

# Ofsted Big Listen: research with the public and parents/carers

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Prepared for: Ofsted



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We would also like to thank Mark Peters, Emma Glendinning, Lindsay Sutherland and Jenny Bird at Ofsted for their support and guidance.

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# 1. Key findings

## Insights from research with the public and parents/carers

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### 1.1 Introduction

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. It inspects services that provide education and skills for learners of all ages in England. It also inspects and regulates services that care for children and learners.

In January 2024, His Majesty's Chief Inspector announced his intention to carry out the Big Listen, a comprehensive consultation that asked for people's views on how to improve Ofsted's approach to inspection and regulation. The Big Listen was launched in early March. It gave professionals, children and learners, parents, carers, and the public an opportunity to give their feedback on Ofsted's work.

In September 2024, Ofsted published its [response to the Big Listen](#), setting out the actions it will take to address what it heard.

This report sets out the [findings from research with the public and parents/carers, commissioned through the National Centre for Social Research \(NatCen\)](#) to gather their views.

Alongside these reports, Ofsted also published evidence from other activities that formed part of the Big Listen:

- [findings from Ofsted's Big Listen public consultation](#)

- 
- findings from a consultation and focus groups with children and young people to gather their views
  - findings from research with providers and professionals, commissioned through IFF Research, to understand the strengths and weaknesses of our current approach to inspection and regulation

NatCen led the strand of the Big Listen which involved research with the general public via an online survey, and parents and carers via an online survey and focus groups. The research aimed to explore the public's and parents' views about Ofsted's current approach to inspection and regulation as well as views on its impact and ability to meet the needs of key stakeholders. Accompanying data tables from the surveys including the full question wording are published separately.

The first chapter of this report draws out the key findings from both elements of NatCen's strand of the Big Listen. These findings are presented in depth in the subsequent chapters.

## 1.2 Key findings from research with the public

The public survey achieved 4,141 responses and explored respondents' awareness, perceptions and trust in Ofsted. The data are weighted to be representative of adults in England.

Awareness of Ofsted as an organisation was relatively high; 82% said they either knew Ofsted 'a lot' or 'a little' and only 13% had 'only heard the name'. The vast majority of respondents were aware that Ofsted inspects schools, but awareness was lower for other sectors – around 60% were aware that it inspects early years and further education and skills providers.

Trust in Ofsted, and views on Ofsted's priorities and impact were mixed:

- Less than half the public (44%) had **trust** in Ofsted, although more agreed that Ofsted could be trusted than disagreed (44% versus 16%).
- Slightly more than half agreed that Ofsted **acts in the best interests of children** (53%) and is a **valuable source of information** about childcare (54%).

Public survey respondents were also consulted about current inspection and reporting practices:

- 
- Most favoured either retaining or reducing the current **notice period** given to providers before inspections (73%). A substantial subset of these favoured no notice (35%).
  - The use of **single-word judgements** in reporting had more opposition (45%) than support (34%). Opposition to single-word judgements was correlated with higher respondent education levels and lower trust in Ofsted.

### 1.3 Key findings from research with parents and carers

The parent/carer survey achieved 4,349 responses and covered the four core topics (culture, inspection, reporting, impact) as well as remit-specific questions. The results cannot be generalised to the total population of parents and carers in England. NatCen also conducted seven focus groups with a total of 42 parents. Note that findings in this section relate to the parent/carer survey unless it is specified that findings are from focus groups. Some of the survey questions were not asked of all respondents (see Methodology in the Introduction chapter) so percentages may relate to a subset of the sample.

#### Culture

Unsurprisingly, awareness of Ofsted among parents and carers was almost universal (97% knew Ofsted 'a lot' or 'a little' (46% said 'a lot' and 51% said 'a little')).

- Awareness of Ofsted's focus on **safeguarding** and its role **regulating social care** was also high among parents and carers. Around 80% of respondents were aware of each of these elements.
- There was more uncertainty around **Ofsted's role in relation to government**, with 29% of parents and carers agreeing that Ofsted acts independently compared to 26% who disagreed. This uncertainty was also seen in focus groups.

**Trust** in Ofsted was mixed. 49% of parents and carers agreed that Ofsted could be trusted, while 26% disagreed. The most common reason selected for having trust in Ofsted was reports being accessible and informative, while personal experience was the most common reason selected by those who did not trust Ofsted. This view was also represented in focus groups, where participants spoke of Ofsted's judgements not reflecting their own experiences of providers, which impacted their level of trust.

**Expertise of inspectors** was an area that was important to parents and carers (97% of a subset of survey respondents agreed that inspectors should have expertise in the specific types of provider they inspect)<sup>1</sup>. Focus group participants similarly viewed inspectors having

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<sup>1</sup> Asked of respondents with a child attending a specialist provider (who had also been selected to answer tailored questions about schools).



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expertise in SEND providers to be important and expressed some concern about inspectors' approach to feedback sessions with pupils and learners during inspections.

## Inspections

Parents and carers showed support for Ofsted's **key areas of inspection**, though quality of education had the highest support with just over 80% considering this important across remits. Focus group participants also agreed that the current areas were important to inspect, although there was a feeling that there was too much focus on curriculum and outcomes at present. Participants also felt more attention should be given to safeguarding, physical safety and child wellbeing.

Views on **notice periods** before inspections showed a similar picture to the public survey. The most frequently selected option was to give no notice, which was favoured by 32% of respondents. There was varying support for other notice periods, including 11% who favoured giving 10 days' notice or more. No notice period was also the preference in focus groups, and participants cited staff wellbeing and concerns about providers' having too much time to prepare in advance of inspections as reasons for this.

**Frequency of inspections** was another area where parents and carers wanted to see reform. The most popular view was that inspections should happen every year (between 33% and 44% of respondents across remits selected this response). Focus group participants also called for more frequent inspections and consistency across remits and providers with different grades.

**Feedback from parents/carers during inspection** was covered by the survey and focus groups. While most survey respondents thought parent and carer views were considered to some extent in inspections, almost 30% thought they were not taken into consideration at all. Focus group participants were sceptical about the extent to which their views were considered and suggested parents/carers should be consulted more and given different methods to provide feedback.

## Reporting

The parent/carer survey explored views on inspection reports:

- 56% of those selected to answer questions about schools, 59% who answered questions about early years, and 43% who answered questions about further education and skills, agreed that Ofsted is a **valuable source of information** about providers in their local area.
- Around 70% of respondents indicated that **performance data** was important to include in reports.

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In focus groups, participants said they wanted inspection reports to have more focus on parental feedback, and additional context about the provider and limitations of the inspection, to give a more accurate picture of the provider.

Views on **single-word judgements** were mixed, in line with findings from the public survey. Half (49%) opposed the use of single-word judgements, although 46% agreed that they were useful in helping parents and carers make decisions about their children's education. Reasons for opposing single-word judgements were explored in focus groups. Participants felt that they did not give enough information about a provider and were not always representative of their experiences of a provider.

When presented with alternatives to single-word judgements, the most popular was replacing single-word judgements with separate judgements for each inspection area (supported by 76% of respondents compared to just 38% who supported single-word judgements). This approach is currently used in inspection reports, in addition to single-word judgements for the overall effectiveness of a provider. It is unclear whether parents who agreed with this approach were in favour of removing the overall effectiveness grade or if they were aware that reports included separate grades. Focus group participants' suggestions for alternatives focused on replacing the single-word judgement with a more detailed summary or providing more context about how the grade was determined.

## **Impact**

Despite reservations about the current approach to reporting, the majority of survey respondents did indicate inspection **reports informed decision making** about their children's education; most placed some value on reports when making these decisions (early years 90%; schools 83%; further education and skills 81%). Focus group participants recalled that they had used inspection reports at various stages of researching and selecting a provider, although one view was that they had to rely on this in the absence of other information.

The impact of inspections and judgements on wellbeing was a prominent topic in focus groups. Participants felt that these impacted both staff and children's wellbeing, contributing to feelings of worry and overwhelm.

Lastly, participants perceived that the **impact of reports and judgements** on providers was limited in terms of improvements being made, and that most changes were observed immediately before an inspection. Parents/carers therefore felt reporting practices in their current form did not inspire ambition in providers.

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# 2. Introduction

## Background, aims & methodology

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### 2.1 Background

NatCen led the strand of the Big Listen which explored perceptions of parents, carers, and the general public. See Key Findings for more detail about the other strands of research Ofsted commissioned.

Our research used mixed-methods approaches to gain deep insight into the range of views held by stakeholders across four key areas:

- **Culture** – general perceptions of Ofsted and the conduct of its inspections
- **Inspection practice** – Ofsted’s approach to education and regulatory inspections
- **Reporting practice** – how Ofsted reports on education and regulatory inspections
- **Impact** – the consequences of inspections for children, professionals, providers, and parents’ choices.

### 2.2 Aims of the research

NatCen’s strand of the Big Listen had the following research questions, developed in consultation with Ofsted:

- How effective is Ofsted’s current approach to inspection and regulation for its stakeholders, including children and learners?
- Across the four areas of reporting, inspection practice, impact, and culture:

- 
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of Ofsted’s approach?
  - How well is Ofsted meeting the needs of its stakeholders, including children and learners?

This strand used quantitative and qualitative data, which combine to provide evidence to address the research questions above. The quantitative data examine the breadth of the issues, while the qualitative data explore key areas in depth.

## 2.3 Methodology

We took a mixed-method approach. We used an online survey to collect data from the general public, and both an online survey and qualitative focus groups to capture the views and experiences of parents and carers. Key elements of the methods are presented below, with further detail provided in the Technical Appendix.

### Public survey

We sought the general public’s views about Ofsted via a random probability-based online panel survey. Seven questions were included in the NatCen panel’s May 2024 data collection. The survey covered awareness of Ofsted; awareness of the sectors Ofsted inspects; trust in Ofsted; views on whether Ofsted acts in the best interests of children; views on whether Ofsted is a valuable source of information about education and care providers; views on notice periods given to providers before inspections; and views on single-word judgements.

In total, the public survey achieved 4,141 responses in England. The data was weighted so that the results presented in this report are representative of adults in England.

### Parent/carers research

The second element of the NatCen strand was research with parents and carers, comprising an online survey and focus groups.

The parent/carers survey comprised questions on core topics which all respondents answered, as well as specific questions asked of parents and carers who had experience of a particular remit that Ofsted inspects or regulates: early years; schools; further education and skills; independent and special schools. The core content included questions about **culture** (including trust and perceptions of Ofsted), **inspection** (including notice periods and inspection frequency), **reporting** (including single-word judgements and alternative approaches) and **impact** (including how Ofsted outputs inform decision making). The accompanying [data tables from the surveys](#) which include the full question wording are published separately.

Survey respondents were recruited via providers attended by their child/children.

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The achieved sample was 4,349 responses. Due to the convenience sampling approach that was used, the results cannot be generalised to the total population of parents and carers in England.

We conducted seven focus groups with a total of 42 parents and carers who had experience of different provider types. These were: early years (x2 groups); schools (x2); further education and skills; SEND in mainstream schools or colleges, and SEND in specialist schools or colleges<sup>2</sup>.

Tailored topic guides were used to support data collection. We developed individual topic guides for each remit. Each topic guide contained core questions that were asked of all respondents, as well as remit-specific questions reflecting topics of interest to Ofsted. Core content included questions on **culture** (including awareness, knowledge and perceptions of Ofsted); **inspection** (including key inspection areas, notice periods and parental feedback); **reporting** (including accessibility of reports, single-word judgements and alternative approaches); and **impact** (including how Ofsted outputs inform decision making).

The topic guides were used flexibly to guide each discussion, ensuring consistency of topic coverage across focus groups while allowing researchers to respond to the nature, dynamic, and content of each focus group. Due to the small number of focus groups and the fact that these were split by remit type, the qualitative findings presented in this report are unlikely to fully represent the range of views parents and carers may hold, particularly for the remit-specific questions that were only asked of one or two groups.

Note that findings relating to the research with parents/carers presented in this report are derived from survey data, unless it is explicitly specified that findings are from focus groups. Some survey questions were not asked of all respondents, so some percentages pertain to a subset of the total sample. Where the remit-specific question sets included variations of the same question, the percentages for each group are reported.

We will refer to 'parents' as a shorthand for parents and carers when referring to the findings from this element of research for the remainder of the report.

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<sup>2</sup> Views and experiences of parents of children with and without SEND are represented in the qualitative findings set out in this report. This reflects the mix of experiences represented in the qualitative sample. Two of our focus groups were comprised solely of parents of children with SEND, to focus specifically on their experiences; the remaining five focus groups were comprised of a mix of participants, including some parents of children with SEND.

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# 3. Public views

## Findings from NatCen's panel survey

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This chapter covers the general public's views about Ofsted, drawing on findings from NatCen's panel survey. The data is weighted to be representative of adults in England.

