay concerns by publishing information about its quality assurance processes and the changes that it makes during the complaints process.
- e Ofsted should use its new performance measures to monitor, and report publicly on, progress against its new strategy.** It should be transparent about baseline performance, trends and the extent to which it is meeting targets for both processes and impact.
- f Ofsted should build on its research and take action to engage more with parents and make inspection reports more useful to parents.** In particular, it should consider how it can collect more feedback from parents and how it can reflect this in its reports.

Part One

Ofsted's role

1.1 This part of the report covers the role of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted).

Responsibilities and budget

1.2 Ofsted's remit has expanded significantly since 2000 as it has taken on a range of new responsibilities (**Figure 1** on pages 14 and 15). HM Chief Inspector and Ofsted are now responsible for inspecting and regulating other sectors as well as schools:

- Through inspection, Ofsted provides an independent assessment of the quality of services. It inspects state-funded schools, some independent schools, initial teacher training providers, further education institutions and programmes, and childcare, adoption and fostering agencies.
- Through regulation, Ofsted determines whether providers are fit to provide services, and takes enforcement action against those that are not. It regulates early years providers and children's social care services.

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 the services it inspects.

1.3 In 2017-18, Ofsted spent £151 million. Between 2005-06 and 2015-16, successive governments reduced Ofsted's budget. As a result, Ofsted's annual spending fell from £280 million to £167 million, a decrease of 40% in real terms (Figure 1).¹ In the 2015 Spending Review, Ofsted and the Department for Education (the Department) agreed that Ofsted's budget to 2019-20 would fall by a further 11% in real terms. Ofsted advised the Department that, as part of making the necessary savings, it would reduce improvement activity and the number of monitoring visits to schools graded as less than good.

¹ We adjusted the figures for inflation to 2017-18 values using GDP deflators.

Figure 1
Ofsted's responsibilities and spending, 1999-2000 to 2019-20

Ofsted's role has expanded significantly, but its spending has fallen in real terms since 2005-06

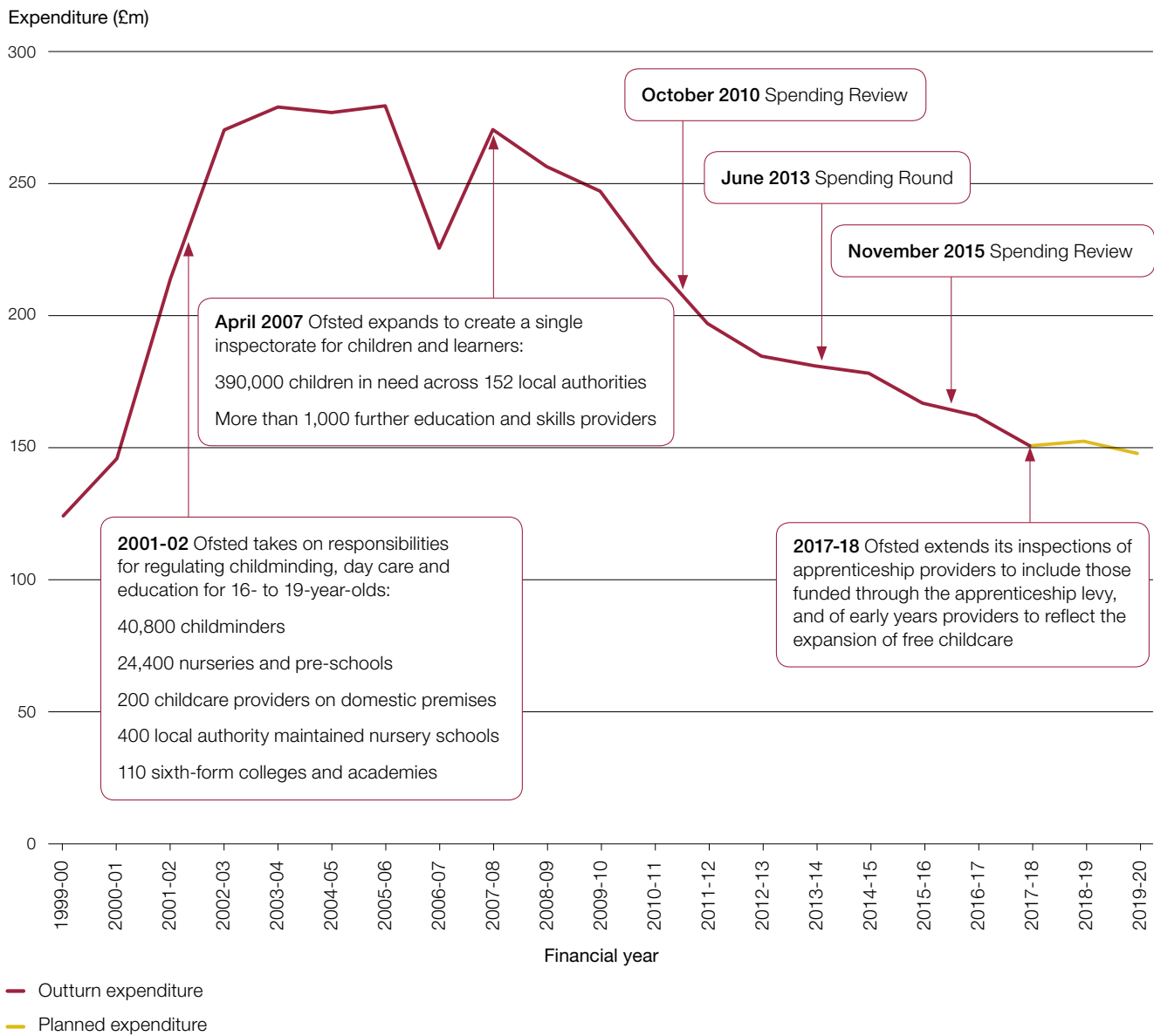


Figure 1 *continued*

Ofsted's responsibilities and spending, 1999-2000 to 2019-20

Financial year

1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
125	146	214	271	279	277	280	226	271	257	247	220	197	185	181	179	167	162	151	153	148

Notes

- 1 Data on numbers of providers are taken from Ofsted, *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2016/17*, HC 618, December 2017.
- 2 Spending data are taken from Ofsted's annual reports and accounts. Ofsted's 2017-18 accounts had not been audited at the time of our work.
- 3 We adjusted the figures for inflation to 2017-18 values using GDP deflators.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Ofsted information and data

1.4 Inspecting the schools sector accounts for the largest share of Ofsted's spending. Of the £151 million it spent in 2017-18, it spent an estimated £60 million (40%) on this element of its work, comprising:

- £40 million on the direct costs of inspecting the schools sector; this includes spending on employing and contracting with inspectors; and
- a £20 million share of the £61 million spent on administration and inspection support (**Figure 2** overleaf).

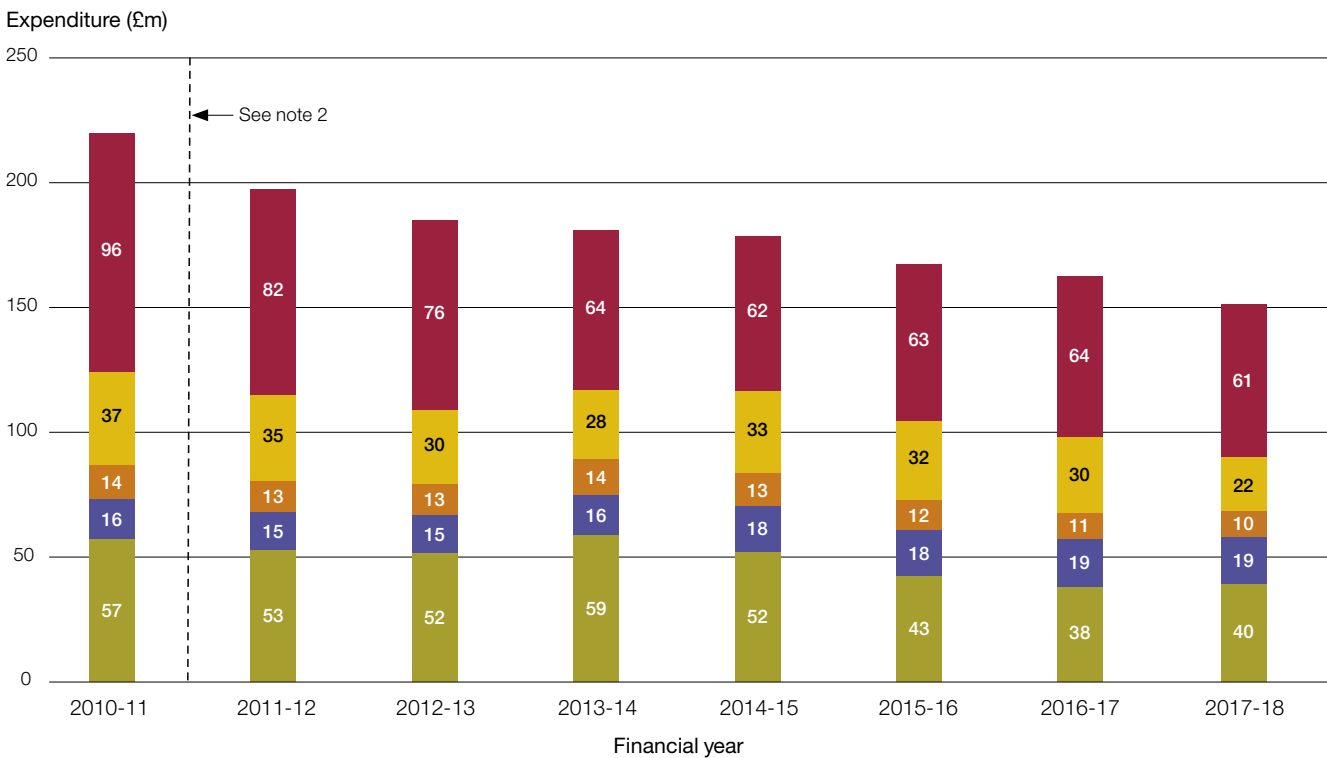
We estimate that the total cost of inspecting state-funded schools was £44 million in 2017-18 (29% of Ofsted's total spending). This is equivalent to 0.11% of the total funding for state-funded schools in the same year. The remaining £16 million was the wider cost of inspecting the schools sector. This included: inspecting independent schools; inspecting teacher training providers; and monitoring visits.

1.5 Ofsted's spending on inspecting the schools sector has fallen significantly (Figure 2). It does not have consistent, comparable information on spending over time because the scope of its schools remit and how it incurs and records its costs have changed. Ofsted therefore undertook an exercise to estimate for us how its spending has changed. This exercise indicated that:

- the direct cost of inspecting the schools sector was 31% less, in real terms, in 2017-18 (when it spent an estimated £40 million) than in 2010-11 (when it spent an estimated £57 million, adjusted to 2017-18 prices);
- Ofsted significantly reduced its administration and inspection support costs from an estimated £96 million in 2010-11, adjusted to 2017-18 prices, to an estimated £61 million in 2017-18; and
- the full cost of inspecting the schools sector was 52% less, in real terms, in 2017-18 (when it spent an estimated £60 million) than in 1999-2000 (when it spent £125 million, adjusted to 2017-18 prices).

Figure 2
Ofsted's spending by inspected sector, 2010-11 to 2017-18

Ofsted has spent less on inspecting the schools sector over time



- Administration and inspection support
- Early years sector
- Further education sector
- Social care sector
- Schools sector

Notes

- 1 The cost of inspecting and monitoring each sector is the amount that Ofsted spent on employing inspectors and contracting with inspection service providers. For September 2015 onwards, we included overheads in direct costs where we estimate that they were incurred as a result of replacing inspection service providers with in-house inspectors. We did this to make costs comparable over time.
- 2 Ofsted could identify the costs of administration and inspection support in 2010-11 but not the cost of inspecting each sector. Therefore the total cost of inspection has been apportioned to sectors using 2011-12 ratios.
- 3 2017-18 expenditure figures are unaudited.
- 4 We adjusted the costs for inflation to 2017-18 values using GDP deflators.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Ofsted data

1.6 Ofsted is organised into eight regions, each headed by a regional director. At March 2018, Ofsted employed 1,770 staff (full-time equivalents) of whom 660 were based in its regional offices. Its school inspections were undertaken by 166 directly employed inspectors and approximately 1,470 contracted inspectors.

Inspecting schools

1.7 In carrying out an inspection, Ofsted reaches a conclusion on the effectiveness of a school. It reports on and grades schools on their overall effectiveness and on four specific areas:

- the effectiveness of leadership and management (including the effectiveness of the arrangements for safeguarding pupils);
- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment;
- personal development, behaviour and welfare; and
- outcomes for pupils.

1.8 Ofsted 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 (**Figure 3** overleaf).

1.9 Ofsted's inspection process and grading framework are clear and transparent. It publishes its inspection handbooks, risk assessment framework and guidance for schools and parents on its website. School inspections vary in scope and duration depending on the circumstances of the school (**Figure 4** on page 19).

1.10 Since September 2015, Ofsted has re-inspected schools previously graded as good through a short (one-day) inspection. It aimed to convert this to a full inspection within 48 hours if the inspection team considered that the school might be better or worse than good. In 2016/17, it converted 29% of short inspections to full inspections.

1.11 Ofsted found it challenging to convert short inspections to full inspections within 48 hours. Schools' experience of conversion could sometimes be negative, and the approach created uncertainty for inspectors who were on standby to join the inspection but often not required. Ofsted has therefore made changes aimed at reducing the number of short inspections that convert:²

- Since October 2017, it has carried out full inspections of good schools where its risk assessment indicates that a short inspection would be highly likely to convert, rather than first carrying out a short inspection.
- Since January 2018, it aims to convert a short inspection, usually within 48 hours, if it has serious concerns about safeguarding or behaviour, or if it thinks the quality of education has declined to inadequate. If Ofsted does not have serious concerns, but considers that the school is likely to be graded as outstanding or requires improvement, it will publish a letter setting out the school's strengths and areas for improvement. It aims to carry out a full inspection later, typically within one to two years.

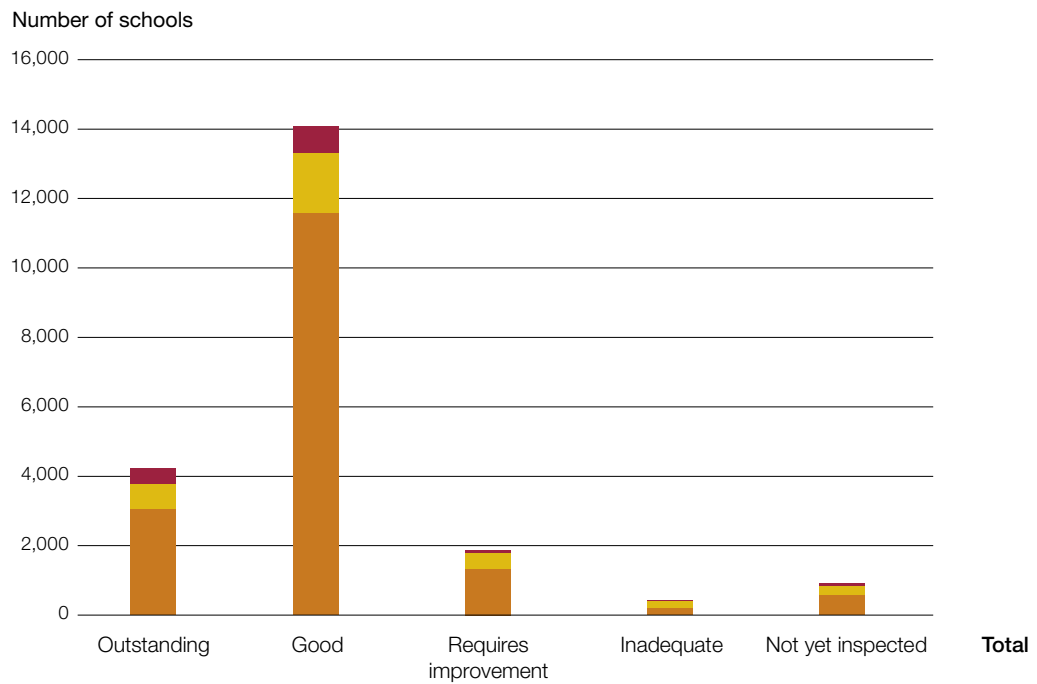
Ofsted considers that the changes reflect its aim to act as a force for improvement and to "catch schools before they fall". It expects the new arrangements will help it to minimise the burden on schools, at the same time as providing schools with support and more time to improve.

² Ofsted, *Short inspections of good schools: A report on the responses to the consultation*, December 2017.

Figure 3

Ofsted's grades for the overall effectiveness of state-funded schools at August 2017

Ofsted had graded two-thirds of schools as good at August 2017



	Outstanding	Good	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Not yet inspected	Total
Ofsted overall effectiveness grade						
■ Special schools and pupil referral units	439	775	73	28	71	1,386
■ Secondary	728	1,750	474	179	244	3,375
■ Primary	3,062	11,576	1,333	214	598	16,783
All schools	4,229	14,101	1,880	421	913	21,544
Percentage (%)	20	65	9	2	4	100

Note

1 Figures exclude providers that are exclusively nurseries or post-16 provision.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Ofsted data

Figure 4
Types of school inspection undertaken by Ofsted

Type of inspection	Basis of inspection	Circumstances when used	Length of on-site visit	Outcome
Full inspection ¹	Section 5 ²	New schools ³ Re-inspections of schools previously graded as inadequate or requires improvement Since October 2017, inspections of good schools where Ofsted's risk assessment indicates that a short inspection would be highly likely to convert, rather than first carrying out a short inspection	2 days	New grading; published report
Short inspection ¹	Section 8 ²	Schools previously graded as good, with a focus on whether the school is still performing at a good level Includes schools graded as good that have converted to academies	1 day	No new grading; inspection findings published in a letter to the school
Monitoring visit ¹	Section 8 ²	Schools graded as inadequate or requires improvement before Ofsted undertakes a full re-inspection	1 day	No new grading; judgement on progress published in a monitoring letter and/or report
Other section 8 inspection ¹	Section 8 ²	'Unannounced behaviour inspections' or 'no formal designation' inspections, including those arising from complaints or concerns about a school raised with Ofsted	Unannounced behaviour visits: 1 day Others: normally 2 days but may be shorter or longer (and may be deemed a section 5 inspection), depending on the circumstances of the school and the nature of the concerns that led to the inspection	No new grading unless deemed a section 5 inspection; published report
Independent school inspection	Agreement with the Department	Non-association independent schools ⁴	Normally up to 3 days	New grading; published report
Demand-led inspection ⁵	Section 5, section 8 or agreement with the Department ²	Request from the Department regarding a school causing concern Unregistered schools	Varies	Varies

Notes

- 1 Applies to state-funded schools.
- 2 The sections relate to the Education Act 2005.
- 3 Other than schools which converted to academies and which were previously graded as good or outstanding.
- 4 Most independent schools belong to one or more associations and are inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate or the School Inspection Service. Ofsted inspects the remaining 'non-association' independent schools.
- 5 Applies to state-funded and independent schools.

Source: National Audit Office

1.12 Ofsted considers that, as well as reducing the burden on good schools, short inspections allow it to target resources where they are most needed. It also told us that short inspections inevitably provide less assurance and allow inspectors less time to discuss with schools how they might improve. It considers that this inspection model might be difficult to sustain in the long term.

Ofsted's place in the school improvement and accountability landscape

1.13 The system for school improvement and accountability is fragmented, with different arrangements for maintained schools, academies and independent schools. Schools, overseen by their governors or trustees, are responsible for the quality of education they provide. A range of different national and local bodies have a role in holding schools to account and supporting them to improve (**Figure 5**).

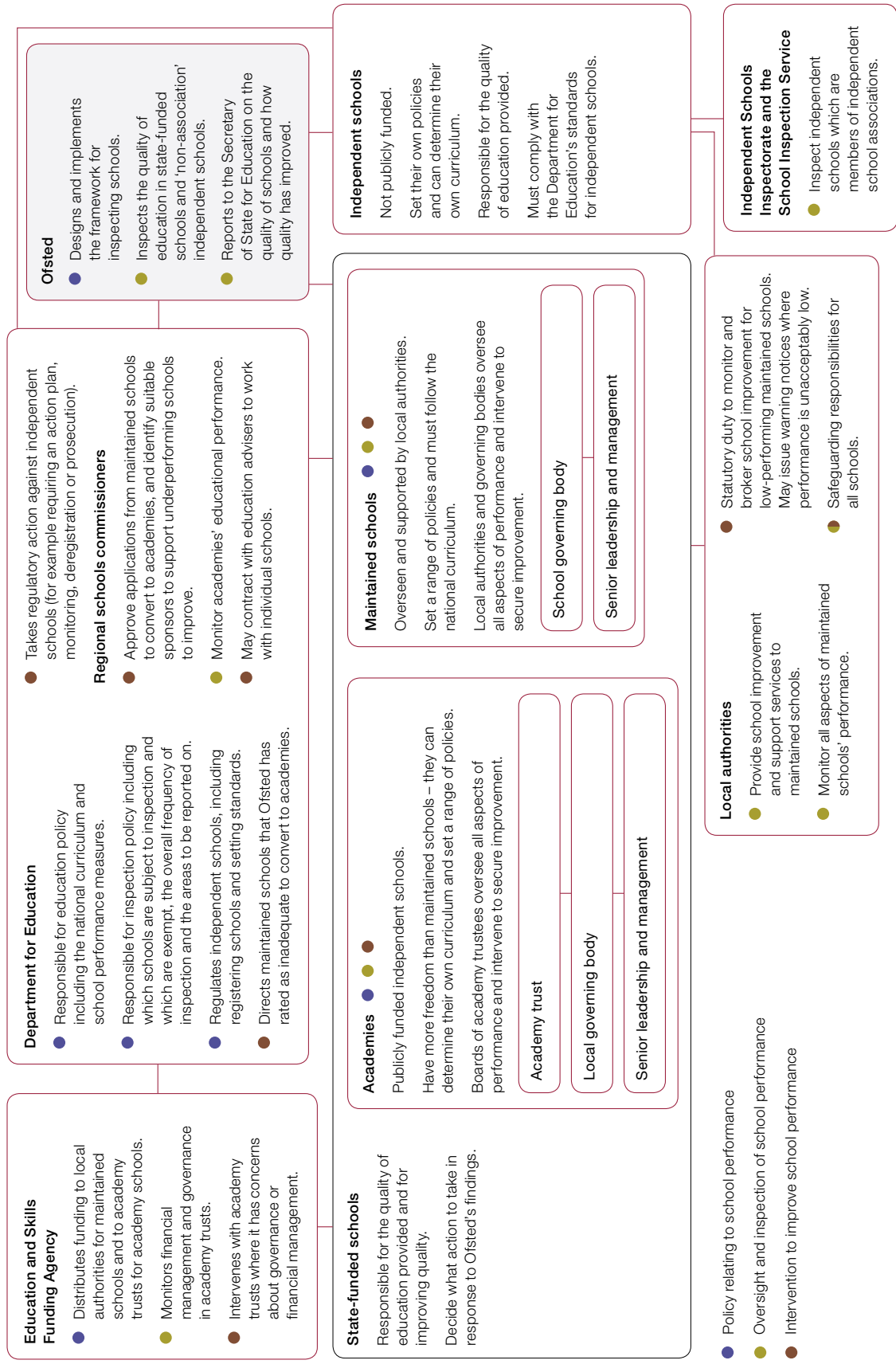
1.14 There is some confusion about the respective roles of Ofsted and regional schools commissioners. In 2014, the Department appointed a national schools commissioner and eight regional schools commissioners to provide greater oversight of academies, particularly their educational performance. In monitoring academies, regional schools commissioners draw on Ofsted's inspection reports but also undertake their own assessments. As part of this, they may contract with education advisers to visit schools. The National Schools Commissioner has acknowledged that these visits could appear to duplicate Ofsted inspections. In November 2017, Ofsted and the regional schools commissioners began to explore formally how they could work more effectively together.