### 3.1 Views about Ofsted

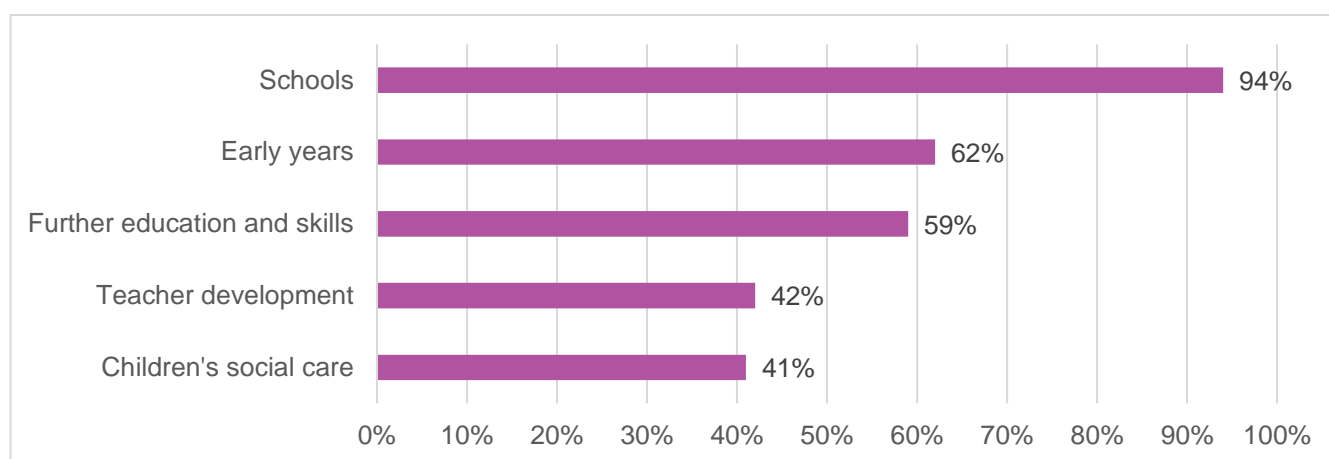
#### Knowledge and awareness

Most of the general public said they knew Ofsted to some extent before this survey. A quarter (23%) said they knew 'a lot' and two-thirds (59%) said they knew 'a little' about Ofsted. In contrast, 13% said they had 'only heard the name', while 4% said they had 'never heard of Ofsted'. The latter group were not asked any further questions.

Self-reported knowledge of Ofsted varied considerably by respondents' education levels. While overall, 23% said they knew Ofsted 'a lot', the figure was 31% for those with degree level education (or higher), and 10% for those with no qualifications. There is a similar pattern by income; 28% of those in the highest income category (a monthly household income of £4,351 or more) knew Ofsted a lot, compared with 17% of those in the lowest income category (less than £1,411 per month). Indeed, out of a range of socio-demographic characteristics the survey captured, education and income appeared most clearly and consistently linked to variation in respondents' views about Ofsted. For this reason, we focus on these subgroup differences (and in particular, differences by education level), for the rest of this chapter.

Awareness of the sectors which Ofsted inspects was more varied, as shown in Figure 3.1.1. When asked, ‘Which of the following sectors, if any, were you aware Ofsted carries out inspections on?’, the vast majority were aware that Ofsted inspects schools; awareness was lower for early years and further education and skills. The proportions of respondents who were aware that Ofsted inspected teacher development<sup>3</sup> and children’s social care were the lowest.

**Figure 3.1.1: Percentage of respondents who were aware of the different sectors inspected by Ofsted**



Base: all respondents who had heard of Ofsted; NatCen panel survey. Unweighted base: 4,015.

People’s levels of knowledge about Ofsted were correlated with their awareness of the sectors Ofsted inspects, meaning we can have confidence that their self-reported knowledge reflects actual differences in knowledge about Ofsted’s work. For example, while 88% of those who said they ‘knew a lot’ about Ofsted were aware of Ofsted inspecting the early years sector, this dropped to 60% of those who said they ‘knew a little’, and just 27% of those who said they had ‘only heard the name’. A similar pattern was seen for all other sectors except schools, where awareness was much higher overall and the difference between those who ‘knew a lot’ and those who ‘knew a little’ about Ofsted was negligible.

### **Overall perceptions of Ofsted (culture/impact)**

When asked for their view about whether ‘Ofsted is an organisation that can be trusted’, just 44% agreed, while 16% disagreed, as shown in Figure 3.1.2. While the proportion who said that they trust Ofsted outweighed the proportion who did not, the positive view was held by less than half of respondents. Trust varied by a number of socio-demographic variables,

<sup>3</sup> Ofsted inspects the quality of professional development opportunities available to teachers. This includes entitlements for early career teachers and national professional qualifications.

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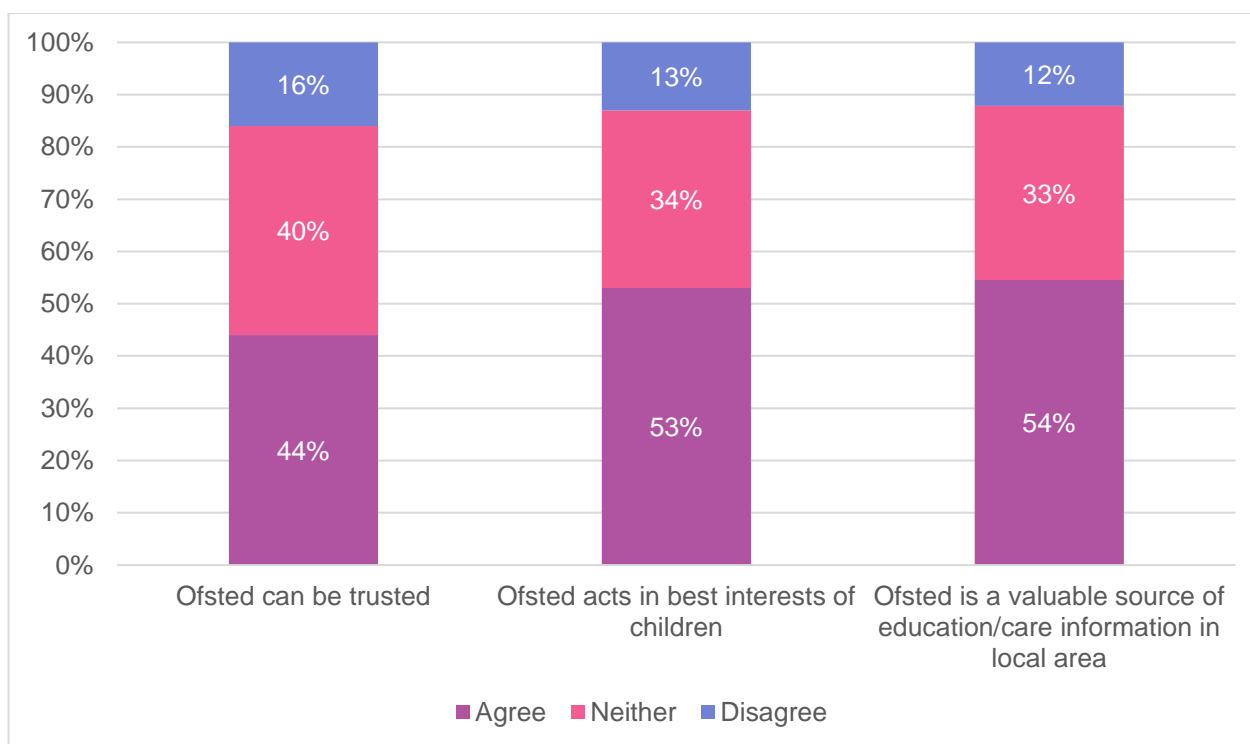
including education and income. Those with higher incomes and higher education were less likely to trust Ofsted than those with lower incomes and lower levels of qualification (or none). Of those in the highest income category, 20% said they did not trust Ofsted, compared with 10% of those in the lowest income category. Similar figures were seen for high and low education levels.

We also asked two more general perception questions about Ofsted (whether it acts in the best interests of children, and whether it is a valuable source of education/childcare information in the local area). We found that around half of the public held a positive view; again, this proportion outweighed the proportion who held a negative view (see Figure 3.1.2). Differences by socio-demographic characteristics were not as marked as for the question about trust, but similar patterns were evident. For example, while half of those with a degree (or higher) agreed that Ofsted acted in the best interests of children, this compares with 58% of those with no qualifications. Whether Ofsted was considered a valuable source of information about childcare was also related to education levels; for example, 12% of those who were degree-educated (or above) 'strongly agreed' Ofsted was a valuable source of information, compared with 20% of those with no qualifications.

For all three questions, a large proportion did not have a view either way (for example, in response to the question about trust in Ofsted, 40% said they neither agreed nor disagreed). This suggests that these questions have fairly low salience for a sizeable minority of the general public.



**Figure 3.1.2: Trust in Ofsted and perceptions of Ofsted**



Base: all respondents who had heard of Ofsted; NatCen panel survey. Unweighted base: 4,015.

To get a better understanding of what might explain people’s levels of trust in Ofsted, we carried out further analysis which found that trust was related both to people’s knowledge of Ofsted, and their views about Ofsted. First, when we looked at trust by self-reported knowledge, those who knew Ofsted ‘a lot’ had lower levels of trust than those who knew Ofsted ‘a little’ (39% compared with 48% agreed Ofsted could be trusted).

Second, there was a particularly strong relationship between trust and views about Ofsted’s work. Those who strongly agreed with the statement that Ofsted acts in the best interests of children had much higher levels of trust than others: 93% of those who strongly agreed with this statement agreed they trusted Ofsted, compared with 66% who agreed, 5% who disagreed and 2% who strongly disagreed. There was a similar relationship between trust and people’s views about whether Ofsted was a valuable source of information in their local area: 90% of those who strongly agreed with this said they trusted Ofsted, compared with 64% who agreed, 7% who disagreed and 5% who strongly disagreed.

### 3.2 Inspections

The general public were asked one question about inspections: namely, how much notice providers should be given before an inspection. The question included details of the current practice as follows: ‘Currently, Ofsted usually tells schools or early years settings that they are

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going to be inspected one day before an inspection starts. Further education and skills settings are usually told up to two days before. How much notice do you think Ofsted should give?'.

**Table 3.2.1: Preference for length of notice given to providers before inspections**

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Notice period	%
No notice	35
Less than now but at least some	7
Same notice period as now	31
More notice than now	27

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Base: all respondents who had heard of Ofsted; NatCen panel survey. Unweighted base: 4,015.

As shown in Table 3.2.1, the most popular answer was 'no notice', with a small proportion selecting 'less than now but at least some'. There was only limited support for giving providers more notice than now. When the first three categories were combined, around three-quarters (73%) wanted either the same or a shorter notice period as now.

Views on inspection notice periods were strongly related to education levels, with half (48%) of those with no qualifications preferring no notice period, compared with 29% of those with degree level education or higher.

### 3.3 Reporting

When it came to views about the use of single-word judgements in relation to the overall effectiveness of providers, public views were less in line with current Ofsted practice. The question first explained what was meant by a single-word judgements ('Currently, Ofsted uses a **one-word overall effectiveness grade** in its education and childcare inspections. A provider can be judged by Ofsted to be: 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate'). We then asked: 'To what extent do you support or oppose using a one-word grade to sum up a provider?'