1.15 The Department is accountable for securing value for money for spending on schools. It relies on Ofsted to provide an independent assessment of schools' performance as one mechanism for assessing the outcomes achieved from the resources allocated to schools.³ Ofsted's inspection reports help the Department to monitor educational standards and to trigger intervention where it is needed.

3 Department for Education, *Accounting Officer System Statement for the Department for Education*, August 2017.

Figure 5
System for school accountability and improvement

Ofsted is one part of the system for school accountability and improvement



Source: National Audit Office analysis of Ofsted and Department for Education material

1.16 During our work, we regularly heard the school inspection regime described as 'high stakes accountability'. This is because the consequences of Ofsted concluding that a school is underperforming can be significant. Ofsted itself does not have a role in decisions about what action should be taken after it has inspected a school. However, others may take decisive action in light of Ofsted's reports:

- The Department has a statutory duty to direct all maintained schools that Ofsted has graded as inadequate to become academies. The Department issued 344 directive academy orders to maintained schools between April 2016 and October 2017.⁴
- School governors or academy trustees may decide to replace headteachers or other staff in underperforming schools. Such schools may also find it more difficult to recruit or retain teachers.
- Parents may regard schools graded as requires improvement or inadequate as less attractive when they choose a school for their children. Falling pupil numbers, leading to a drop in funding, may put schools' financial sustainability at risk.

1.17 In May 2018, the Secretary of State for Education announced that the Department would clarify the system of accountability for schools. The Department has published high-level principles for "how the accountability system for educational performance will operate, and how the different actors fit within it". It recognises that school leaders can feel accountable to multiple bodies, which place different demands on them. The Department plans to work with the schools sector to refine the principles and turn them into detailed proposals for consultation in autumn 2018.⁵

Ofsted's strategic framework

1.18 As we noted in our 2015 comparative study on inspection, the strategic framework for inspectorates is important as it contributes directly to the credibility of inspection, the scope of the work inspection covers, and how the independence and objectivity of inspection is perceived. In turn, these factors can affect the impact of inspection.⁶

Figure 6 sets out key aspects of the strategic framework within which Ofsted works.

1.19 Ofsted is a non-ministerial government department. This means that it is free from political involvement in terms of its day-to-day operations, how it carries out its inspections and its inspection judgements. Ofsted is directly accountable to Parliament, and HM Chief Inspector is personally accountable for Ofsted's use of resources.

1.20 Ofsted identifies independence as one of the core values supporting its activities. Important aspects of Ofsted's independence are:

- reporting its findings on the quality of the schools it inspects without fear or favour; and
- providing impartial advice to government, based on evidence, of the quality of education and how it could be improved.

⁴ The Department subsequently revoked 10 of the directive academy orders.

⁵ Department for Education, *Principles for a clear and simple accountability system*, May 2018.

⁶ Comptroller and Auditor General, *Inspection: A comparative study*, Session 2014-15, HC 1030, National Audit Office, February 2015.

Figure 6

The strategic framework for Ofsted's inspection of schools

HM Chief Inspector appointment

Chief Inspector appointed by:	Secretary of State for Education. ¹
Select Committee pre-appointment hearing:	Education Committee.
Tenure:	Determined by the Secretary of State, not more than five years.

Funding	Ofsted has its own funding voted by Parliament. The Department for Education (the Department) negotiates Ofsted's budget with HM Treasury on Ofsted's behalf.
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Work programme

Core work programme:	Ofsted determines its own work programme within a legal framework. HM Chief Inspector must report on specific aspects of schools as set out in the legislation.
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Governance

Sponsor department:	Ofsted is a non-ministerial government department. The Department acts as a sponsor in some respects through its policy-setting and budget negotiation roles.
Internal governance:	A board comprising a non-executive chair, HM Chief Inspector and non-executive members appointed by the Secretary of State.

Note

¹ According to legislation, Her Majesty The Queen appoints the preferred candidate selected by the Secretary of State.

Source: National Audit Office

1.21 The Department influences Ofsted's work in a number of ways. For example:

- The Department proposes to Parliament legislation that determines aspects of Ofsted's work, including the overall frequency of inspection and the broad areas of performance that Ofsted must report on.
- The Department can direct Ofsted to carry out inspections, for example if it has particular concerns about a school. Ofsted must prioritise these inspections, which reduces the resources available for other work. Ofsted undertook 617 such inspections in 2016/17.
- The Department negotiates Ofsted's budget with HM Treasury. In the last two Spending Reviews, the Department negotiated reductions in Ofsted's budget, having taken advice from Ofsted on the implications of those reductions. The Department also makes decisions about extra funding for any additional or changed requirements placed on Ofsted.

Frequency and scope of inspection

1.22 Under legislation, Ofsted is required to re-inspect schools every five years. However, schools that Ofsted has graded as outstanding are exempt from re-inspection, unless Ofsted identifies a particular risk (such as where concerns are raised about the school) or unless there is a significant change (for example the addition of a sixth form). This reflects the Department's aim that inspection should be "increasingly focused on underperforming schools where it can add most value".⁷ At August 2017, 1,620 schools had not been inspected for six years or more. This included 296 schools that had not been inspected for 10 years or more (**Figure 7**).

1.23 The Department classifies schools which convert to academies as new schools. They are not covered by the statutory five-year re-inspection requirement. Instead Ofsted aims to inspect these schools within three years of them opening as academies. It may take account of the timing of any inspections of the predecessor maintained school when deciding when to inspect a new academy. Between 2012/13 and 2016/17, 312 schools that converted to academies went for five years or more without being inspected.⁸

1.24 The length of time without inspection means that some pupils go through primary and/or secondary school without an independent assessment of their school's effectiveness. The older an inspection judgement, the greater the risk that it is no longer accurate. This reduces the level of assurance available about the school concerned. In addition, exempting outstanding schools from routine re-inspection reduces the extent to which Ofsted's inspectors see outstanding schools, and therefore the extent to which they can compare with and reference outstanding practice.

1.25 Ofsted does not have the power to inspect multi-academy trusts, only the individual academy schools within a trust. Most academies are part of multi-academy trusts, which are responsible for educational and financial performance.⁹ Ofsted considers that multi-academy trusts play a crucial role in overseeing the quality of education and supporting school improvement. It believes that its remit has not kept pace with structural changes in the school system and that inspecting academy groups (the multi-academy trust and its schools) would make inspection more efficient and effective. The Department plans to seek views on how to improve the accountability of multi-academy trusts as part of its exercise to clarify the system of accountability for schools (paragraph 1.17).

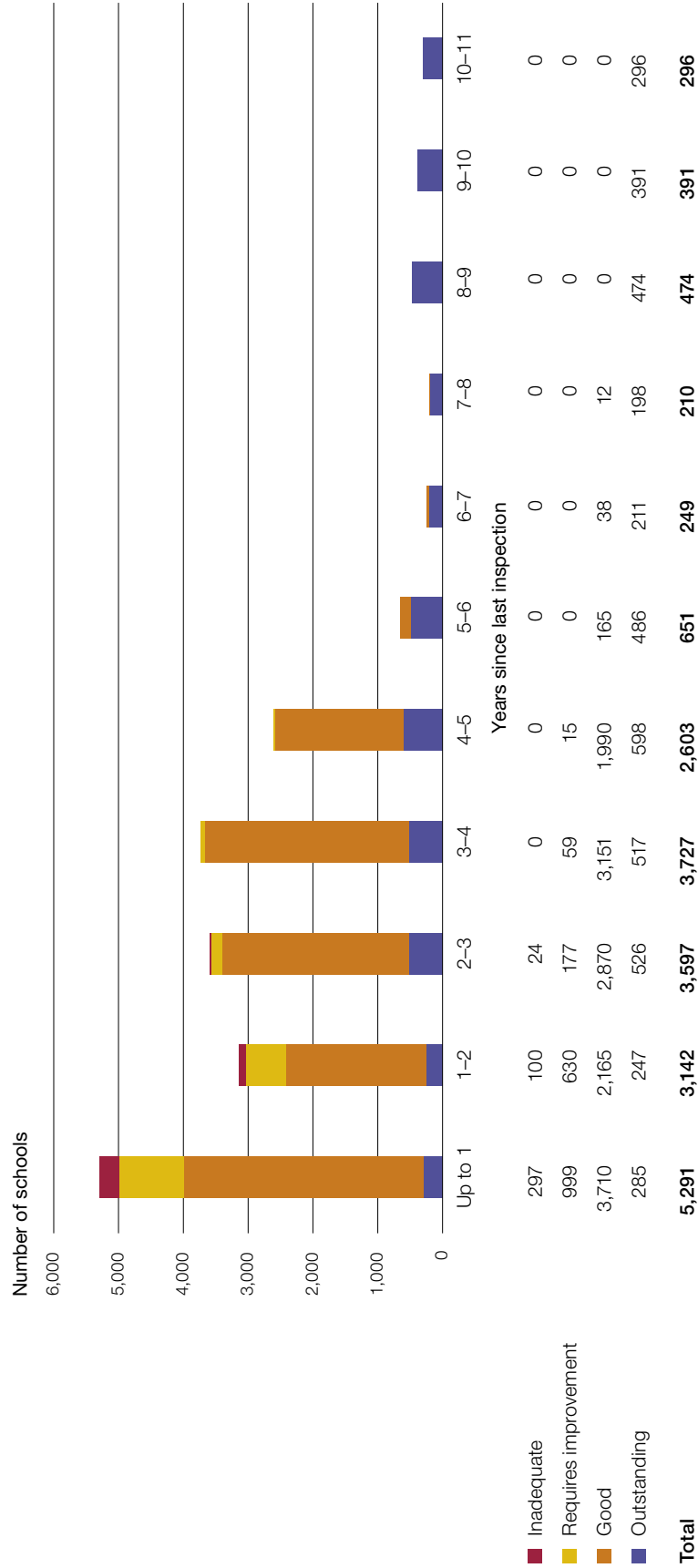
⁷ Department for Education, *Educational excellence everywhere*, Cm 9320, March 2016.

⁸ Ofsted previously graded 299 of these schools as good; the remaining 13 were special schools or pupil referral units previously graded as outstanding.

⁹ At January 2018, 80% of academies were part of multi-academy trusts.

Figure 7
Time since schools were last inspected, by Ofsted grade, at 31 August 2017

Ofsted has not inspected 1,620 schools for six years or more; nearly all of these were previously graded as outstanding



Note

1 The 215 schools rated as good that had not been inspected for more than five years include 186 schools that converted to academies after their last inspection but have not been inspected since. These are included in the numbers of schools referred to in paragraphs 1.23 and 2.8 as going for more than five years without being inspected.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Ofsted data

Part Two

Ofsted's performance

2.1 This part of the report covers the performance of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) in inspecting schools.

Efficiency

2.2 Ofsted does not have reliable data on the efficiency of its state-funded school inspections over time. This is because it cannot match the costs of school inspection with activity. Specifically it cannot separate the costs of inspecting state-funded schools from the wider costs of inspecting the schools sector. In 2017-18, the only year for which this calculation was possible (paragraph 1.4), we estimate that the average total cost per state-funded school inspection was £7,200. For earlier years, based on our work, Ofsted undertook indicative analysis using data on the costs of inspecting the schools sector. This suggested that the total cost per inspection may have decreased overall between 2012-13 and 2017-18, but is likely to have increased in 2014-15 and 2015-16 because Ofsted performed fewer inspections in those years. These changes cannot be reliably quantified.

2.3 Ofsted has made efficiency savings in light of the reductions in its budget. In 2015-16, it brought all school inspections in-house (paragraph 2.27). It also introduced short inspections for schools previously graded as good. In its business case, Ofsted estimated that these changes would save £22 million over the five years from 2015-16.¹⁰ It has not assessed the extent to which these savings are being achieved.

2.4 Ofsted charges fees for inspecting independent schools but these do not cover the full cost. The fees, which are set out in legislation, are based on the number of pupils at the school. In 2016-17, Ofsted recovered 22% of the full cost, leaving it with a deficit of £3 million on its inspections of independent schools. State-funded schools do not pay inspection fees.

2.5 Ofsted's settlement in the 2015 Spending Review assumed an increase in fee income from independent schools. In autumn 2017, the Department for Education (the Department) consulted on proposals to increase fees to enable Ofsted to move closer to full cost recovery. The Department implemented increases from April 2018.¹¹

¹⁰ The £22 million includes projected savings relating to inspection of further education and skills providers and children's centres, as well as state-funded and independent schools.

¹¹ Department for Education, *Independent schools: inspection fees, and school standards: Government consultation response*, February 2018.

Number of inspections

2.6 The number of inspections dropped significantly between 2014-15 and 2015-16, but recovered in the following two years. Ofsted completed:

- 65% of planned inspections in 2015-16 – this was a total of 3,572 inspections, 30% fewer than in 2014-15; and
- 94% of planned inspections in 2017-18 – the number of inspections rose to 6,079, an increase of 19% compared with 2014-15 (**Figure 8** overleaf).

Performance against inspection targets

2.7 Ofsted has a well-developed risk assessment process, which it uses in developing its inspection programme. It focuses its inspections on schools where pupils are most at risk, for example because of poor pupil attainment or weaknesses in safeguarding. It chooses schools for inspection based on timescales set in legislation and its inspection framework and, for primary and secondary schools previously graded as good or outstanding, its assessment of risk. The assessment covers pupils' academic progress, achievement and attendance. For each school term, Ofsted's central risk and selection team produces initial lists of schools to be inspected. The final selection is determined by the regions using local intelligence, such as complaints.

Statutory targets

2.8 Ofsted has not quite met its statutory target to inspect non-exempt schools within five academic years of the end of the academic year in which the last inspection took place. This requirement applies to all schools except primary and secondary schools graded as outstanding. Our analysis found that, of the 17,503 schools not exempt from inspection between 2012/13 and 2016/17, Ofsted inspected 17,460 (99.8%) within the statutory timescale. It failed to meet the statutory timescale for 43 schools (0.2%); 32 of these were overdue at the end of August 2017. There were 15,750 pupils in the 43 schools.¹²

2.9 In its annual report and accounts for 2016-17, Ofsted reported that it had met its target for the inspections it was required by legislation to carry out in 2015/16 and was on track for 2016/17.¹³ In light of our analysis, HM Chief Inspector wrote to the Secretary of State in March 2018 to tell him that Ofsted had not met the statutory requirement and to explain why. She explained that in 32 of these cases the school had expanded or amalgamated with another school and Ofsted should have treated them as continuing, rather than new, schools; in the 11 other cases, Ofsted had judged that there were exceptional circumstances and had decided to defer re-inspection.

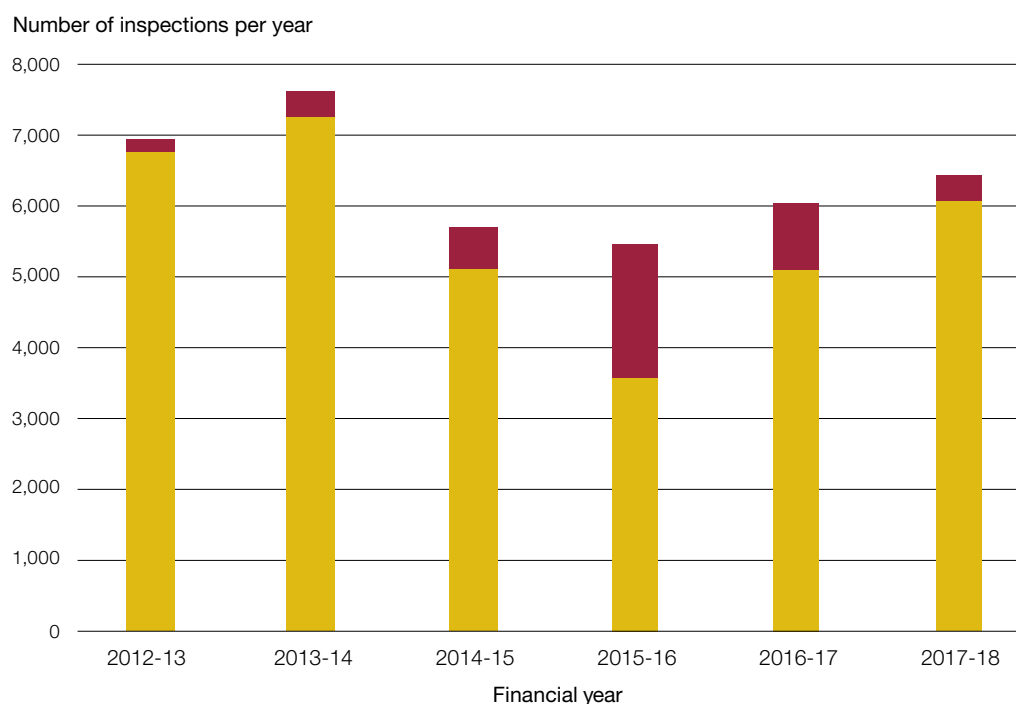
¹² The numbers of pupils referred to in paragraphs 2.8 and 2.11 to 2.13 are at January in the academic year of inspection or, where inspections were overdue, at January 2017.

¹³ Ofsted, *Annual Report and Accounts 2016-17*, HC 28, July 2017.

Figure 8

Number of school inspections, 2012-13 to 2017-18

The number of inspections fell in 2014-15 and 2015-16 but increased in the following two years



	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Total inspections planned	6,956	7,622	5,706	5,454	6,043	6,445
■ Inspections planned but not completed	182	355	587	1,882	945	366
■ Inspections completed	6,774	7,267	5,119	3,572	5,098	6,079
Percentage completed (%)	97	95	90	65	84	94

Notes

- 1 Data relate to state-funded schools only.
- 2 Numbers exclude monitoring visits to schools graded as requires improvement or inadequate.
- 3 The numbers of inspections in 2012-13 and 2013-14 were higher because Ofsted received additional funding to re-inspect all schools then graded as 'satisfactory'. We therefore used 2014-15 as the baseline for comparing the number of inspections in subsequent years.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Ofsted data

Inspection framework targets

2.10 Overall, Ofsted has struggled to meet the timescales set out in its inspection framework. It changed the framework in September 2015 and in some cases extended the timescales to allow schools more time to improve. This has also allowed Ofsted to spread re-inspections over a longer period. Performance against the target timescales has improved since 2015/16, but average times between inspections have generally increased.

New schools

2.11 Ofsted is closer to meeting its revised, less demanding target for inspecting new schools:

- From 2012/13 to 2014/15, Ofsted did not meet its target to inspect new schools generally during the second year of opening in 95 cases (9.6% of new schools inspected). There were 67,900 pupils in these schools.
- From 2015/16 to 2016/17, Ofsted did not meet its revised target to inspect new schools usually within three years of opening in 36 cases (7.8% of new schools inspected). There were 12,100 pupils in these schools.

Schools graded as requires improvement

2.12 Ofsted has met its targets for re-inspecting schools previously graded as requires improvement for most, but not all, schools:

- From 2012/13 to 2014/15, Ofsted did not meet its target to re-inspect schools graded as requires improvement normally within two years in 51 cases (2.4% of schools graded as requires improvement which were inspected). There were 22,600 pupils in these schools.
- Since September 2015, Ofsted's regional directors have had discretion to extend the re-inspection timescale from 24 to 30 months in exceptional circumstances, for example when a school has a new headteacher. In practice, Ofsted has used this flexibility extensively. Taking 2015/16 and 2016/17 together, Ofsted re-inspected 692 schools (26.8%, containing 269,100 pupils) in the period between two years¹⁴ and 30 months. It did not re-inspect 55 schools (1.3%, containing 16,050 pupils) within the extended period of 30 months.

Ofsted may visit schools graded as requires improvement between inspections to monitor progress.

¹⁴ In practice, by the end of the term in which the two-year period since the publication date of the previous inspection report.

Schools graded as inadequate

2.13 Ofsted has not met its targets for re-inspecting schools previously graded as inadequate – normally within 18 months for schools with serious weaknesses and normally within 24 months for schools in special measures – where the quality of education provision is most at risk. Between 2012/13 and 2016/17, for schools inspected, Ofsted missed its targets for 78 schools (6.0% containing 43,200 pupils) (**Figure 9**). Ofsted aims to visit all schools graded as inadequate to monitor progress between inspections.

Average time between inspections

2.14 In 2015/16 and 2016/17, Ofsted did not meet its inspection framework target to re-inspect schools graded as good approximately every three years. The average time between inspections has increased for primary and secondary schools graded as good, and for special schools and pupil referral units graded as good or outstanding (**Figure 10** on page 32). Good primary schools had the longest time between inspections (4.4 years in 2016/17).

2.15 The average time between Ofsted's inspections of schools graded as inadequate increased each year between 2012/13 and 2016/17. For schools graded as requires improvement, the average time increased each year from 2013/14.

2.16 Ofsted told us that it has been increasing the time between inspections of good schools to free up resources for other activities, such as expanding its system-level research. In addition, in order to inspect a greater proportion of outstanding schools, Ofsted plans to lengthen the target interval between inspections of good providers to four years.¹⁵

Timeliness of inspection reports

2.17 Ofsted aims to publish its inspection reports within 19 working days of the end of the inspection, or within 28 working days where additional quality assurance is applied (see paragraph 2.38). Ofsted's analysis shows that, since September 2015, it has published 81% of its reports on time. The proportion published on time fell from 84% in the period from September 2015 to March 2017 to 79% in 2017-18.

Inspecting independent schools

2.18 The Department has required Ofsted to inspect all non-association independent schools within three years of September 2015. At the end of March 2018, Ofsted had 222 of 1,100 schools left to inspect during the 2018 summer term. It believes it will be able to complete all the inspections by August 2018.

2.19 Ofsted has diverted resources from other activities in order to inspect non-association independent schools. The Department told us that it recognises that completing these inspections has been challenging for Ofsted but that it considers establishing an inspection baseline is important.

¹⁵ Ofsted, *Ofsted strategy 2017–22*, September 2017.

Figure 9

Ofsted's performance against inspection framework targets for schools graded as requires improvement or inadequate

Ofsted grade	Framework target for re-inspection ¹	Re-inspections that have taken place where Ofsted did not meet the framework target ²		Re-inspections that have not taken place and are overdue ⁴	
		Number	Percentage ³ (%)	Number	Percentage ⁵ (%)
Requires improvement	Before September 2015: Monitored and normally re-inspected within two years of the date of the most recent full inspection.	51	2.4	–	–
	From September 2015: Monitored and usually re-inspected before the end of the term in which the 24th month after the publication date of the report falls ⁶ ...except	735	28.5	101	6.0
	...the target can be extended at the discretion of the Ofsted regional director, for example where the school has a new headteacher, to no later than 30 months after publication of the inspection report.	43	1.7	12	0.7
Inadequate, with serious weaknesses ⁷	Subject to monitoring, with full re-inspection normally within 18 months.	16	4.6	1	1.7
Inadequate, and in special measures ⁷	Subject to monitoring, with full re-inspection normally no later than 24 months after the previous inspection. The timing of the re-inspection will be determined by the school's rate of improvement.	42	7.4	19	6.1