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**Table 3.3.1: Views on single-word judgements for overall effectiveness**

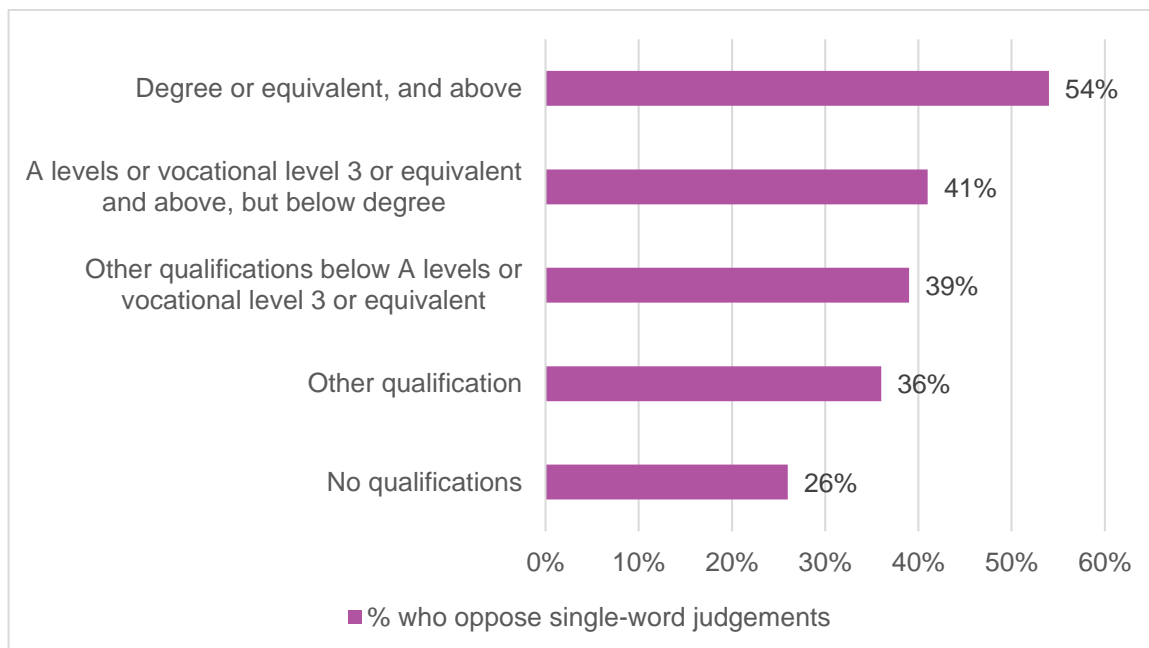
Single-word judgements	%
Support	34
Neither support nor oppose	21
Oppose	45

Base: all respondents who had heard of Ofsted; NatCen panel survey Unweighted base: 4,015.

Table 3.3.1 shows that opposition (45%) was higher than support (34%) for this approach. The strength of feeling was also notable: 22% said they strongly opposed single-word judgements to sum up a provider (this is the only attitude or perception question that elicited this strength of opinion from the general public). In contrast, 12% said they strongly supported this practice. Meanwhile, one in five (21%) said they neither supported nor opposed the use of single-word judgements.

Support for single-word judgements to sum up a provider varied by education level (see Figure 3.3.1), with 54% of those with degree level education being opposed to their use, compared with 26% of those with no qualifications. The proportion of these groups who strongly opposed the use of single-word judgements was 29% and 10% respectively.

**Figure 3.3.1: Percentage of respondents who oppose the use of single-word judgements for overall effectiveness, by highest level of qualification**



Base: all respondents who had heard of Ofsted; NatCen panel survey. Unweighted bases for subgroups (from top to bottom): 1,740, 840, 911, 159, 352.

Views about the use of single-word judgements were also related to trust in Ofsted. Those who were strongly opposed to the use of single-word judgements to sum up providers had much lower levels of trust in Ofsted than those who strongly supported their use (17% and 82% respectively said they trusted Ofsted).

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# 4. Parent & carer views

## Findings from the survey and focus groups

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This chapter covers parent/carer views about Ofsted in relation to culture, inspection, reporting and impact, drawing on data from the survey and focus groups. The findings are not representative of all parents and carers in England.

### 4.1 Culture

#### Knowledge and awareness

##### Awareness of Ofsted's roles

Data from the parent survey indicated that parents had varying levels of awareness and familiarity with Ofsted and its different roles. Almost all parents were aware of Ofsted to some degree: 46% said they knew a lot about Ofsted, 51% knew a little and 3% had only heard the name. Anyone who said they had never heard of Ofsted was screened out of the survey.

The survey also measured awareness of Ofsted's different roles. The findings indicate that overall awareness of Ofsted is high, but knowledge of its specific roles is more variable. The proportion of respondents who were aware of Ofsted's different roles is as follows:

- Regulating early years – 90%
- Regulating social care – 80%
  - 17% knew 'a lot'
  - 20% had no prior knowledge of Ofsted's work in this area

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- Focus on safeguarding – 83% of respondents who answered questions about schools or further education and skills; 81% who answered about early years
    - For those who answered about schools, 95% of those who knew ‘a lot’ about Ofsted were aware of this, compared to 75% of those who knew ‘a little’.

### Awareness of Ofsted’s and the Department for Education’s roles

The parent survey and focus groups explored awareness of the distinct roles and responsibilities of Ofsted and the Department for Education (DfE). Across both the quantitative and qualitative data, some uncertainty about the responsibilities of the two organisations was evident.

Survey respondents who indicated they knew ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’ about Ofsted were asked whether they agreed with the statement ‘Ofsted acts independently of government’. Responses varied: 29% agreed that Ofsted acts independently, 26% disagreed, and a further 28% neither agreed nor disagreed, suggesting a lack of clarity about Ofsted’s independence. In focus groups the discussion assessed participants’ awareness of the different roles of Ofsted and the DfE. Participants said that Ofsted and the government should work together but felt there was a lack of “joined-up thinking” between the two. One barrier participants identified was the level of turnover among key stakeholders in government, such as the Secretary of State for Education. High rates of change were considered to have a negative impact on Ofsted.

Do Ofsted have to change each time [there is a new Minister of Education]? Do schools...? It’s kind of like everyone is drowning because there’s no consistency.

**SEND mainstream provider focus group participant**

## **Trust and perception**

### Levels of trust in Ofsted

Across the parent survey and focus groups, parents expressed varying levels of trust in Ofsted. Survey respondents were asked whether Ofsted was an organisation that could be trusted. Almost half agreed it was, compared to just over a quarter who felt it was not (see Table 4.1.1). Trust appeared to decrease with age: more parents aged 16-30 agreed Ofsted could be trusted, compared with those aged 51 and over. Trust was higher among parents who said they knew Ofsted ‘a little’ than those who knew it ‘a lot’ (56% and 40% respectively), suggesting that having more knowledge about the organisation could result in lower levels of trust. Trust was also higher among those answering questions about early years (57%) than those answering schools or further education and skills questions (47% and 46% respectively).

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**Table 4.1.1: Trust in Ofsted, by age**

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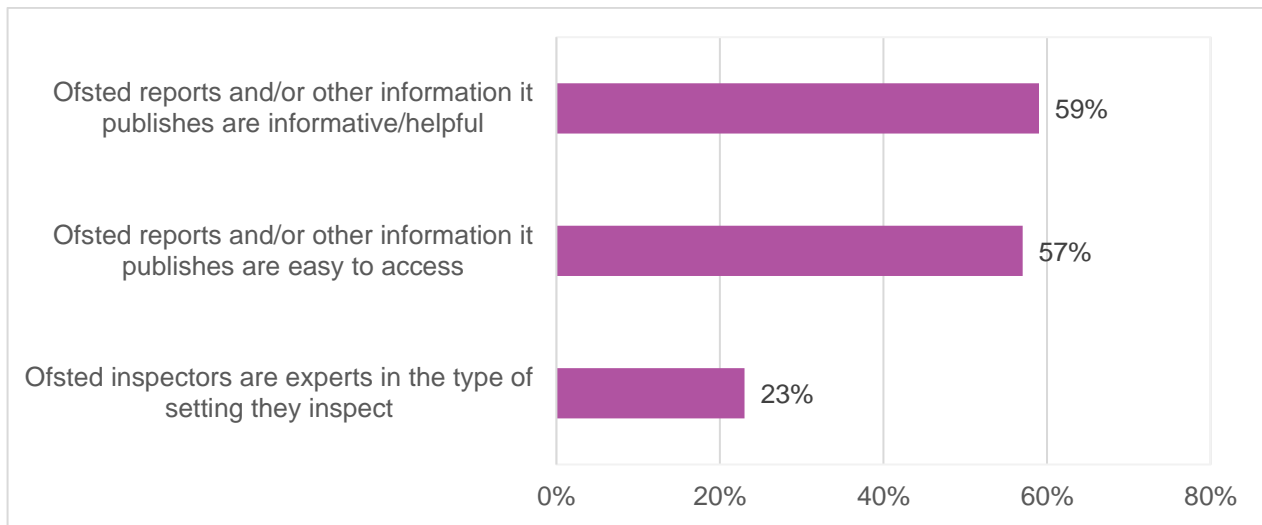
Age category	Ofsted is an organisation that can be trusted		
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
16-30	63%	21%	14%
31-40	54%	22%	22%
41-50	44%	23%	30%
51+	44%	25%	29%
<b>All</b>	49%	23%	26%

Base: all respondents; NatCen parent/carer survey. Unweighted base (all): 4,349. Unweighted bases for age categories (from top to bottom): 238, 1,468, 1,899, 744.

Trust also varied by parents' perceptions of Ofsted (these questions are discussed in more detail later in this chapter). For example, those who agreed that Ofsted acts in the best interests of children were much more likely to trust Ofsted: the vast majority of those who strongly agreed with this statement agreed that they trusted Ofsted (97%), compared with only 10% of those who said they 'tend to disagree' and 2% of those who strongly disagreed. A similar pattern was found when looking at trust against views about whether Ofsted helped to improve standards of education.

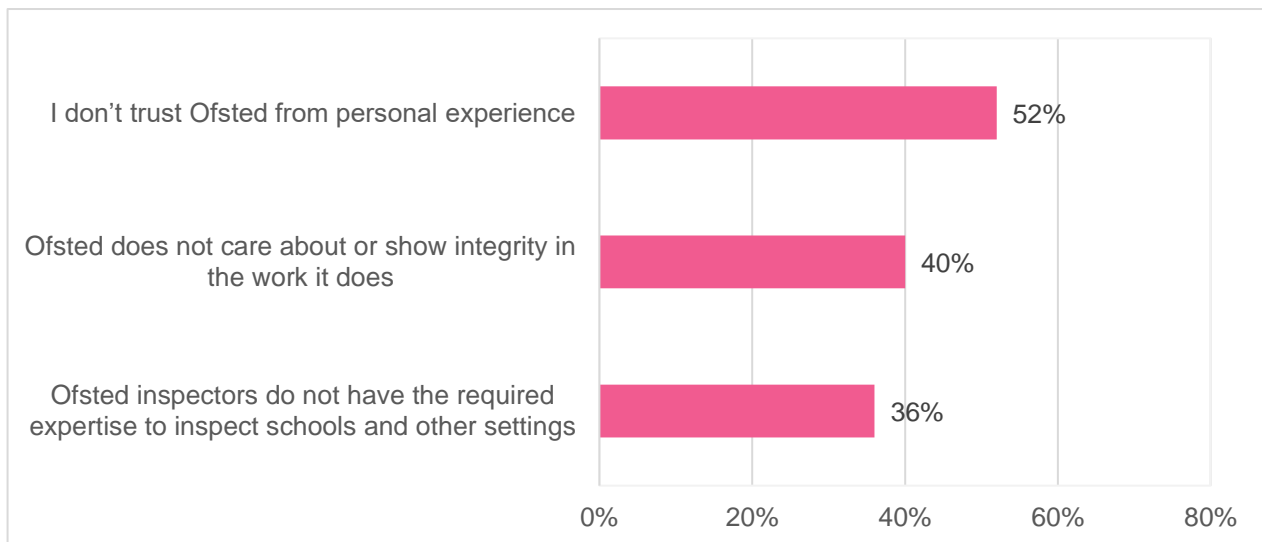
Depending on their answer to the initial question about trust, respondents were asked to select their reasons for either trusting or not trusting Ofsted. Respondents were able to select more than one response. The most frequently selected responses for trusting Ofsted are listed below in Figure 4.1.1. Reasons for not trusting Ofsted are presented in Figure 4.1.2.

**Figure 4.1.1: The most frequently selected reasons for trusting Ofsted, from parents who indicated trust**



Base: respondents who 'strongly agree' or 'agree' that Ofsted can be trusted; NatCen parent/carer survey. Unweighted base: 2,112

**Figure 4.1.2: The most frequently selected reasons for not trusting Ofsted, from parents who indicated a lack of trust**



Base: respondents who 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree' that Ofsted can be trusted; NatCen parent/carer survey. Unweighted base: 1,150

Survey responses showed that the two most common reasons for trusting Ofsted were that reports were considered informative and helpful (59%), and that reports were easy to access (57%). For those who indicated that they did not trust Ofsted, personal experience was reported as the most common reason for a lack of trust (52% selected this option). The level



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of expertise of Ofsted inspectors was selected as a reason among both those who did and who did not trust Ofsted, suggesting differing perceptions of inspectors' expertise among individuals. It is also notable that 33% of respondents who indicated that they did not trust Ofsted selected 'other reason' for this question, compared with just 3% of respondents who did trust Ofsted. This suggests that the answer options provided in the survey did not fully capture the range of reasons why respondents might distrust Ofsted.

Trust was also explored in the focus groups. Overall, participants expressed some level of trust in Ofsted. The reasons cited differed from the survey findings, however. Focus group participants emphasised the importance of there being an agency responsible for holding education settings to account and influencing improvement where required. Ofsted's independence was a key factor that participants said influenced their trust in its ability to perform this function, despite evidence that Ofsted's role in relation to government was not understood by all parents (as discussed earlier in this chapter). A contrasting view was, however, evident among participants in the focus groups that explored experiences in specialist SEND providers. Some participants whose child's provider had been assessed negatively by Ofsted expressed distrust of the organisation. In particular, parents said their trust in Ofsted had decreased as a result of the judgements given to their children's setting (see Impact for more detail).

Survey data on reasons for distrust chimed with this: a relatively low proportion of respondents said they did not trust Ofsted because they had heard something bad about it (18%). These findings demonstrate that negative personal experiences had a particular impact on trust, as opposed to negative perceptions influenced by friends or family or media coverage.

Two further reasons for distrust of Ofsted that were commonly selected as survey responses are discussed in the following two sections. No further information on specific reasons for a lack of trust in Ofsted was identified in the focus groups.

### Perception of Ofsted's priorities

Parents had a broad range of opinions on how well Ofsted achieves its aims. Just over half agreed that Ofsted 'acts in the best interests of children', and 'helps to improve standards of education' (see Table 4.1.2). This suggests that while respondents may have a relatively positive perception of Ofsted's priorities, there are a considerable proportion who believe Ofsted practices do not achieve positive outcomes for children.

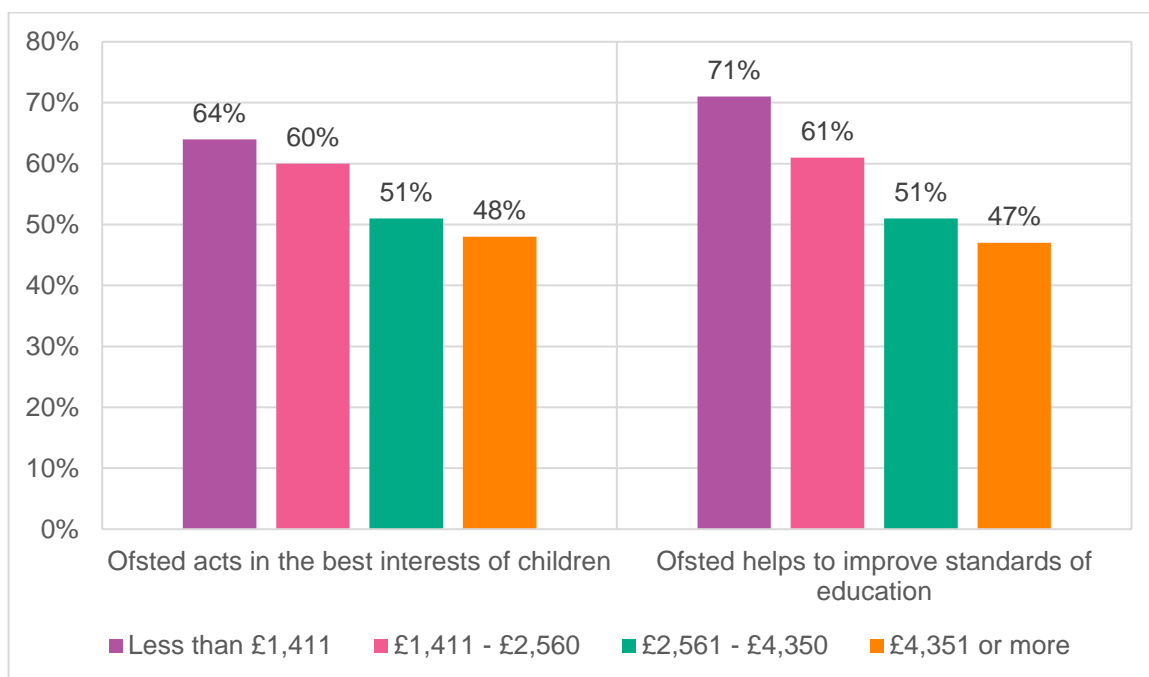
**Table 4.1.2: Perceptions of Ofsted**

	Ofsted acts in the best interests of children %	Ofsted helps to improve standards of education %
Agree	51	52
Neither agree nor disagree	20	16
Disagree	27	31

Base: all respondents who said they knew Ofsted ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’; NatCen parent/carer survey. Unweighted base: 4,202.

Figure 4.1.3 shows a relationship between agreement with these statements and income, whereby agreement with the statements increased as household income decreased.

**Figure 4.1.3: Percentage of respondents who agreed with statements about Ofsted, by household income**



Base: all respondents who said they knew Ofsted ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’; NatCen parent/carer survey. Unweighted bases for subgroups (from left to right): 212, 602, 1,183, 1,773.

The survey also asked parents whether they agreed or disagreed that ‘Ofsted holds providers accountable for the quality of education and care’. The proportion of parents who agreed with this statement was slightly higher than for the other statements: 68% agreed; (14% neither

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agreed nor disagreed; 16% disagreed). The income trend that was evident for the other statements (shown in Figure 4.1.3) was not as strong for this statement.

In the focus groups, views about how well Ofsted achieves its aims were also mixed. While some participants did feel that Ofsted prioritised children, a contrasting view was that greater importance was placed on practice and policy. This perception was linked to two key points. Some parents had had direct, negative experiences of providers, which they felt had let their child down. Positive assessments of the provider by Ofsted contradicted participants' direct experience, leading to distrust in Ofsted's processes and judgement. The inverse was also true: negative assessments which parents deemed to be misaligned with their positive experiences also led to distrust. Secondly, some participants were frustrated by a perceived lack of transparency in Ofsted's inspection guidelines. This reduced trust in Ofsted, particularly in relation to independence and objectivity. Parents acknowledged the importance of buy-in among both parents and children to Ofsted inspection processes, including reporting. This was considered a key factor in receptiveness to conclusions and outputs provided by inspectors.

Ofsted's approach to safeguarding was also a concern for some parents. One view among focus group participants was that safeguarding was a priority area of focus and should be more explicitly reflected in Ofsted's judgements, which the single-word judgements in relation to the overall effectiveness of providers did not allow. Others suggested that school closures as a result of safeguarding concerns did not always result in meaningful change and questioned the value of this approach.

### Perception of Ofsted and its inspectors

Parents had varied perceptions of Ofsted and its inspectors. In focus groups, some participants reflected on Ofsted's ongoing work to collect views and experiences about providers directly from pupils. One view among parents was that conducting pupil feedback groups was useful; however, parents also suggested these groups needed to be better tailored towards pupils' age and abilities. One example parents gave where this had not happened related to the terminology used by inspectors hosting feedback groups. Use of terms unfamiliar to pupils (for example, 'protected characteristics') had a negative effect as children felt as though they were being tested.

Key qualities of inspectors that were discussed included their professionalism and expertise. In the focus groups, one view was that Ofsted inspectors were professional, polite and thorough. In both the quantitative and qualitative data, parents emphasised the importance of expertise among Ofsted inspectors, which appeared to be a key influence on their perceptions of Ofsted overall. Almost all (97%) survey respondents with children at a special school (who were selected to answer questions about schools) agreed that inspectors should

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have specific expertise in the setting they inspect. This view was echoed by participants in the SEND specialist provider focus group, who said expertise was essential. Some parents questioned the level of expertise which inspectors did in fact hold. Over a third (36%) of survey respondents who felt Ofsted could not be trusted, for example, reported that this distrust was due to inspectors not having ‘the required expertise to inspect schools and other settings’. Views on inspections are discussed in the next section of this report.

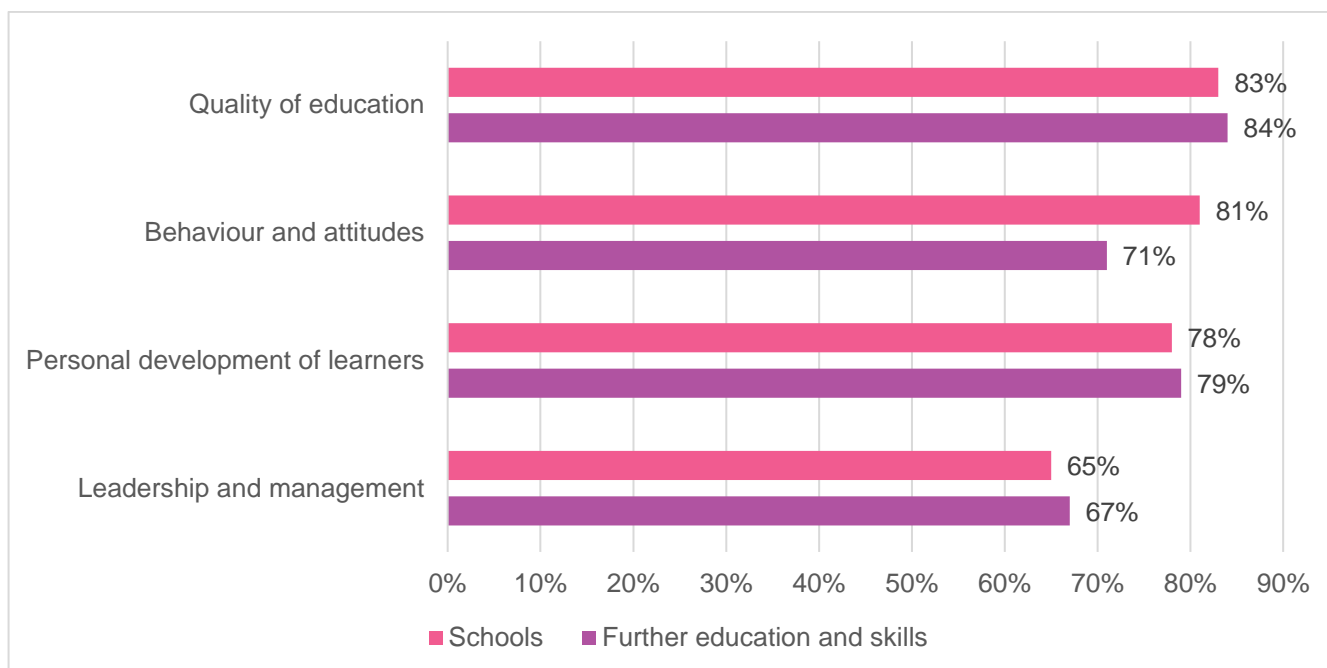
## **4.2 Inspections**

### **Views on Ofsted’s key areas of inspection**

Broadly, parents agreed that Ofsted’s current key areas of inspection were the right areas of focus. Participants also suggested additional areas of interest for inspection, discussed later in this section.

The parent survey asked respondents to indicate which of Ofsted’s four key inspection areas were most important to them (with the option to select multiple areas). The four areas – quality of education, leadership and management, behaviour and attitudes, and personal development – were listed, and respondents were given a brief description of each. The survey data (see Figure 4.2.1) showed that respondents generally agreed that Ofsted had the right areas of focus. At least 65% of parents who were selected to answer questions about schools and further education and skills remits indicated that these were important areas to inspect. The area with most support was quality of education, which is discussed in more detail below.

**Figure 4.2.1: Percentage of respondents who considered each key inspection area important, by remit**



Base: respondents who answered the set of questions about schools or further education and skills; NatCen parent/carer survey. Unweighted base: schools: 2,967; further education and skills: 587.

Focus group participants agreed with Ofsted’s key areas of inspection, and parents gave examples of how the different areas addressed the specific needs of their children. For example, one view was that personal development was particularly relevant to further education and skills learners when considering the next steps into employment or higher education. For participants who had children with SEND, behaviour and attitudes were seen as important. However, some areas of focus were seen to be counterproductive. For example, Ofsted’s focus on attendance was seen to encourage pupils to attend school even when ill, with the potential to negatively impact children and learners with medical conditions.

Parents also suggested additional areas that could facilitate a more comprehensive appraisal of the provider, thereby ensuring inspection reports provide parents with all relevant information about how a provider operates. In focus groups, parents suggested that inspections should cover staff turnover and provision of extracurricular activities. They said this could give a more accurate reflection of the providers’ capabilities as well as staff working conditions.

I think, also, they should look at staff turnover because [...] that's a very good indication of whether a school is a happy place to work and therefore a happy place to learn.

**School focus group participant**

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## **View on Ofsted's focus on quality of education**

Survey respondents and focus group participants considered quality of education an important aspect of inspections. This topic was a key area of focus in the qualitative data, with some parents expressing concern about how quality was measured.

'Quality of education' was the most frequently selected of the four inspection areas when parents were asked to indicate their importance in the parent survey. This was the case for 83% of respondents who were selected to answer questions about schools, and 84% of respondents who answered questions about further education and skills providers.

In the focus groups, the curriculum was an aspect of quality of education that participants identified as particularly important across remits and ages. Among parents of children with SEND, however, one view was that inspections should focus more extensively on the curriculum. Some parents felt that this was given less attention by specialist providers. They felt part of the reason for this was that providers sometimes made misguided assumptions about pupils' abilities to achieve academic targets. The survey data reflected similar views about the importance of the quality of education for children with SEND: 78% of the parents of children with SEND who answered questions about schools indicated that quality of education was important (compared with 85% of parents of children without SEND).