Notes

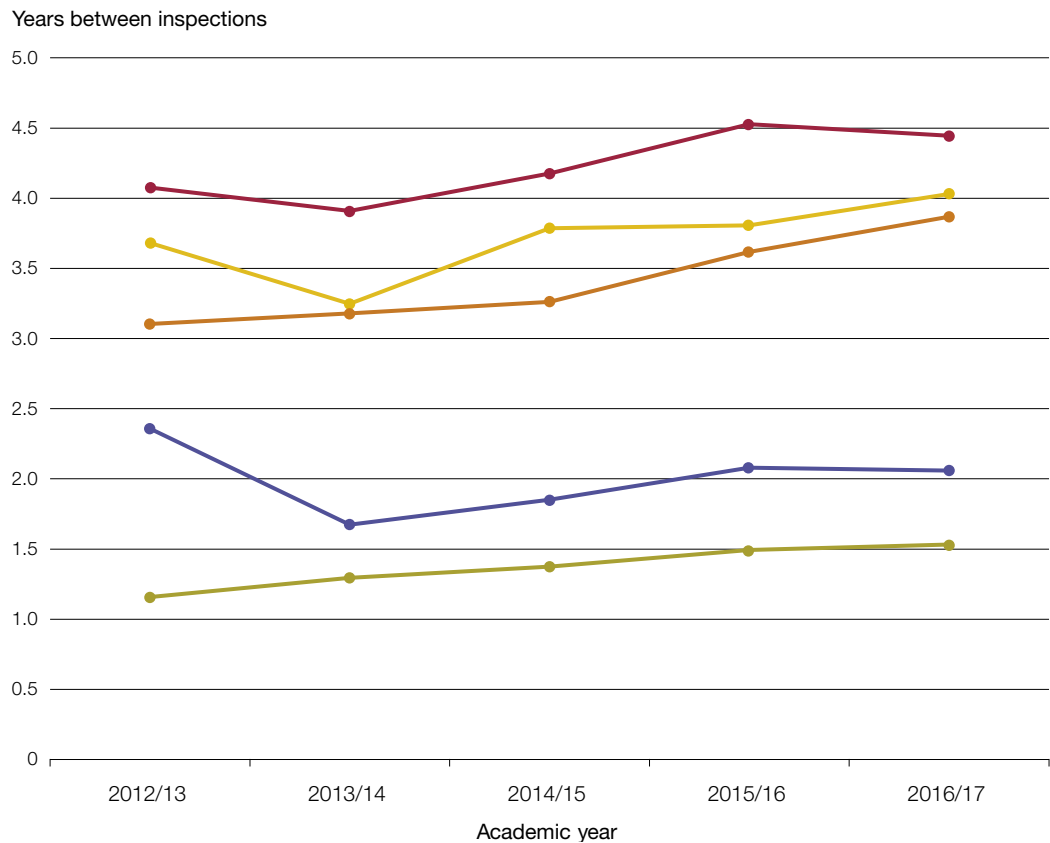
- 1 The inspection framework requirements changed for some schools over the period. The targets are set out in Ofsted's inspection framework documents and school inspection handbooks.
- 2 Re-inspections that have taken place where Ofsted did not meet the framework target include all inspections between September 2012 and August 2017.
- 3 As a proportion of inspections of schools of that type and grade over the relevant period.
- 4 Re-inspections that have not taken place and are overdue at the end of August 2017.
- 5 As a proportion of schools currently of that type and grade.
- 6 Framework target inspection periods are timed from the date of publication of the inspection report, which can be several weeks after the inspection (see paragraph 2.17).
- 7 Ofsted categorises schools graded as inadequate as either having serious weaknesses or requiring special measures. Schools with serious weaknesses have been graded as inadequate for overall effectiveness, but graded as better than inadequate for the effectiveness of leadership and management. Schools requiring special measures have been graded as inadequate for both overall effectiveness and the effectiveness of leadership and management.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Ofsted data

Figure 10

Average time between Ofsted school inspections, 2012/13 to 2016/17

The average time between inspections has increased for most types of school



	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
● Good primary	4.1	3.9	4.2	4.5	4.4
● Good secondary	3.7	3.2	3.8	3.8	4.0
● Good and outstanding special schools and pupil referral units	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.6	3.9
● Requires improvement ¹ (all schools)	2.4	1.7	1.9	2.1	2.1
● Inadequate (all schools)	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.5

Note

1 In September 2012, Ofsted replaced the grade of 'satisfactory' with 'requires improvement'. Schools graded as satisfactory before this date were "likely to be inspected...by the end of the school year 2013/14".

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Ofsted data

The school inspection workforce

2.20 Ofsted has struggled to meet its inspection targets, partly because of a shortage of inspectors, particularly to lead inspections. It uses a mix of directly employed and contracted inspectors:

- HM inspectors are directly employed by Ofsted. They are senior inspectors who carry out a large number of inspections, allowing them to build considerable experience and expertise.¹⁶
- Ofsted inspectors are contracted to undertake a number of inspection days each year. They are serving school leaders, typically headteachers or deputy headteachers, or non-serving practitioners, such as education consultants or former headteachers. Contracted inspectors provide Ofsted with flexibility in staffing and a direct connection with schools. Around 70% of Ofsted inspectors are serving practitioners. Comments from a small number of respondents to our survey of headteachers mentioned the benefits of having serving teachers on inspection teams, including greater credibility and a better understanding of current practice and the challenges that schools face.

2.21 Ofsted's regional directors decide how many staff they need, and the mix of HM inspectors and Ofsted inspectors, within their overall budget. All HM inspectors and some Ofsted inspectors can lead inspections.

HM inspectors

2.22 Ofsted has found it challenging to retain enough HM inspectors. In March 2018, it had 30 (15%) fewer HM inspectors than it had budgeted for.¹⁷ Turnover of HM inspectors improved from 26% in 2016-17 to 19% in 2017-18, although this still indicates a high level of churn in the workforce (**Figure 11** overleaf).

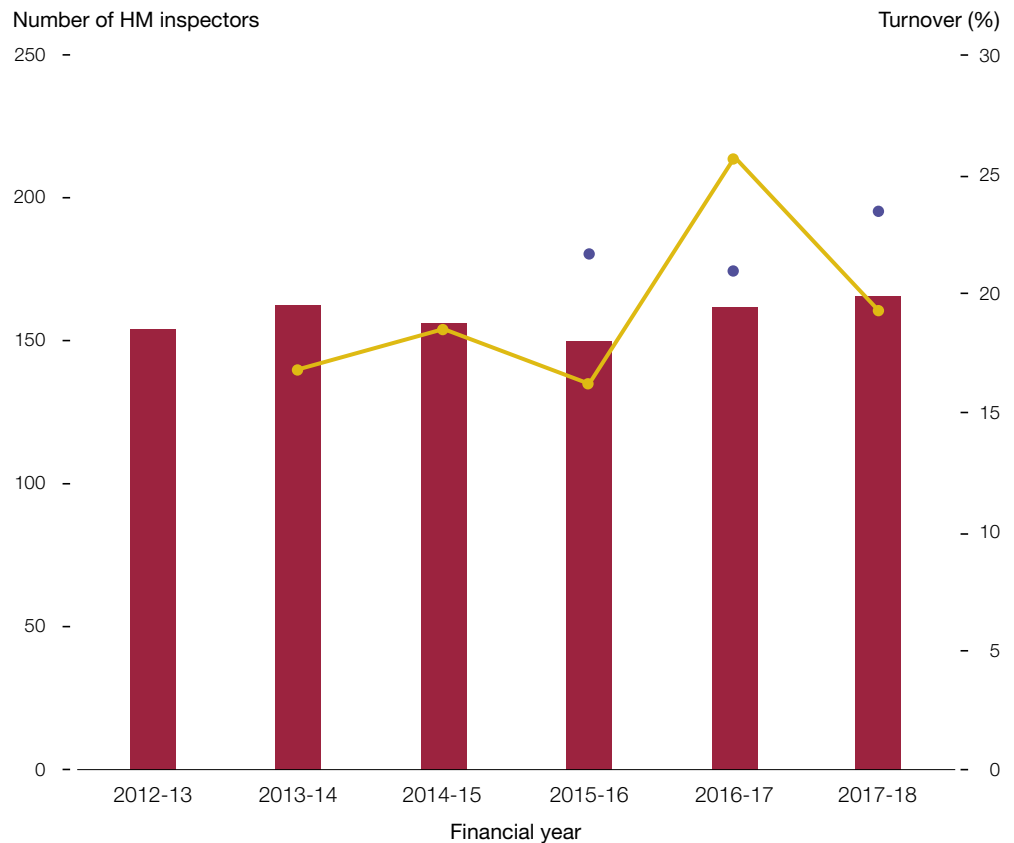
2.23 The available evidence indicates that workload is one of the main reasons why HM inspectors leave. In 2016/17, workload was cited by nine of the 12 school HM inspectors with two years' or less service who completed exit interviews or questionnaires. In the 2017 civil service people survey, 39% of HM inspectors said they had an acceptable workload and 45% said they did not. Inspections are an intensive process for the team, especially the lead inspector, who has one day to prepare and one day to write the report for a full inspection (half a day for each for a short inspection).

¹⁶ Ofsted also employs HM inspectors in leadership and central roles who do not routinely undertake inspections.

¹⁷ As Ofsted's regional directors decide locally how many HM inspectors they need, the number of vacancies may be higher or lower than this. Ofsted does not hold vacancy information centrally.

Figure 11
Numbers of school HM inspectors, 2012-13 to 2017-18

The number of HM inspectors rose in the last two years after previously declining; turnover reduced in 2017-18 but remained high



■ HM inspectors in post	154	163	156	150	162	166
● Budgeted complement	n/a	n/a	n/a	180	174	195
— Turnover (%)	n/a	16.8	18.5	16.2	25.7	19.2

Note

1 Numbers of Her Majesty's (HM) inspectors in post are full-time equivalents at 31 March in the year shown.

Source: Ofsted

2.24 A third of HM inspectors who completed exit interviews or questionnaires cited dissatisfaction with the role as a reason for leaving.¹⁸ For example, some felt that the role was too narrow, with a lack of improvement work. Ofsted reduced the extent of improvement work in light of the reductions in its budget. Ofsted told us that the introduction of short inspections had also made inspectors' jobs more about checking compliance and less about improvement and follow-up work. As a result, HM inspectors' work had become less varied and less satisfying for some inspectors.

2.25 Ofsted also faces competition for staff from other employers. Staff in the three Ofsted regions that we spoke to cited examples of inspectors leaving for more highly paid jobs with multi-academy trusts. Ofsted's salaries have been subject to public sector pay restraint since 2010, although pay for HM inspectors rose by 8% in 2015-16 when the new inspection framework was introduced. In the 2017 civil service people survey, 37% of HM inspectors said that their pay was reasonable compared with people doing a similar job in other organisations and 48% said it was not.

2.26 Ofsted's response to the shortage of HM inspectors has been to use more Ofsted inspectors to lead inspections. It is also considering how it can make the HM inspector role more attractive to help retention, for example by giving HM inspectors the opportunity to get involved in Ofsted's wider research. Ofsted is also exploring how it can encourage senior teachers to see working as an inspector as a mid-career role, rather than something for the end of their career as has traditionally been the case.

Ofsted inspectors

2.27 Since September 2015, Ofsted has contracted directly with Ofsted inspectors. Previously it had outsourced much of its inspection work to private companies, but it was not satisfied with the level of control this arrangement gave it over quality. Bringing school inspection in-house gave Ofsted more control over the selection, training and monitoring of inspectors. However, the change left Ofsted with an unexpected shortfall of contracted inspectors, partly because less than half of the existing contracted workforce who applied were assessed as meeting the standards and offered contracts.