My daughter [...] is still very capable academically, in the right setting with her needs met. I sometimes feel that that area [the curriculum] is kind of brushed to the side [...] it's like, "Well, they're in a specialist setting, so they can just do all the other bits".

### **SEND specialist provider focus group participant**

Parents across all remits suggested it was important to focus on successes beyond core subjects (including, for example, subjects such as music and art). Further, there was concern about how this area was measured. Parents also suggested that grades were an insufficiently accurate means of measuring academic success. This was felt to have a particular impact on pupils with SEND.

It's great when the schools says, "Oh, we've got 96 per cent A to Cs" [...] but they're not reporting on the other bit. They're not saying, "Well, actually how many pupils didn't you enter for exams? How many pupils are you keeping out of mainstream lessons?"

### **SEND mainstream provider focus group participant**

Parents suggested that measuring pupils' progress could provide better insight into providers' quality of education. Progression was also deemed an appropriate indicator for pupils with SEND who had transferred to specialist providers from mainstream schools where their needs might not have been adequately met.

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## Views on Ofsted's focus on safeguarding

In the parent survey, the majority of respondents selected to answer questions about early years providers were aware that one of Ofsted's key responsibilities was 'assessing whether there are effective arrangements in place for keeping children safe' (81% said yes; 12% said no). Additionally, across remits, most respondents agreed that Ofsted holds providers accountable for keeping children and learners safe (72% agreed; 13% neither agreed nor disagreed; 10% disagreed). See Culture for more detail on parents' perspectives on safeguarding.

Wellbeing and safeguarding were identified as key areas of Ofsted inspections by parents in the early years and SEND specialist provider focus groups. Participants placed particular value on physical safety, and one view was that it needed more attention. A range of concerns were mentioned by participants, including the condition of schools' built environments, including playgrounds, and protective measures for individual children, such as the application of suncream for young children. Parents of children who have SEND further emphasised the importance of safeguarding for children with particular vulnerabilities, such as preventing bullying online and at school.

What Ofsted look for isn't necessarily what I'd look for in a school, particularly the special needs. **SEND specialist provider focus group participant**

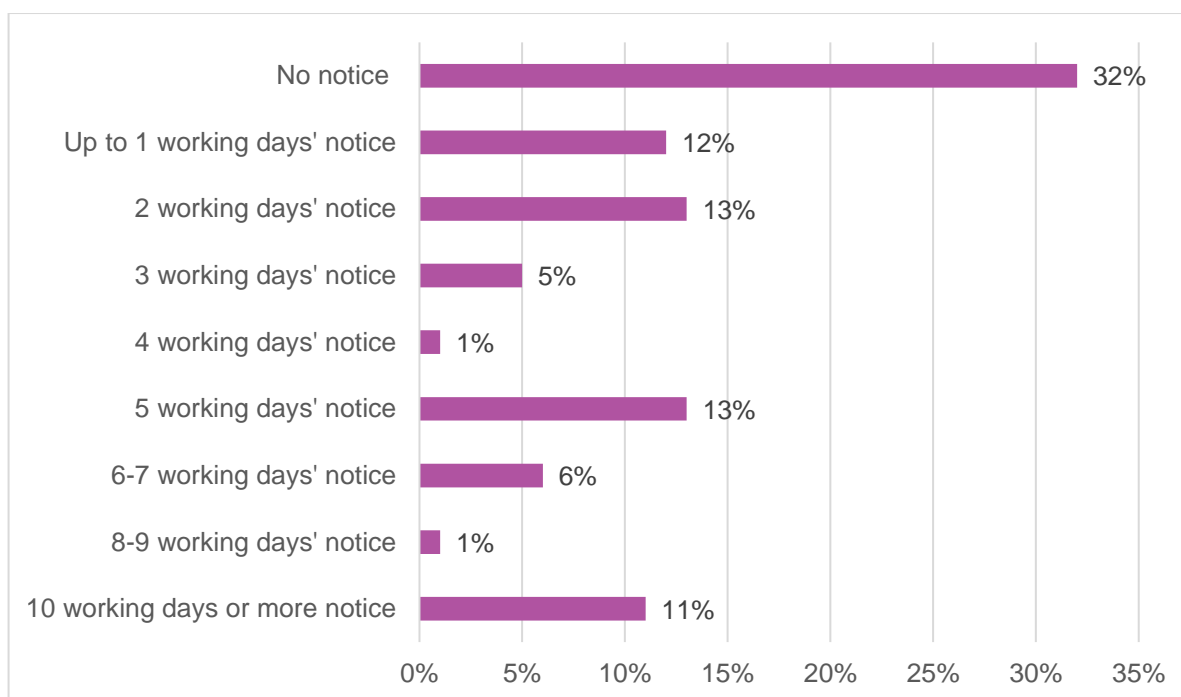
Use of electronic devices including mobile phones was also discussed in relation to safeguarding children. One suggestion was that Ofsted should inspect schools' electronic device policies as part of a focus on safeguarding. A contrasting view, however, was that management of children's use of devices was a parental responsibility rather than a matter for Ofsted.

## Inspection notice period

An area of particular interest for Ofsted is the notice given to providers before an inspection is due to take place. The notice period given to providers at present varies by remit: schools and early years providers are given up to one day's notice; further education and skills providers are typically given two days' notice, or up to five days for large or complex providers.

The parent survey showed that 32% of respondents thought that no notice period should be given to providers, with the remaining respondents favouring some amount of notice (see Figure 4.2.2). For instance, 12% thought notice periods should remain at up to one day's notice, but 11% said providers should be given 10 days or more notice before an inspection.

**Figure 4.2.2: Preference for length of notice given to providers before inspections**



Base: all respondents; NatCen parent/carer survey. Unweighted base: 4,349.

Views on inspection notice periods were also explored in the focus groups. Reasons given by parents who preferred no notice to be given included:

- **Preparation time.** Parents suggested that longer notice periods would allow providers to prepare specific resources and put on a “performance” for Ofsted. As such, they felt that longer notice periods would reduce the accuracy of the inspection judgement.

I think the more notice you give them the more preparation they have, and therefore you don't see the true element of how they are on a day-to-day basis. Whereas if they're not prepared and you just go in and inspect, like a health inspection, without notice, they're caught off-guard and you're actually inspecting the true essence of what goes on. **Early years focus group participant**

- **Staff wellbeing.** Some participants felt that not having a notice period would reduce pressure on staff, which they suggested could build in the run-up to an inspection.

Parents also acknowledged that schools had time to prepare beyond the official notice period, because they knew roughly when inspections would be scheduled. Additional notice was therefore considered unnecessary by some.



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Focus group participants said that with no notice period, inspections would capture a more realistic impression of a provider. One suggestion was that if something goes wrong during an inspection, however, the provider should not necessarily be penalised through a downgraded Ofsted rating, but could instead be given the opportunity for a supplementary inspection or the ability to give additional context to inspectors.

I think it's important that if you are going to turn up unannounced that the guidelines for Ofsted inspections are set to be realistic and that schools aren't judged harshly [...] the balance has got to be struck with that. **Early years focus group participant**

When asked about potential impacts on Ofsted's ability to collect parental feedback if notice periods were removed, participants across focus groups suggested effects would be negligible, as questionnaires were typically circulated during an inspection.

### **Different approaches to inspections**

Suggested changes to Ofsted's inspection approach were also captured in the quantitative and qualitative data. As discussed in detail below, parents' suggestions included increasing the duration or frequency of inspections or altering their focus. As with notice periods, potential effects on accuracy and pressure on staff were key to participants' rationale.

#### Duration

In focus groups, parents suggested extending the duration of inspections, as some felt that one-day inspections could not be sufficiently thorough to assess providers' overall performance. As such, increasing the duration of inspections could increase the accuracy and representativeness of inspection reports. Participants suggested that collecting management and attainment data on another occasion or electronically could facilitate this approach, by allowing inspectors to spend more time assessing other areas of a provider's performance. It is important to note, however, that participants in the further education and skills focus group were not aware that inspections for these remits were often longer than those in schools.

#### Frequency

Respondents selected to answer survey questions about early years, school and further education and skills providers had a preference for inspections to be annual, with the highest proportion of parents choosing this option (between 33% and 44%). Around a quarter of respondents indicated inspections should be every two years (between 26% and 27%).

Similarly, focus group participants favoured more frequent inspections and suggested this would improve accuracy and reduce teacher stress. Parents alluded to the differences in the frequency of inspections for providers which had been judged to be outstanding, which they felt was not warranted. One view was that this approach reduced their trust in Ofsted

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judgements for these remits, as inspections would not capture substantial changes which could occur in the intervening period. As a result, parents wanted consistency in the frequency of inspections for providers across remits and with different Ofsted grades. Linked to this, one view was that the prolonged period between inspections for these providers increased stress among staff due to lack of recent experience of Ofsted visits, which also had consequences for children (see Impact for more detail).

### Focus

Parents suggested that altering Ofsted's approach to inspections would better facilitate improvements for providers. Making concrete suggestions where providers could improve, as opposed to only identifying areas that needed improvement, was proposed as something that could reduce the pressure that some felt single-word judgements (relating to the overall effectiveness of providers) could result in.

One suggested strategy participants felt Ofsted could employ was creating targets for providers following an inspection. They felt that altering the focus in this way would allow schools to be honest about problems without fear of being downgraded in their Ofsted rating.

Wouldn't it be great if you had teachers saying, 'Oh, I'm so glad we're getting an Ofsted inspection. It's going to be such a help. [...] at the moment what the kids are seeing [is] their teachers completely stressed out, being judged, not allowed to show any weakness and that's the environment we're creating in our schools for our children. **SEND mainstream setting focus group participant**

### **Collating feedback**

Focus groups participants were asked about their views and preferences regarding providing feedback about providers to Ofsted. Participants saw both parent and child feedback as an important aspect of inspections, though some questioned the extent to which it was used by Ofsted.

The survey findings indicated that, while most parents were aware that Ofsted seeks parent feedback during inspections, they tended not to believe that their views constituted a large part of the inspection process. Around half of respondents said that parents' views were considered 'a little', with almost a third saying parents' views were not considered at all (see Table 4.2.1). The percentage of respondents who did not know Ofsted collected feedback from parents was low, however almost twice as many men gave this response (15%) than women (8%).

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**Table 4.2.1: Extent to which parent views are considered in inspections, by remit**

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<b>Extent to which parents' views considered</b>	<b>Schools %</b>	<b>Further education and skills %</b>
A lot	15	12
A little	48	51
Not at all	27	27
Did not know Ofsted collected feedback from parents/carers	9	10

Base: respondents who answered the set of questions about schools or further education and skills; NatGen parent/carer survey. Unweighted base: schools: 2,967; further education and skills: 587.

Focus group data illustrated a similar scepticism around the impact of parental feedback. Parents reported distrust of Ofsted's commitment to listening to parent feedback and questioned whether reports accurately captured the range of parents' opinions.

'We consulted parents' in my opinion is just not good enough [...] if part of one of Ofsted's objectives is to get parental input. I think it's a very tick-box exercise. **School focus group participant**

Despite concerns that parent feedback was not sufficiently considered, across focus groups, participants said they regarded feedback as valuable. Parents listed various topics they wanted to discuss with inspectors, including children's experiences, learning objectives, communication, nutrition, and improvements.

While parents in the further education and skills focus group highlighted interest in giving feedback, they also suggested that, due to the age of their children, they had less direct involvement with the provider. Participants with children in early years emphasised that parental feedback in inspections was vital, as children were too young to express their own views.

The children are the ones in the setting, but we're the ones that make the decision about whether our child is happy [...] I think that voice is absolutely necessary. The children can't give that voice [...] You can't often get that honest perception from a child that's less than five [years old]. **Early years focus group participant**

Focus group participants were also asked about their preferred method of giving feedback to inspectors. Two key factors were identified: accessibility and equal opportunities for all parents to give feedback. Linked to these, parents favoured provision of multiple feedback

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methods. Some focus group participants said they preferred to give verbal feedback to inspectors. Others were concerned that some parents would not be available for in-person feedback or that it might cause tension between parents and providers. Specifically, participants in the SEND specialist provider focus group highlighted that specialist providers were fewer in number and often further from parents' homes, meaning in-person feedback was not appropriate as the only method for providing feedback. Parents also felt that feedback questionnaires had too narrow a focus, limiting their ability to share feedback and concerns to Ofsted.

### **Remit-specific findings**

The parent survey showed overwhelming agreement (97%) from parents of children in specialist SEND provision that inspectors should have specific expertise in SEND.