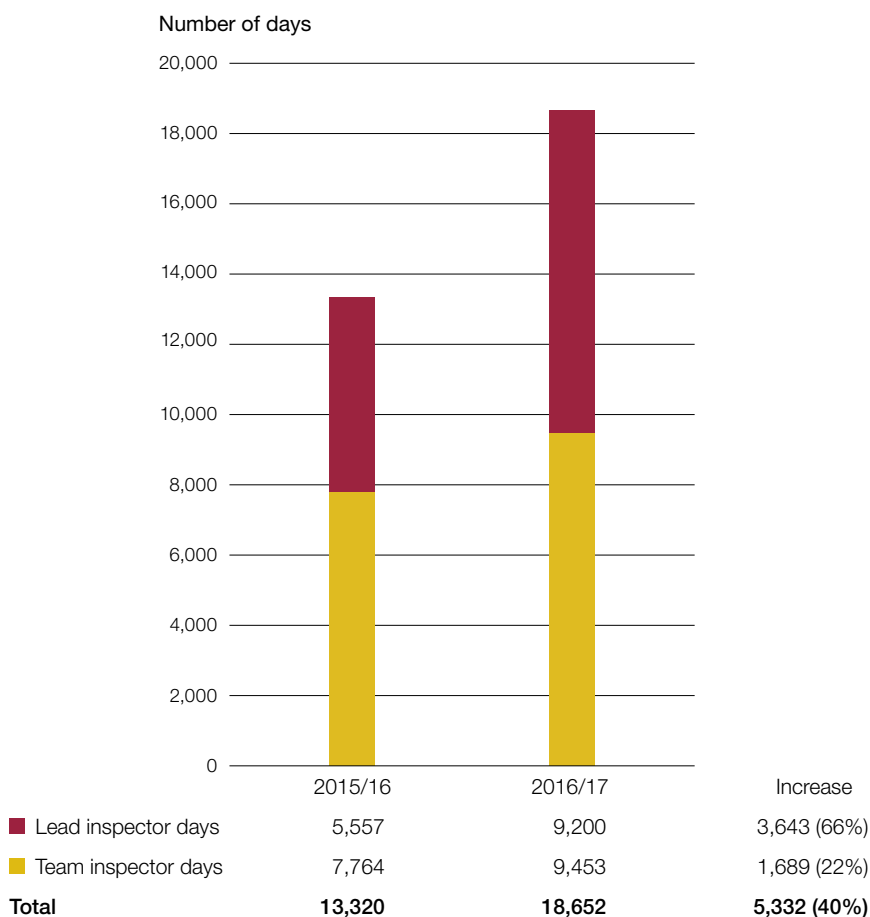
2.28 Ofsted could not deploy enough Ofsted inspectors to undertake its planned inspections in 2015/16. In 2016/17, it increased deployment significantly – by 40% from 13,320 days to 18,652 days; within this, deployment of Ofsted inspectors to lead inspections increased by 66% (**Figure 12** overleaf).

¹⁸ Ofsted's exit interview analysis covers HM inspectors and senior HM inspectors who left between 1 November 2016 and 31 August 2017. Of the 58 leavers who agreed to have an exit interview or who completed an exit questionnaire, 68% were school inspectors.

Figure 12

Deployment of Ofsted inspectors, 2015/16 to 2016/17

Ofsted deployed contracted Ofsted inspectors for 40% more days in 2016/17 than it did in 2015/16

**Note**

1 Figures may not sum due to rounding.

Source: Ofsted

2.29 Ofsted aims to engage serving practitioners for 16 days a year and non-serving practitioners for 32 days a year. These levels are designed to give Ofsted inspectors sufficient experience and to help Ofsted get value from the investment it makes in their training. Of the Ofsted inspectors deployed in 2016/17, each serving practitioner was used for an average of nine days and each non-serving practitioner for an average of 23 days (up from seven days and 19 days respectively in 2015/16). Ofsted told us that it had not sought to enforce the deployment requirements because it had not had enough lead inspectors.

2.30 Ofsted wants more Ofsted inspectors to be able to lead inspections, although it has not quantified how many it needs. At December 2017, it had trained 435 of 1,466 Ofsted inspectors (30%) to lead. As well as training existing inspectors, at the time of our work Ofsted was only taking on new inspectors who were willing to lead. As an incentive, it increased the daily rate for lead inspectors by nearly a quarter in February 2016. Payment for serving practitioners is made to the school in which they work.

Quality and consistency

2.31 Given the impact that Ofsted's inspection reports can have, it is vital that its inspections are of high quality and its grades are consistent, while recognising that they involve an element of judgement. The responses to our stakeholder consultation indicated that the teaching unions in particular have concerns about consistency and the validity of inspection grades in light of the experience of their members.

2.32 In our survey of headteachers, 84% of respondents said that the outcome of their school's most recent inspection was fair. The proportion with this view varied depending on the grade of the school, from 100% of outstanding schools to 51% of inadequate schools (**Figure 13** overleaf).

Breadth of evidence

2.33 To make a rounded assessment of a school's effectiveness, Ofsted considers a wide range of quantitative and qualitative evidence, including:

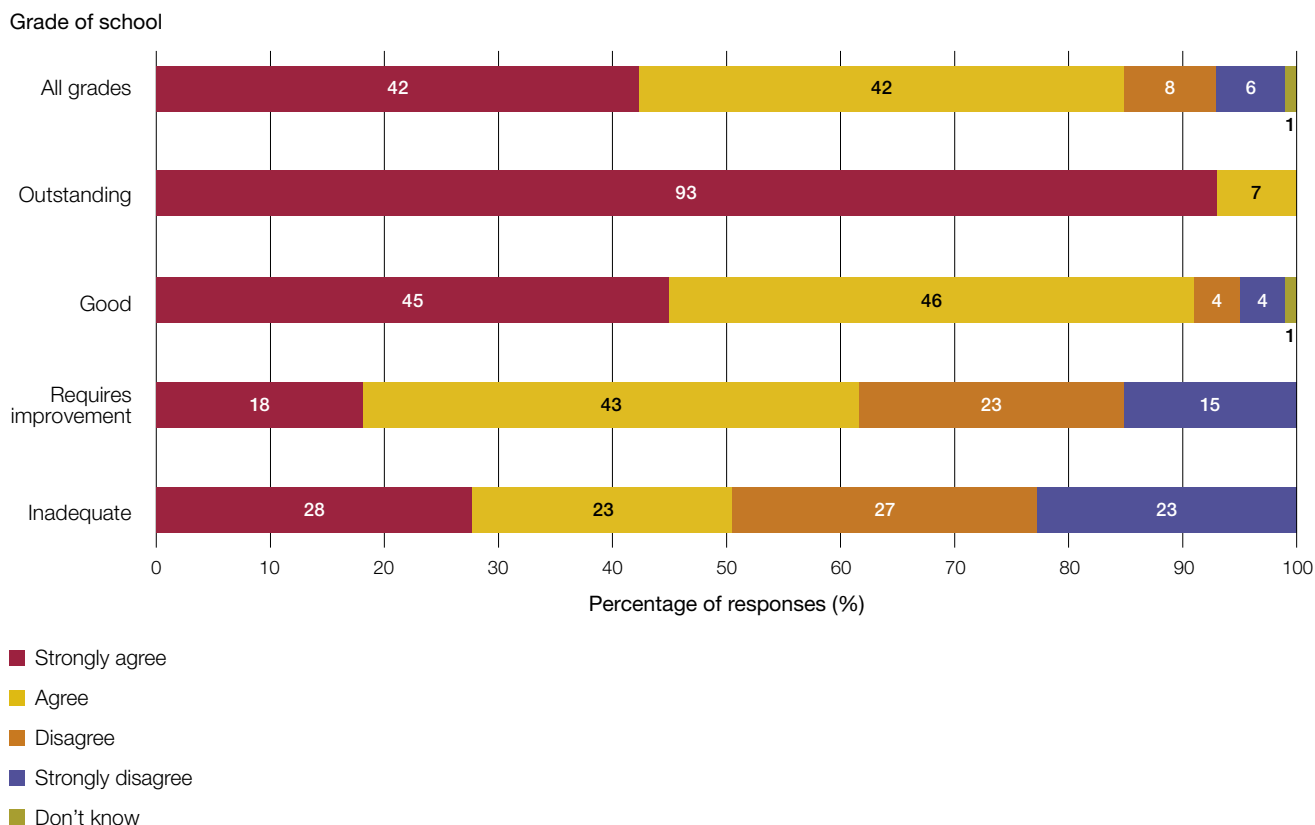
- progress, attainment, attendance and other pupil data;
- school records and policies, and information on safeguarding;
- observations of lessons and non-lesson time;
- reviews of pupils' work;
- discussions with school leaders, other teachers and governors; and
- conversations with pupils and parents.

2.34 Our stakeholder consultation and Ofsted's surveys indicate a perception that inspectors rely too much on data and go into an inspection with a pre-conceived view of the outcome. This view was not generally supported by our survey of headteachers: for the 13 inspection activities we asked about, between 65% and 90% of respondents said that the inspectors placed the right amount of emphasis on each one. In the case of reviewing published pupil attainment data, 73% said that inspectors gave this the right amount of emphasis, while 21% said that they gave it too much emphasis.

Figure 13

Headteachers' views on the fairness of inspection outcomes

Headteachers of outstanding and good schools were more likely to think that the outcome of their most recent inspection was fair



Notes

- 1 The chart shows responses to the question: "Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree that the outcome of your school's most recent inspection was fair?"
- 2 Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Source: National Audit Office survey of headteachers, 2018

2.35 A relationship between the effectiveness of a school and pupils' progress and attainment is to be expected, but it is difficult to prove or disprove any causal link. To explore the relationship, Ofsted analysed a measure of pupil progress ('Progress 8') against its inspection gradings of secondary schools in 2016/17. It reported that, looking at all four inspection grades together, there was a clear relationship between median progress scores and inspection grades; however, there was also considerable overlap in the scores for the four groups of schools.

Training of inspectors

2.36 Inspections rely on the professional expertise and experience of the inspection team. In our survey of headteachers, 82% of respondents said that the inspection team had the appropriate expertise and experience to carry out the inspection effectively, and 15% said that they did not.

2.37 Ofsted uses training as an important way of promoting quality and consistency. Initial training for all inspectors comprises three four-day phases and is provided centrally. Following this, Ofsted's regions sign off inspectors as ready to inspect, and provide ongoing training and support. Ofsted holds conferences to discuss inspection practice and communicate changes, which all inspectors are required to attend. Ofsted told us that inspectors who do not undertake mandatory training are prevented from undertaking inspections.

Quality assurance arrangements

2.38 Ofsted has a range of quality assurance processes and has acted to strengthen these arrangements. Quality assurance is led by Ofsted's regions, with central overview. The processes include the following:

- Lead inspectors assess the performance of team inspectors, using prescribed quality standards. This happens on all inspections that involve more than one inspector.
- Quality assurance readers, who are usually inspectors, review all inspection reports before publication.
- Ofsted shares draft inspection reports with schools so that they can identify any factual inaccuracies and provide other comments.
- Ofsted carries out enhanced checks for higher-risk inspections. As part of this, a quality reviewer may scrutinise the inspection evidence and how well the inspection team determined its judgements and made recommendations. In 2016/17, 56% of inspections had enhanced quality checks.
- Quality assurance inspectors visit inspections to provide additional assurance on higher-risk inspections or to evaluate the work of members of the inspection team. This happens on approximately 10% of inspections.
- Ofsted's central quality team reviews a sample of inspection reports and supporting evidence. This is done to gain assurance about the effectiveness of regional quality assurance processes.

2.39 The quality assurance processes generate data which Ofsted uses to track whether the quality of inspections is improving. Ofsted's data relating to three of the processes show that over 90% of inspections were assessed as meeting requirements between 2015/16 and 2017/18 (**Figure 14**). Taking the three quality assurance processes together, there is no clear trend in performance.

2.40 In 2016/17, the quality assurance processes led to the overall effectiveness grade being changed following 17 inspections (equivalent to one in 420 inspections). They also identified 36 (one in 200) inspections where a further evidence-gathering visit was required.¹⁹ These results were similar to those in 2015/16. Data from the first eight months of 2017/18 indicate that quality may be improving.

2.41 During 2015/16, Ofsted assessed the reliability of its short inspection judgements by carrying out separate inspections of the same primary school on the same day. Of the 24 schools inspected, the two inspectors agreed on the outcome in 22 cases. Ofsted acknowledged the limitations of this exercise and noted that the results of the study should not be generalised more broadly.²⁰

Figure 14

Ofsted's performance against its inspection quality requirements, 2015/16 to 2017/18

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18 ¹
Quality assurance of inspection reports			
Number of inspections assessed	5,371	7,139	5,862
% meeting requirements	98%	97%	98%
Quality assurance during inspections			
Number of inspections assessed	558	776	489
% meeting requirements	98%	97%	96%
Review of inspection evidence base			
Number of inspections assessed	342	631	378
% meeting requirements	90%	96%	93%

Note

1 Data for 2017/18 cover the first eight months of the year (September 2017 to April 2018).

Source: Ofsted

19 The figures in this paragraph relate to inspections, including monitoring visits, of state-funded and independent schools. The 17 grade changes include changes following further visits. The grade improved in nine cases and declined in eight cases.

20 In the test inspections, the judgement to be reached by the inspectors was whether the school remained good or whether more evidence was required from a longer inspection.

Complaints

2.42 Ofsted approaches complaints about inspections in three stages. First, it aims to resolve complaints during the inspection visit. Second, a contracted investigator or an HM inspector who was not involved in the inspection will investigate a formal complaint. Finally, a complainant can ask Ofsted for an internal review, which involves scrutiny by a panel, including a sector representative external to Ofsted.

2.43 In 2017-18, Ofsted received formal complaints, which were not resolved during the course of the inspection and required independent investigation, relating to 310 (5%) of its school inspections. Of these, 105 complaints (34%) were fully or partly upheld; none resulted in Ofsted changing the inspection grade. This was also the case in 2015-16 and 2016-17; Ofsted changed three grades in each of 2013-14 and 2014-15.

2.44 Ofsted regards the outcomes from its complaints process as a positive reflection on its inspections and quality assurance. An independent adjudicator appointed by the Department also considers that Ofsted's complaints process works well.²¹ Evidence from our survey of headteachers indicates a more complex picture, although the number of respondents was small meaning the results may be less reliable:

- Less than half of respondents (43%, 49 respondents) who did not consider that the outcome of their inspection was fair complained to Ofsted. Of those who did complain, 61% (30) were not satisfied with how Ofsted handled the complaint, and 85% (41) were not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint.
- Of the 66 who did not complain, 45% (30) did not do so because they did not believe the complaints process to be fair or independent.

²¹ Since 2009 the Department has appointed the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution to administer the Independent Complaints Adjudication Service for Ofsted. As well as reviewing how Ofsted has responded to individual complaints, provided that the complainant has first exhausted Ofsted's internal complaints procedure, the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution produces an annual report about its work.

Part Three

Ofsted's impact

3.1 This part of the report covers the impact of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills' (Ofsted's) school inspections. As Ofsted has not evaluated this area, we used survey data and other information to assess it.

Ofsted's impact measurement

3.2 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. It has not had clear performance indicators or targets to track progress towards these high-level aims. Its performance measures have instead focused mainly on activity and processes.

3.3 Ofsted set few targets to measure performance against its 2016 strategic plan, and has provided limited information to allow others to assess its progress. The strategic plan included nine measures of quality, efficiency and effectiveness for which Ofsted planned to set targets. However, seven of these measures did not have associated targets; and performance against three of them was not reported publicly. In addition, when reporting performance in its annual report and accounts, Ofsted has not generally provided baseline levels of performance or analysed trends.

3.4 In September 2017, Ofsted published a new strategy for 2017–2022. In March 2018, it agreed an evaluation framework for assessing performance against the strategy over the five-year period, including performance indicators and targets. The measures include the percentage of parents who consider that Ofsted is a valuable source of information, and the percentage of teachers who see Ofsted as a force for improvement.

Meeting the needs of parents

3.5 Parents are an important audience for Ofsted's inspection reports. Focus group research for Ofsted in 2017 concluded that parents were positive towards Ofsted: it is respected, trusted and seen as independent. The research also highlighted an important caveat – that parents were confused as to why Ofsted does not do no-notice inspections and many parents considered that this undermines its credibility.²²

3.6 The Department for Education (the Department) intends that parents will use Ofsted's inspection reports to inform their choice of school for their children. Evidence indicates that parents do consider inspection reports when they choose a school. Ofsted's 2017 survey of parents found that word of mouth from other parents (48% of respondents) and Ofsted reports (47%) were the two main sources of information for parents when choosing a school.²³ The top three factors when choosing were: proximity to home (61%); Ofsted judgement (50%); and siblings at the school (25%). However, the proportion of parents agreeing that Ofsted provides a reliable measure of a school's quality fell from 66% in 2016 to 59% in 2017.

3.7 Ofsted and Parentkind have found that parents would like more opportunity to comment on schools, and for more views from parents to be included in Ofsted's inspection reports.²⁴ Ofsted's focus group research indicated that parents found the writing in inspection reports "generic, clichéd and impersonal", and that parents believed that schools were able to 'game' the system. It also found that parents would welcome a stronger 'parent voice' in inspection reports. Parentkind told us that its research showed that parents valued having an independent inspectorate but considered that inspection reports lacked a parent voice.

3.8 Ofsted seeks parents' views about schools, but the level of response is low. It obtains views mainly through an online survey. Once they have registered, parents can access the survey at any time. When a school is told that it is about to be inspected, it must contact parents inviting them to complete the survey.²⁵ Schools must also tell parents how to contact the inspection team, and inspectors talk to parents during the inspection. In the year to January 2018, Ofsted received an average of 17 submissions from parents for each state-funded school in England (up from an average of 12 in the previous year). Parentkind told us that Ofsted should rely less on the online survey; instead, schools should seek regular feedback from parents and Ofsted should draw on this material in its inspections. At the time of our work, Ofsted was undertaking further research on how it might engage more effectively with parents and improve take-up of the online survey.

²² Eight focus groups of parents were run by Public First on behalf of Ofsted in June and July 2017.

²³ Ofsted's survey of parents was carried out in December 2017. Ofsted received 1,000 responses from parents with a school-aged child.

²⁴ Parentkind, formerly PTA UK, is a membership organisation for parent-teacher associations. Its survey of parents was carried out in December 2017 and received 295 responses.

²⁵ Once an inspection is announced, a free-text box is enabled in the survey, in addition to the existing questions, so that parents can submit more information. This is disabled at noon on the last day of the inspection, so for a short inspection it is only available for a maximum of 24 hours.

Improving school performance

3.9 Survey evidence indicates that schools and teachers have mixed views about the impact of Ofsted's inspections on school performance:

- In our survey of headteachers, 44% of respondents said that the inspection had led to improvements in the school, and 28% said that it had not.
- Ofsted's post-inspection survey of schools inspected since September 2015 found that 91% thought that the inspection findings would help the school to improve. Respondents valued most the professional dialogue with school leaders during the inspection, the final feedback and the analysis of strengths and weaknesses.²⁶
- In Ofsted's teacher attitude survey in 2017, 29% of teachers agreed that inspection helps individual schools to improve, with 46% disagreeing.²⁷

3.10 There are more positive views about Ofsted's feedback to schools. In addition to the written inspection report, inspectors provide oral feedback as they are undertaking their inspection activities and in meetings with school leaders at the end of each inspection day. Two-thirds (67%) of headteachers who responded to our survey said that there was useful feedback in the inspection report, ranging from 92% for schools graded as outstanding to 41% for schools graded as inadequate. Slightly more respondents (71%) agreed that inspectors provided useful feedback both during and at the end of the inspection visit. However, some stakeholders representing teachers and school governors told us that Ofsted reports were not detailed or technical enough to provide useful feedback for schools.

Improving the schools sector

3.11 Ofsted is in a position to make a broader contribution to improving the quality of education beyond the schools it inspects. By using serving teachers as inspectors, Ofsted helps to build capability in the school system. In its 2017 survey of Ofsted inspectors, 99% of serving practitioners agreed that the knowledge and experience they had gained as an inspector would be of benefit to their own provider and to the wider sector that they served.²⁸

3.12 Inspection findings create a substantial knowledge asset that Ofsted can use to provide insights and generate value. In our survey of headteachers, 81% of respondents who were aware of Ofsted's thematic reports said that they found them useful. However, in light of budget reductions, Ofsted reduced its school improvement activity, such as wider research and thematic reports that pull together findings and recommendations and share good practice. It published 13 research and analysis reports in 2013, but only two in 2017. In December 2017, Ofsted decided to expand its improvement activity and divert £1.2 million from inspecting schools in 2018-19 to fund the first year of a two-year research programme.

²⁶ Ofsted sends a survey to schools after each inspection. It received 5,834 responses between September 2015 and September 2017.

²⁷ The survey was commissioned by Ofsted and took place in February 2017. It received 1,026 responses.

²⁸ Ofsted's survey was carried out in December 2017 and January 2018. It covered those inspecting other education settings as well as schools; 69% of the 903 respondents were school inspectors.

3.13 Inspectors keep a record of what they see and hear during an inspection to support the report and the grading. However, the value that Ofsted can extract from aggregating its inspection findings is limited as inspectors' notes are handwritten, meaning they cannot easily be analysed electronically. Ofsted plans to introduce electronic evidence gathering to its school inspections later in 2018, to make evidence gathering more efficient and effective and enable better use of the evidence that inspectors record.

Burden of inspection

3.14 Ofsted has taken steps to reduce the burden of inspection. Inspection inevitably places some burden on schools as staff, particularly senior leaders, spend time speaking with the inspectors and collating information. Beyond this, Ofsted has sought to reduce or remove other demands on schools, including by reducing the notice period for an inspection to half a day. In doing this, Ofsted has emphasised that inspection requires no special preparation. It also committed not to make changes to the inspection framework for two years following its introduction in 2015.

3.15 In addition, in January 2016, Ofsted launched a 'myth-busting' campaign to dispel common misconceptions about inspection that can result in schools doing unnecessary work. It has also worked with the Department and the teaching unions to produce guidance aimed at reducing teachers' workload and highlighting practices that are not (or are no longer) required by Ofsted.

3.16 The myth-busting campaign has been welcomed by teaching unions but its messages have not permeated throughout the school system. Ofsted's 2017 teacher attitude survey found that 69% of teachers had not heard anything about the myth-busting campaign. However, the vast majority of teachers correctly identified that, for example, it is false that Ofsted requires teachers to provide individual lesson plans for inspectors and that the judgement made by the lead inspector on the day cannot be challenged. We heard during interviews that sometimes messages do not reach beyond school leaders to other teachers. In our survey of headteachers, 46% of respondents agreed that Ofsted had taken effective steps to reduce the burden of inspection on schools but 44% disagreed.

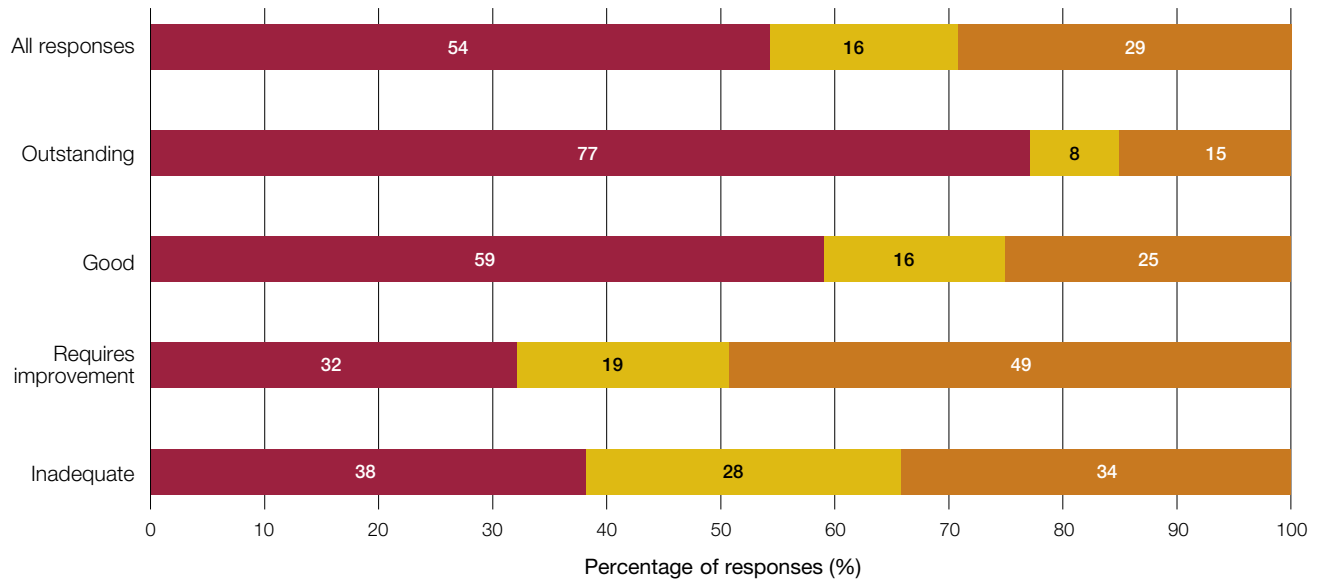
3.17 Views are mixed about whether Ofsted places an acceptable burden on schools, with headteachers of schools inspected in the past two years more positive than teachers generally. In Ofsted's 2017 teacher attitude survey, 86% of teachers agreed with the statement "Ofsted inspection introduces unacceptable levels of burden into the system". The headteachers we surveyed were less critical when we asked about the burden of their most recent inspection. More than half of respondents (54%) agreed that the burdens placed on the school were proportionate in order for Ofsted to form a reliable judgement, while 29% disagreed (**Figure 15** overleaf).