This opinion was mirrored by focus group participants. Focus group participants who discussed SEND, expressed some concern about inspectors' limited expertise and knowledge of specialist settings in particular.

Some of the issue we had with the inspectors coming in was [that] they had no understanding of a special educational setting. So, their view of the quality of education was different to what a special needs teacher would have, because they had no understanding of what the quality of [specialist] education looks like. **SEND specialist provider focus group participant**

## **4.3 Reporting**

### **Views on report content**

In the parent survey, around half of respondents across remits (56% for schools, 59% for early years, and 43% for further education and skills), agreed that Ofsted was a valuable source of information about providers in their local area. Across all three remits, respondents who knew a little about Ofsted were more likely to agree with this statement, compared with those who knew a lot (for example, 66% compared to 46% for those who answered questions about schools). As outlined in the previous section on Inspections, parents agreed that the four key inspection areas (quality of education, leadership and management, behaviour and attitudes, and personal development) were all important to include in Ofsted reports for schools or further education and skills providers.

When asked how important they found performance data about academic outcomes and progress when choosing a provider, parents indicated that this was valued. Around 70% of respondents selected to answer questions about further education and skills (70%) or schools (72%) indicated that performance data was important. Indeed, a view expressed in the focus groups was that the reports should include more of this kind of statistical information.

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Examples included figures relating to the number of pupils that achieve learning objectives or certain levels in writing, reading, and maths.

In focus groups, participants had a number of more negative views about the content of reports. First, there was a concern about accuracy. Participants said that Ofsted's assessment of providers was not always aligned with the views and experiences of parents and children. This chimed with a view that perceived limitations of inspections, such as the influence of preparation time, and the short inspection timeframe, reduces the accuracy of inspectors' assessment of a provider (see Inspections).

[An inspection is a] snapshot of a moment in time [...] you can't evaluate a report without thinking about how that inspection is done [...] That 'jump in', helicopter view [of] looking at things in two days [results in] the report [being] written as [though], "I've seen this one thing happen once and I'm making a judgement call on that", rather than looking at any sustained result or outcome or [...] or behaviour. **Further education and skills focus group participant**

Second, parents suggested that reports should be more balanced, presenting both negative and positive aspects of providers. One view was that reports tended to have a negative focus and lacked information about areas in which providers were doing well, which were important to inform parents' decisions about where to send their children for education or childcare.

Third, parents shared negative impressions of the style and language of reports. One view was that the information provided lacked sufficient detail about the provider that would allow parents to understand the differences between the providers they are considering.

[Ofsted reporting] doesn't add the colour and the vibrancy to each individual school setting. I know that Ofsted would probably say, 'We've got to have a certain type of standard, certain type of report' but every school is different. **Further education and skills focus group participant**

### **Views on content missing from reports**

Across focus groups, parents made suggestions relating to perceived gaps in the current content of inspection reports.

One area parents wanted to see included was parental and pupil/learner feedback and satisfaction with a provider. Parents emphasised the importance of ensuring feedback was thorough and representative, whereby inspectors speak to many pupils/learners of different backgrounds, abilities, needs, and experiences at their provider. They also said it was important for Ofsted to communicate to parents the selection process for gathering

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pupil/learner feedback. Further discussion of parents' views on collecting feedback during inspections is provided in the Inspections section of this report.

Parents of children attending special schools felt it was important for reports to include details about a provider's recent record and history of issues, including safeguarding, pupil off-rolling, and the number of recent incident reports.<sup>4</sup> Parents said that this would help them decide whether a special school could meet their child's needs.

### **Views on content that would help improve accuracy of reports**

Focus group participants also discussed additions they felt would enhance the accuracy of judgements and reports.

#### Detailed breakdown of outcomes

One suggestion was that reported outcome measures could usefully be broken down to reflect the experiences of children and learners from different backgrounds, abilities, and needs, including socioeconomic status. Participants who expressed this view felt that such information could facilitate assessment of whether all groups of children were adequately supported by providers.

#### SEND and additional needs provision

Reporting on provision(s) to support additional needs and/or SEND, including assessment of quality, was also discussed. One view was that this needed to be covered more explicitly in Ofsted reports, including coverage of the different types of provision in place, and explicit indications where provisions were not implemented. Parents who had children with SEND also emphasised that information about SEND provision in reports did not accurately reflect their children's experiences of those providers, with regard to, for example, the quality of teaching or facilities available to pupils.

#### Context about specific providers

Parents suggested more background and context about providers should also be included in reports. Examples included information about the provider's admissions process and waiting list; any upcoming changes or future plans they would be implementing before the next inspection and the date of the next inspection. Participants felt additional details that were unique to a provider could contextualise and aid their understanding of the Ofsted judgement and make reports more interesting to read.

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<sup>4</sup> Pupil off-rolling is the practice of removing a pupil from the school roll without using a permanent exclusion, when the removal is primarily in the best interests of the school, rather than the best interests of the pupil.

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### Recommendations for improvements

Parents also suggested that Ofsted's reports could include more detail on the recommendations for improvements that were made to providers from the inspection. Parents felt they did not currently have access to as much detailed information on recommendations as they would like. One view was that transparent communication by Ofsted of their recommendations would enable parents to hold providers accountable for making these changes.

From the parent survey, only around half of respondents who were selected to answer questions about schools (50%), or further education and skills (45%) agreed that 'Ofsted accurately identifies the strengths and improvement areas' for providers. Of the respondents who answered the set of questions on schools, those with a lower monthly income and lower levels of education were more likely to agree with this statement.<sup>5</sup> These mixed views suggest a lack of agreement about whether Ofsted accurately identifies a provider's strengths and weaknesses. Nonetheless, the qualitative data showed that parents wanted these assessments to be communicated to them more clearly.

### Additional information on inspection process, including limitations

Finally, parents said that they would like reports to provide greater clarity and information on the objectivity, standards, criteria, and processes used by inspectors to conduct inspections and reach their conclusions. Linked to this, one suggestion was for limitations of each inspection to be set out in the report. Examples included noting whether (and why) the inspection did not cover certain topics or areas. Including this information would help readers to assess the reliability of reports, and provide context about why particular details were not included.

### **Length of reports**

Participants who reflected on the length of Ofsted's reports shared the view that they tended to be overly long, which made it harder to understand and absorb the information.

### **Ease of locating reports**

Focus group participants said that the inspection reports were easy to locate online via providers' and/or Ofsted's websites.

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<sup>5</sup> 64% of respondents in the lowest income category agreed compared with 45% in the highest income category. 61% of respondents with qualifications below A-levels (e.g. GCSE/O Level) or vocational equivalent agreed, compared with 46% of respondents with a degree, or equivalent or higher.

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One view was that providers could email the report directly to parents as an additional way of ensuring access. However, a contrasting view was that reports were already easy to find, and that anybody who did not access them online was unlikely to engage with them via email either. As such, participants felt that Ofsted should prioritise improving inspection and reporting practices over efforts to enhance access to reports.

None of us have got a problem finding the report. We all know where to get them. The problem is what [Ofsted is] looking at and how [Ofsted is] doing it. **Further education and skills focus group participant**

### **Accessibility of language and content**

Across the focus groups, participants said they found the language and style of Ofsted reports inaccessible, making them difficult to understand and use to inform their decisions about education or childcare.

Another view parents expressed about reports was that they were too “wordy”, “complex” and contained too much “jargon”, which made them challenging for those without an educational background to understand. Parents indicated that not being able to understand the detailed information within the reports led them to depend on Ofsted’s single-word judgement to assess the quality of a provider.

The findings indicate some disagreement between parents, with some wanting reports to contain more detail and explanation, and others wanting them to be shorter and simplified. One solution that may help both groups to engage more with reports would be to include more high-level summary information (as suggested in the following section on alternatives to single-word judgements), while adding detail on the key areas of interest in the main body of the report.

### **Views on appropriateness of single-word judgements**

Mixed views on the usefulness of Ofsted’s one-word grading system were evident in the survey data. Asked whether the single-word grading for providers’ overall effectiveness was useful in helping parents make decisions about their children’s education or childcare, 46% of respondents agreed, 41% disagreed, and 11% neither agreed nor disagreed. Views varied by income: 67% of those with in the lowest income category agreed that the single-word Ofsted grading system was useful, compared with 42% of those in the highest income category.

Of respondents who answered questions about schools, 39% agreed that ‘The number of schools graded good and outstanding in England gives a clear indication of the overall quality of the school system’, with a slightly higher proportion (43%) disagreeing. Respondents in the



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lowest income category were, however, more likely to agree with this statement than those in the highest income category (61% compared to 32% respectively).

Overall, however, the parent survey data showed that support for single-word judgements was low. Around half (49%) of respondents opposed using a single-word grade to sum up a provider – including 29% who were strongly opposed. Views varied in relation to level of education: 58% of respondents with a degree or higher qualification opposed the use of single-word judgements, compared with only 28% of respondents with qualifications below A-levels (i.e. GCSE/O Level).

Opposition to the use of single-word judgements was also evident in the focus groups, across remits.

One view was that single-word judgements for providers' overall effectiveness were reductive and did not provide a full picture either of the provider itself nor adequately reflect the positive and negative inspection findings.

[Parents] want that feedback, and that one word [grade], excellent, outstanding, good, or whatever isn't enough for them, and it doesn't give them a true feeling of the school and what's being judged. **School focus group participant**

Focus group participants said that single-word judgements did not always reflect parents' priorities or the findings of inspection areas in which they were most interested. One view was that the single-word judgement could be misleading where it reflected findings for one key area (to the exclusion of others that parents might prioritise). For example, some parents might consider a school in which leadership and management was assessed as requiring improvement as good overall, but would be put off by the 'requires improvement' judgement.

I also feel sometimes that the way the reports are presented with that one word [...] doesn't necessarily reflect the areas that I as a parent would be more interested in [...] I think sometimes that [single-word judgements] can give a false understanding of what the school or setting is going to be like [...] if you don't then go and read the report in detail. **Early years focus group participant**

Some parents felt that single-word judgements were inaccurate because they questioned the validity of the underlying inspection. This related to perceived limitations of inspections – namely, the long periods between inspections and their short duration. Reflections on inspection practices are discussed further in the previous chapter on Inspections.

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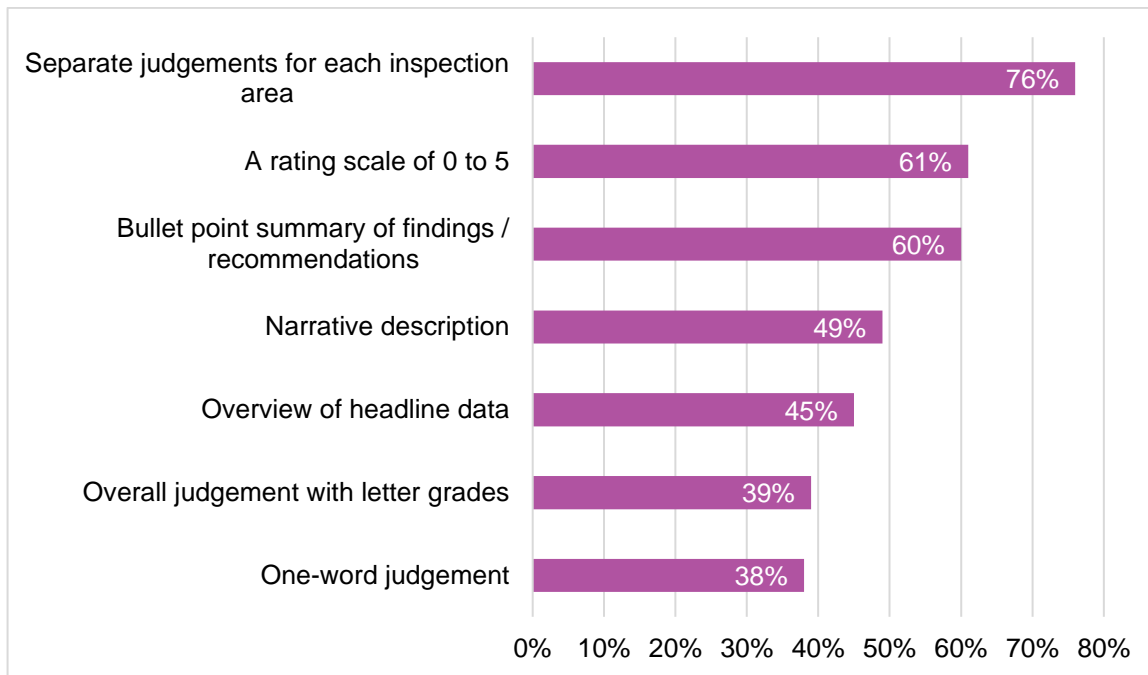
You're stuck between a rock and a hard place when you're trying to choose a provider for your child because you've got information that I fundamentally don't trust. I don't trust their judgements based in two days in an educational setting. **Further education and skills focus group participant**

In addition, one view among parents with children in specialist providers was that single-word judgements were inappropriate and "pointless" for parents of children with SEND, as they do not provide information about SEND provision and quality.