Figure 15

Headteachers' views on the burden of their last inspection

More than half of the headteachers who responded to our survey said that the burden of inspection was proportionate in order for Ofsted to form a reliable judgement

Grade of school



- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree/don't know
- Disagree

Notes

- 1 The chart shows responses to the question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree that the burdens the inspection placed on the school were proportionate in order for Ofsted to form a reliable judgement?"
- 2 Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Source: National Audit Office survey of headteachers, 2018

Appendix One

Our audit approach

1 This report examines whether the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills' (Ofsted's) approach to inspecting schools is providing value for money. It assesses:

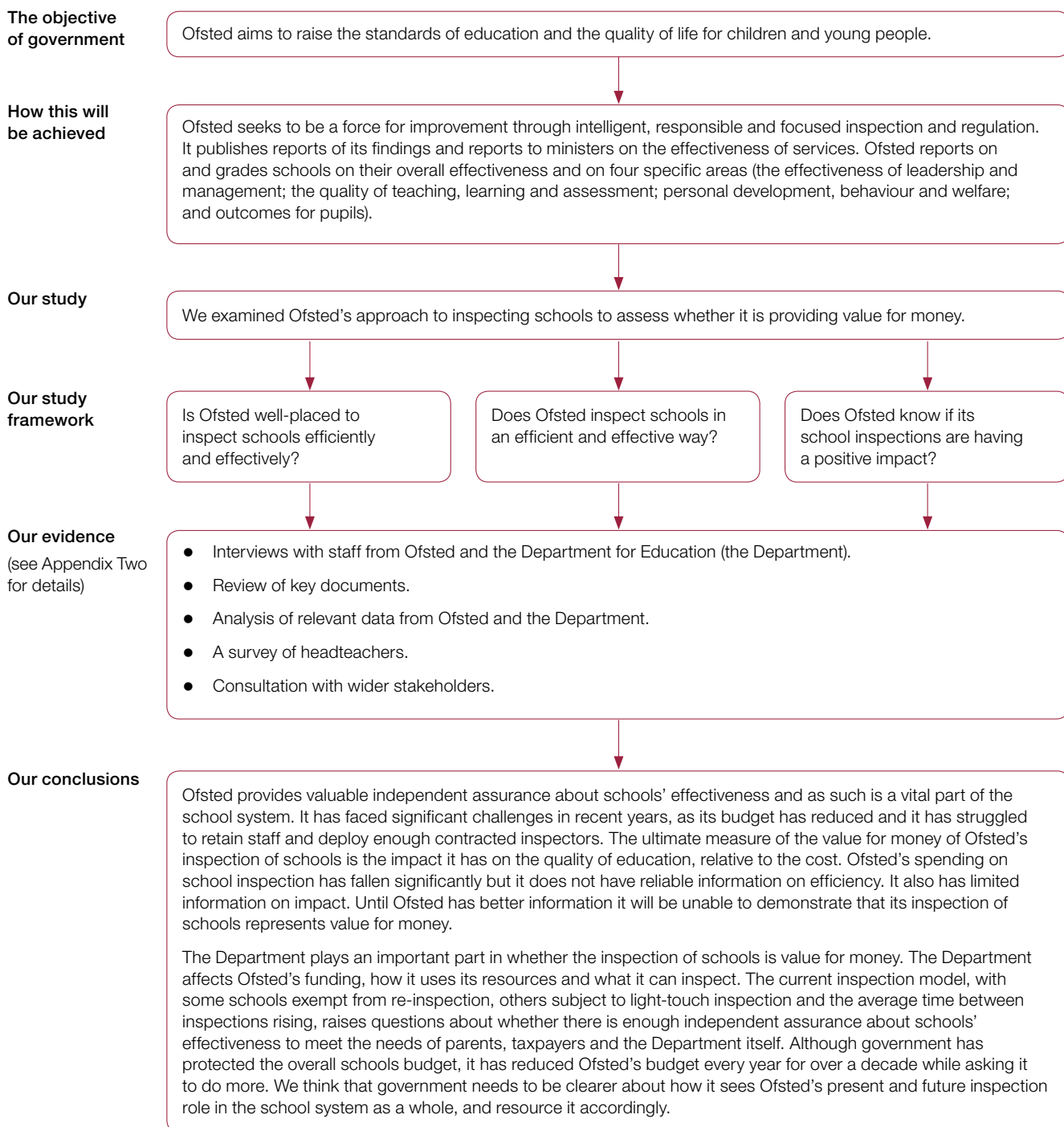
- Ofsted's role, including its place in the school improvement and accountability landscape;
- Ofsted's performance in inspecting schools; and
- the impact of Ofsted's school inspections.

2 We applied an analytical framework with evaluative criteria, which considered what arrangements would be optimal for achieving value for money. By 'optimal' we mean the most desirable possible, while acknowledging expressed or implied restrictions or constraints.

3 Our audit approach is summarised in **Figure 16** overleaf. Our evidence base is described in Appendix Two.

Figure 16

Our audit approach



Appendix Two

Our evidence base

1 We reached our independent conclusions on the value for money of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills' (Ofsted's) inspection of schools by analysing evidence collected between August 2017 and April 2018. Our audit approach is outlined in Appendix One.

2 In designing and carrying out our work, we took account of previous National Audit Office reports on inspectors and regulators. In particular, we drew on our 2015 comparative study on inspection.²⁹

3 Our work focused on the inspection of state-funded schools, including special schools and pupil referral units. We did not cover standalone early years providers, such as nurseries, or 16–19 providers, such as sixth-form colleges.

4 We interviewed staff from Ofsted and the Department for Education (the Department). The people we interviewed included:

- at Ofsted, staff responsible for leading the organisation, inspection policy, data and scheduling, inspector training, inspection quality, finance, strategy and performance; we also spoke to staff from three of Ofsted's regional offices; and
- at the Department, staff responsible for education standards, inspection and accountability policy, independent schools policy and academies; we also spoke to the National Schools Commissioner and two regional schools commissioners.

5 We reviewed key documents. The documents included the following:

- The legislation under which Ofsted operates. We used this to understand Ofsted's statutory responsibilities and the framework within which Ofsted works.
- Documents setting out Ofsted's strategic priorities for 2016-17 and 2017–2022. We used these to understand what Ofsted is aiming to achieve, and how its school inspections fit with its wider priorities.
- Ofsted's published common inspection framework and inspection handbooks. We used these to understand how Ofsted undertakes its inspections, what inspectors are expected to do and the evaluation criteria that inspectors use to make grading judgements.

²⁹ Comptroller and Auditor General, *Inspection: A comparative study*, Session 2014-15, HC 1030, National Audit Office, February 2015.

- Documents relating to how Ofsted plans its inspection programme. We used these to understand Ofsted's inspection scheduling process, its risk assessment of schools and how schools are selected for inspection.
- Ofsted's internal management information, including board papers and documents it uses to hold the regional offices to account. We used these to understand how Ofsted manages its operations and monitors its performance.
- Ofsted's annual reports summarising the findings of its inspection and regulation activities, and its annual reports and accounts. We used these to understand trends in the performance and characteristics of schools and how Ofsted reports its performance. We also used Ofsted's accounts data in our analysis of its costs.

6 We analysed the following data from Ofsted and the Department:

- Data on the inspections that Ofsted completed in each academic and financial year. We used these data to examine Ofsted's performance against statutory and inspection framework targets; the time between inspections; trends in the numbers of inspections and the characteristics of the schools inspected; and to understand the time between inspections taking place and the inspection reports being published.
- Data generated by Ofsted's quality assurance processes. We used these data to understand the number of inspections subject to quality assurance and the results of these processes.
- Published data about schools and pupil numbers. We used these data to check schools' opening and closing dates, and changes to school status (such as becoming an academy), and to check schools' pupil numbers.

7 We analysed Ofsted's financial data. We used:

- Ofsted's annual reports and accounts from 2000-01 to 2016-17 to show how Ofsted's total spending has changed over time. For 2017-18 we used Ofsted's unaudited management information for the complete year. For 2018-19 and 2019-20 we used Ofsted's published spending plans.
- Ofsted's unpublished outturn spending data for 2010-11 to 2016-17 to understand how its spending on each sector has changed over time. For 2017-18 we used Ofsted's unaudited management information for the complete year. For 2010-11 Ofsted could identify the costs of administration and inspection support but not the cost of inspecting each sector. Therefore we apportioned the total cost of inspection to sectors using 2011-12 ratios.
- Ofsted's cost modelling tool for 2017-18 to estimate how much Ofsted spent on inspecting state-funded schools, including apportioned administration and inspection support costs, compared with its other activities relating to the inspection of the schools sector. We then divided this by the number of inspections of state-funded schools that Ofsted performed in that year to calculate the cost per inspection.

- Ofsted's own indicative analysis to understand how cost per inspection has changed over time. This analysis contains uncertainties and so could not reliably quantify changes.

In all cases we adjusted the figures for inflation to 2017-18 values using GDP deflators.

8 We commissioned DJS Research to conduct an online survey of headteachers of state-funded schools during January 2018. The sample comprised around 7,800 state-funded schools which had been inspected by Ofsted between September 2015 and August 2017. DJS sent an email to the headteacher of each school in the sample, inviting them to complete the survey. We set minimum quotas of responses to ensure that the results were representative of primary and secondary schools, and of schools with each of the four Ofsted gradings for overall effectiveness (outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate). We received valid responses from 785 schools, exceeding our minimum quotas for each category of school.³⁰ We did not differentiate responses between maintained schools, academies or other types of school. We weighted the results to reflect the proportions of primary and secondary schools in England, and the proportions of schools with each Ofsted grading. The weighting efficiency for this data was 95.5%.³¹

9 The questions we asked sought information and views about the school's most recent Ofsted inspection and included the following topics:

- the size of the inspection team, duration of the inspection and the expertise of the inspector(s);
- the sources of evidence considered by the inspector(s) as part of the inspection;
- the feedback provided to the school during and after the inspection;
- Ofsted's complaints process; and
- the burden of inspection on schools.

10 We observed Ofsted's inspections of six schools. We shadowed the inspection teams as they undertook all aspects of the inspections. These observations were not designed to generate evidence, but helped us to understand how Ofsted carries out inspections to inform the rest of our work.

³⁰ As with any survey, each result we report is subject to a certain level of uncertainty. The degree of uncertainty is indicated by the 95% confidence interval: broadly speaking, we are 95% certain that the stated confidence interval range contains the value for the population. The maximum confidence intervals for the sample estimates for this survey are: +/- 13.2% for schools rated outstanding; +/- 3.93% for schools rated good; +/- 7.72% for schools rated requires improvement; and +/- 17.29% for schools rated inadequate.

³¹ The weighting efficiency is an indication of the amount of skewing that had to be done to make the survey sample appear representative of the actual population; the closer this figure is to 100%, the less skewing needed to be done.

11 We received written submissions from a number of teaching unions and other organisations on issues relating to Ofsted's school inspections. Submissions were received from:

- the National Association of Head Teachers;
- the National Education Union;
- the National Governance Association;
- Parentkind (formerly PTA UK);
- Voice; and
- the Wellcome Trust.

12 During the course of our work, we also received correspondence from individuals, including teachers, sharing information and views about Ofsted's school inspections.

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