### **Suggestions for alternatives to single-word judgements**

Figure 4.3.1 shows that, in the parent survey, only 38% of respondents supported the use of single-word judgements for overall effectiveness. This had the lowest support of all approaches that parents were asked to consider in the survey.

**Figure 4.3.1: Percentage of parents who support alternatives to single-word judgements for overall effectiveness of providers**



Base: all respondents; NatCen parent/carer survey. Unweighted base: 4,349.

There was no clear preference for any particular alternative. The most-supported option in the parent survey was providing separate judgements for each inspection area (76%). This approach is currently used in inspection reports, in addition to single-word judgements for the overall effectiveness of a provider. It is unclear whether parents who agreed with this approach were in favour of removing the overall effectiveness grade or if they were aware that reports included separate grades.

In the focus groups, parents suggested a similar approach, to have separate judgements for each inspection area, with summaries describing a provider's performance against that inspection area. This suggests grade descriptors similar to those in the school inspection handbook would be beneficial to include in inspection reports. Focus groups did not explore whether parents had accessed inspection handbooks.

The alternative approach with the second highest support in the parent survey was a rating scale of '0 – urgent improvement is necessary' to '5 – very good', as used by The Food Standards Agency (61%). Similarly, parents in the SEND specialist provider focus group suggested using a scale of 0 to 10, corresponding to different inspection areas for special schools.

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The third most-supported alternative (60%) was a bullet point summary of findings and recommendations, like that of the Irish education inspectorate.

Focus groups participants suggested Ofsted move away from grading approaches that use a single word or score. Instead, participants suggested a more expansive approach would be preferable. This could include more words, more detailed criteria, a paragraph overview of settings, and a more comparative and equitable grading system that would “acknowledge the diversities and difficulties that some schools have as opposed to others”.

Instead of removing one-word judgements entirely, another suggestion from focus groups was to modify the existing approach. They gave the following two suggestions:

- **Expanding the range of grades** – to allow consistency when comparing state schools to independent schools.
- **Defining single-word grades more clearly** – particularly in terms of safeguarding, as parents found it difficult to tell the difference between grades.

### **Remit-specific findings**

Parents in early years and schools focus groups were also asked questions specific to their remits.

#### Early years

Parents in the early years focus groups were asked about their views on the importance of including educational outcomes in reports. They said that educational outcomes were important to include in reports, but highlighted the importance of Ofsted recognising and reflecting normal variation in children’s development when inspecting educational outcomes for this age group, to contextualise their assessment of the provider. They emphasised that children develop at different rates and that at these young ages, there is variation in behaviour or slow development that may not be a result of the provider children attend.

All kids develop at different rates, especially at such a young age. Some very bright kids might not be speaking until they're four or five, but that would affect the communication and language score, which isn't necessarily to do with the setting that they're in. **Early years focus group participant**

#### Schools

Parents in the schools focus groups were asked about their views on the timing of releasing reports around school holidays and had mixed views on this. One view was that reports should be published within a specified timeframe even if in the school holidays. A contrasting view, however, was that it would be “unreasonable and very unfair” on school staff to release

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reports before and during a school holiday. Given the potential impact on staff wellbeing, parents agreed that reports should be published during term time and not during school holidays.

#### **4.4 Impact**

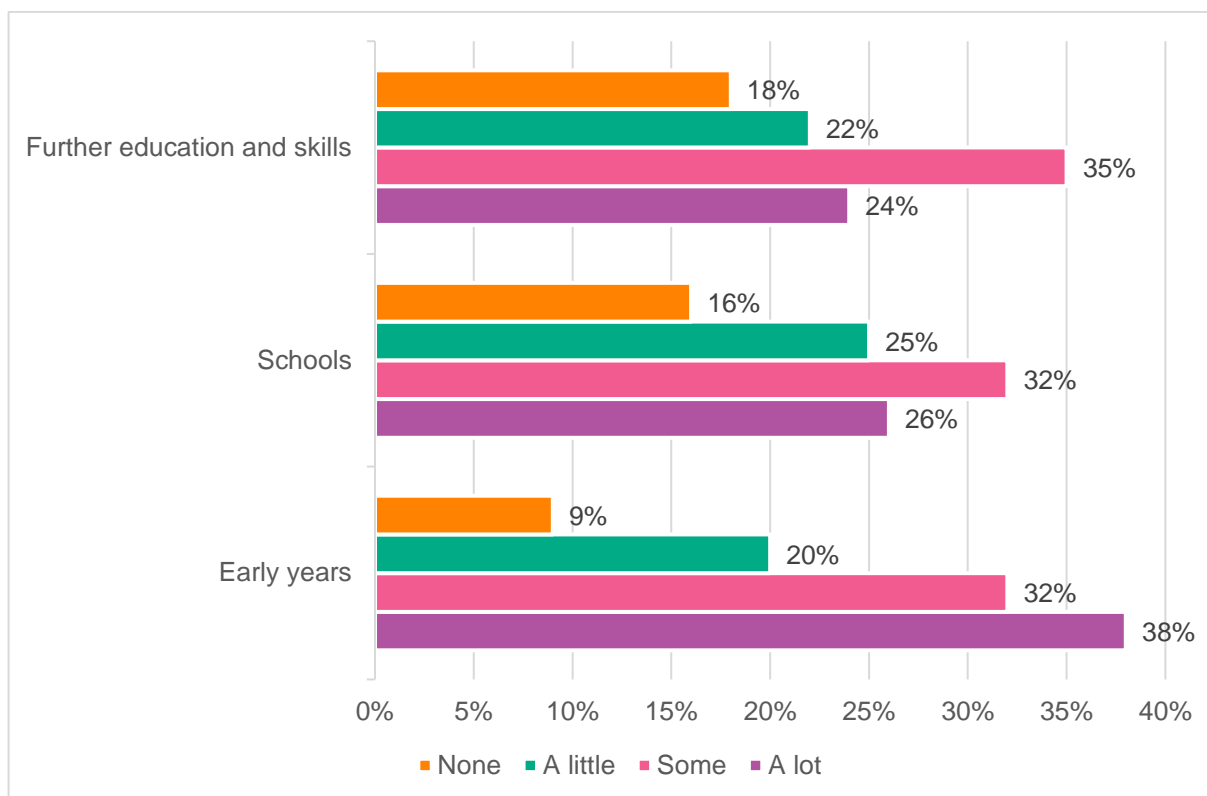
In this section, we explore findings related to the perceived impact of Ofsted practices in terms of inspections, judgements, and reporting, from the perspective of parents.

##### **Influencing decision making**

Survey and focus group data illustrates that parents used reports and single-word judgements in their decision making around provider selection and preferences. The level of confidence parents had in Ofsted reports was mixed, which was linked to the extent to which reports reflected their own experiences or perceptions of a provider.

Figure 4.4.1 shows that over 80% of survey respondents said that an Ofsted report had impacted to some degree when making decisions about their child's school education, early years childcare or education, or further education (83%, 90% and 81%, respectively). Of the respondents who answered questions about independent schools, 60% reported taking into account the single-word judgement for overall effectiveness of a provider when choosing a school for their child. This suggests that despite parents' concerns about accuracy of reports and the limitations of single-word judgements (see Reporting), these outputs did still factor into their decisions about their children's education.

**Figure 4.4.1: Value respondents placed on reports in decisions about their child’s childcare or education, by remit<sup>6</sup>**



Base: respondents who answered the set of questions on each remit; NatCen parent/carer survey. Unweighted base: further education and skills 587; schools: 2,967; early years: 783.

The ways parents used reports and single-word judgements were explored in focus groups. These included initially filtering through a list of potential settings, comparing settings against each other, judging overall quality, and using them to inform their final choices. The qualitative data also indicated that negative judgements were particularly influential, and parents would avoid sending their child to a setting with a poorer grade where possible.

If a setting was rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’, that was our bar. We didn’t really look into the rest of the details of the report...there’s a local daycare here that had two ‘needs improvement’ reports like twice in a row, or whatever the lowest standard is, and we chose not to send our child there because of those reports. **Early years focus group participant**

In focus groups, parents who had children in early years providers noted that reports informed their decision making, as they were able to provide a clear understanding of safety measures,

<sup>6</sup> The question wording varied for different remits, with schools and further education and skills questions asking about ‘schools education’ and ‘further education’, and the early years question asked about ‘childcare or early years education’.

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which was particularly important for young children who could not communicate. Some participants said that in their experience, both reports and single-word judgements reflected their own perception of a provider, strengthening their trust in using Ofsted outputs.

Others, however, reported contrasting experiences, where reports and single-word judgements did not align with their views and were not felt to be an accurate reflection of settings. This was due to a mismatch between what was reported on by Ofsted and their own personal observations. One example they provided was where a provider received a poorer grade than in its previous inspection, without any evidence of negative changes.

It blew my mind in terms of how you could draw conclusions that they did, and how they wrote it in the way that they did, to the point where I read them and went, well, I can't rely on those. **Schools focus group participant**

Lastly, specific to the further education and skills focus group was the view that reports were only used to inform decision making out of necessity, as parents did not have access to alternative sources of information about providers. Some noted that they would have preferred to be able to find details from other sources, as they did not wholly trust or believe the information provided in inspection reports.

I've looked at them as well for both of my children, but it's only because there's nothing else. I think it's a shame. **Further education and skills focus group participant**

### **The need for personal research**

Focus group participants reported that on their own, reports and single-word judgements were not sufficient to fully inform a parent. Participants with this view believed that reports could be subjective and outdated, and that doing their own research could be more valuable. Examples of alternative ways of gathering information included talking to other parents and carrying out in-person visits to settings.

[An Ofsted report is] one thing amongst many other things, other parent's perspectives, talking to the school, finding out if it's right for your child. **SEND specialist provider focus group participant**

One reason for wanting to carry out their own research was the perception that reports could quickly become outdated, due to staff turnover and other changes in settings between inspections. Being able to connect with other parents was therefore deemed important, as they were likely to be able to provide up-to-date insight. Some parents also considered Ofsted reports and judgements to be subjective and felt that they might not accurately reflect a child's experience of a setting. As such, collecting information themselves was something they felt could ensure their view would be better informed than by relying on Ofsted alone.

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## School choice within the local area

Focus group participants highlighted that the degree of choice of schools in their local area impacted the extent to which they could make decisions according to Ofsted reports or single-word judgements.

School focus group participants emphasised that families have limited choice of where their child could go to school, as realistically, parental preferences are restricted by school place availability. This view was particularly, although not exclusively, prevalent among parents whose children attended a specialist SEND provider, where the number of appropriate settings was noted to be even fewer. Parents within the SEND specialist provider focus group explained that a negative Ofsted grade would not necessarily influence a child's school destination, due to limited options.

With a complex needs school you get such a limited choice of where your child can go anyway. Even if it was unsatisfactory, my son would still have had to have gone. **SEND specialist provider focus group participant**

## Impact of inspections and judgements on wellbeing

During focus groups, parents discussed the impact that Ofsted inspections and judgements could have on staff and children.

Parents voiced concerns about the negative psychological impact of Ofsted practices on children. This was mainly attributed to the single-word judgement in relation to the overall effectiveness of providers, and the message this communicates to a child attending a provider which is judged to be inadequate. One view was that children could interpret this as an indication of their own capability, suggesting they were not able to attend a higher-rated school, and that this could affect children's self-worth.

If their school is categorised as inadequate, that message to those kids is you're not good enough to have a good school [...] There is the whole camaraderie of the school and all of that. Ofsted is doing a lot of damage. **SEND mainstream provider focus group participant**

Similarly, parents felt that Ofsted judgements had a negative impact on staff wellbeing. This was particularly the case among participants in the SEND focus groups. Parents referenced increased levels of teacher worry, stress, and a decline in mental health as a direct result of Ofsted inspections and reporting. Parents perceived teachers as being consistently "on edge" around the time of an inspection, anticipating that Ofsted was trying to find something wrong with their setting. Participants felt that the inspection team had a considerable role in this: if they were seen not to be understanding of the pressures that teachers face, parents viewed



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them as contributing to teacher “overwhelm, anxiety, depression” and resulted in teachers “leaving the profession in droves”.

### **Limited change observed post-Ofsted**

Parents said that, despite the stress and worry they felt were induced by inspections, concrete changes were not frequently made following an Ofsted judgement being issued. Parents said it was more common for changes to be made prior to an inspection taking place.

One view was that if a provider was graded as outstanding or good, parents saw no provider-level change following the grade being awarded. They viewed this as an indication of providers having limited aspiration to improve. The impact of this on parents were feelings of disappointment.

It didn't seem to be like, 'Here's the things that Ofsted said we can work on, and we'll work on them'. **Schools focus group participant**

There was, however, agreement that parents had observed changes in providers before an Ofsted visit, linked to a rough estimate of when the inspection would take place. These changes elicited mixed views: parents felt it was positive that schools were making improvements, but assumed that this was only to comply with Ofsted's inspection checklist.

There's some new toys, sometimes, you see appearing, new resources, and you're like, 'Mm, they're due Ofsted'. **Schools focus group participant**

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# 5. Conclusions

## Reflections on research with the public and parents/carers

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Findings from surveys and focus groups give a mixed picture of parents' and the public's views on Ofsted. Across both surveys, responses to attitudinal questions showed that only around half agreed that Ofsted acts in the best interests of children and that Ofsted is a valuable source of information about education and care. This suggests either a lack of confidence in Ofsted, or a lack of knowledge about Ofsted's work with education and care providers. A quarter of parent survey respondents said they did not trust Ofsted, many of whom cited negative personal experiences as a reason for this, a view which was echoed by focus group respondents. Simultaneously, there was uncertainty around Ofsted's roles (e.g. only a third of parent survey respondents agreed that Ofsted acts independently of government). These findings suggest Ofsted could do more to build trust through providing more transparency of inspection and reporting practices as well as working to increase public awareness of its roles and responsibilities more generally.

Findings from both surveys and focus groups indicated parents felt that reform to inspection practice was needed. One strength of inspections was that the current areas judged by inspectors were seen to be appropriate, though focus group participants gave suggestions for particular aspects of providers where they would like to see more focus during inspections. However, elements of the current approach to inspections were called into question. Both the public and parents expressed a preference for no notice to be given before an inspection, with focus groups indicating concern about the impact of preparation time on the accuracy of inspections. Inspectors having expertise in the type of provider or remit they inspect was also considered essential for accurate and informed judgements. Furthermore, inspections were deemed too infrequent, with parents favouring yearly inspections and consistency across remits.

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Views on reporting practice was another area where views were mixed, and one which was particularly relevant to parents as reports are often the lens through which they perceive Ofsted. Most parent survey respondents said they did place some value on reports and focus group participants said they could locate reports easily. However, parents suggested reports were not always accessible to lay audiences, leading to a reliance on single-word judgements. Furthermore, single-word judgements to sum up providers were seen to be ineffective as they often did not reflect parents' and children's real-life experiences of providers. As a result, focus group respondents called for single-word judgements to be replaced with an overview or summary that would provide more detail about the judgement.

Parents also wanted more transparency around inspections and suggested reports include additional context about Ofsted's assessment of a provider, including any limitations of the inspection. Consideration of parent feedback was seen as a weakness of the current inspection process. This was typified by the range of parents' views about the extent to which parent feedback was considered and the finding that almost a third of survey respondents felt parent feedback was not considered at all. Parents suggested including more parent feedback in reports, which would help them feel that their own experiences of a provider were represented, and provide an account of any key issues that an inspection may have overlooked. These findings suggest a lack of confidence in reports, and a desire for more ways for parents to assess the accuracy of a judgement for themselves.

Lastly, in focus groups, parents spoke of the impact of inspections and reporting practices on staff wellbeing. Though this is explored in the IFF Research strand in much greater detail, it is notable that the impacts on staff have permeated to parents through their interactions with providers, and their interactions with their children, who can also be affected by their teachers' feelings of worry. Therefore, working to address this would help to improve a range of stakeholders' impressions of, and trust in, Ofsted.

To conclude, the findings from the NatCen strand of the Big Listen indicate a range of perspectives about Ofsted's current practices, but suggest that the public and parents/carers do support reform of Ofsted's current practices to some degree. Focus groups showed that parents had especially strong views about notice periods given to providers, frequency of inspections and use of single-word judgements. Findings from the research with parents and carers are not necessarily indicative of all parents and carers in England. However, together with findings from IFF Research and Ofsted's public consultation, these findings will help to illustrate the variety of views and concerns held by stakeholders impacted by Ofsted practices.

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# Technical appendix

## Detailed methodology

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NatCen's research involved exploring the views of the general public via an online survey, and parents and carers, via an online survey and focus groups. Each of these methods are described below.

### Recruitment and data collection

#### **Public research**

NatCen sought the general public's views about Ofsted via an online survey hosted by the NatCen Opinion Panel. This is a probability-based research panel of over 22,000 active members. Panel members are recruited from studies such as the British Social Attitudes Study for which participants are selected at random from the general population using the Postcode Address File as sample frame. A random sub-sample of all active panel members was invited to take part in this wave of the study, maintaining the probability-based design. Odds of selection were adjusted based on extent to which a panel member had characteristics that were over- or under- represented in the full panel sample, improving the representativeness of the issued sample.

Sampled panel members were initially invited to take part online, with web fieldwork running from mid-April to early-June 2024. Panel members were sent multiple invitations and reminders by letter, email and text message to encourage participation. Panel members who did not initially take part online were also contacted by phone and offered a telephone interview. Participants were offered a gift voucher as a thank you for their time.

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The questions were predominantly attitudinal and did not require respondents to be a parent or have direct experience of Ofsted. The questions were aligned with key questions in other Big Listen surveys, including the parent/carer survey. The survey covered awareness of Ofsted; awareness of the sectors Ofsted inspects; trust in Ofsted; views on whether Ofsted acts in the best interests of children; views on whether Ofsted is a valuable source of information about education and care providers; views on notice periods given to providers before inspections, and views on single-word judgements.

In total, the public survey achieved 4,141 responses in England, with 4,015 respondents asked the full set of questions (those who said they had never heard of Ofsted at the initial question were not asked the subsequent questions).

Of the 9,492 invited, 5,238 Panel members took part in the survey, giving a survey response rate of 55%. 4,888 completed the survey online and 350 completed via telephone. 4,141 participants were adults (18+) living in England and therefore part of the target population for this study and eligible to answer the questions being asked on behalf of Ofsted.

### **Parent/carer survey**

The parent/carer survey was developed by NatCen in line with priority areas provided by Ofsted. Questionnaire development involved a scoping exercise, drawing on existing questions used in validated surveys, and a review by NatCen's Questionnaire Development and Testing team. Ofsted provided final sign-off on the survey.

After programming and thorough testing of the survey, we piloted the survey by asking NatCen staff who were parents to complete the survey and share it with their contacts. Approximately 30 respondents completed the pilot survey. The purpose of piloting was to identify any data issues and collect feedback on the usability and appropriateness of questions for parents and carers with experience of different education providers. We made some minor changes in line with pilot feedback and launched the survey at the end of April 2024.

The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Eligibility to take part was established through answers to survey questions, and respondents who did not meet all of the criteria were 'screened out'. To be eligible for the survey, respondents had to live in England, be a parent of a child under the age of 18, be aged 16 or older, and have heard of Ofsted.

The core topics covered in the survey included the following:

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- **Culture** – trust in and views on Ofsted, understanding of Ofsted’s remit (i.e. the providers it inspects and regulates), and views on whether Ofsted is a valuable source of information about different providers.
  - **Inspection** – views on the current notice period given to providers, and frequency of inspections.
  - **Reporting** – views on single-word judgements, and views on ways to reform reporting practices (i.e. alternatives to one-word judgements).
  - **Impact** – views on the outcome of Ofsted’s work, and whether single-word judgements impact decisions about their children’s education.

Additionally, the survey included remit-specific questions to be asked of parents and carers who had experience of a particular remit (early years, schools or further education and skills). To reduce the overall length of the survey, those with experience of more than one remit were randomly allocated one set of questions to answer.

The remit-specific question sets for parents and carers with experience of schools and further education and skills contained questions on: views on Ofsted as a source of information about providers; the importance of performance data; views on the extent to which parent feedback is collected during inspections; awareness of focus on safeguarding (schools only); views on key inspection areas, and views on the accuracy of reports. Parents and carers with experience of independent or special schools were additionally asked whether they trusted Ofsted’s judgements of those schools.

The remit-specific question set for parents and carers with experience of early years asked different questions, which were of particular policy interest for Ofsted. These included: awareness of Ofsted’s focus on safeguarding and its role regulating early years providers; awareness that Ofsted publish a summary of regulatory action; whether parents and carers have accessed/read information about Ofsted from different sources; whether the Ofsted website is useful for finding out information about Ofsted, and the best way to communicate suspension of a provider to parents and carers.

Survey recruitment involved emailing providers across the three remits (early years, schools, further education and skills) from a contact list provided by Ofsted. We requested providers share the survey link with parents and carers of children and learners, providing email text which they could use in an email or newsletter. We also sent reminder emails to providers to boost the response rate. The survey was closed after three and a half weeks due to Ofsted’s directive to cease fieldwork during the pre-election period leading up to the general election on 4 July, 2024.

The achieved sample was 4,349 responses. Incomplete cases where respondents stopped the survey before the end of the substantive questions were excluded from the total and the data tables and figures in this report.

The achieved sample for the parent/carer survey was skewed in terms of gender; 84% were women and 14% were men. There was a spread of age groups; the largest age category was 41-50 (44%), followed by 31-40 (34%), 51+ (17%), and 16-30 (6%). The majority of respondents had further or higher educational qualifications: 58% had a degree or above, 13% had other higher education qualifications, 12% had A levels or equivalent, 10% had qualifications below A levels or equivalent; 3% reported having 'other qualifications' and 2% had no qualifications. The majority of respondents were White (86%) and other ethnic backgrounds represented were mixed/multiple ethnic groups, Asian, Black and other (totalling 12%).

Respondents were asked which remits and providers their child(ren) attended. The responses cover a wide range of different providers, across the three remits, as shown in Table A1. The remit that respondents were most likely to have children attending was schools (80% of respondents), followed by early years (26%) and further education and skills (19%). Percentages sum to more than 100% as respondents could select more than one remit.

**Table A1: Parent/carer survey respondents by remit and provider type**

<b>Remit</b>	<b>Provider type</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Early Years</b>	Day nursery	57
	Pre-school	39
	After school club / Breakfast club	15
	Childminder	11
	Holiday club / Holiday play scheme	8
	Other early years provision and childcare	2
	<i>Base</i>	1,132
<b>Schools</b>	Primary school	63
	Secondary school	52
	Independent school (special and other)	5
	Special school	5
	School nursery	4
	Middle school	3
	Alternative provision inc. PRUs	2

	<i>Base</i>	3,491
<b>Further education and skills</b>	College (inc. 16-19 academies, sixth form colleges)	91
	Independent specialist college	3
	Independent learning provider	2
	Community learning and skills provider	2
	Higher education institution	2
	<i>Base</i>	809

Note: percentages within each remit sum to more than 100% as respondents could select more than one provider type. The bases for each remit sum to more than the total sample, as respondents could select more than one remit. For disclosure reasons, providers selected by less than 2% of respondents from that remit are not shown in the table.

### Parent/carer focus groups

We conducted seven focus groups with parents and carers who had experience of different provider types. These were:

- Early years (x2)
- Schools (x2)
- Further education and skills
- SEND in mainstream schools or colleges
- SEND in specialist schools or colleges<sup>7</sup>

Participants invited to take part in focus groups were selected from a pool of survey respondents who gave consent to be recontacted at the end of the parent/carer survey. We conducted screening calls to check participants' demographic details were correct and to ask for their availability to take part in a focus group. Those who had experience of multiple remits were only invited to take part in one focus group.

Fieldwork took place between 20 May and 30 May 2024. Focus groups were delivered online on MS Teams and lasted 70 minutes. Between five and seven participants attended each focus group, totalling 42 participants. The final sample comprised participants who were primarily female (36 female, 6 male); and White (34 White; 8 other ethnic background or

<sup>7</sup> Views and experiences of parents of children with and without SEND are represented in the qualitative findings set out in this report. This reflects the mix of experiences represented in the qualitative sample. Two of our focus groups were comprised solely of parents of children with SEND, to focus specifically on their experiences; the remaining five focus groups were comprised of a mix of participants, including some parents of children with SEND.



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prefer not to say). Participants represented a range of age groups and a spread of different regions. All participants received a £20 high street voucher as thank you.

We developed individual topic guides for each remit which contained both core questions that were asked of all respondents and remit-specific questions which were topics of interest for Ofsted. Core content included questions on:

- **Culture** – trust in Ofsted, perceptions of inspector conduct, and perceptions of Ofsted's priorities,
- **Inspections** – views on key inspection areas, appropriateness of notice periods given to providers, and views on the current approach to parental feedback,
- **Reporting** – views on content and accessibility of reports, views on one-word judgements, and suggestions for alternative approaches.
- **Impact** – whether and how parents/carers use reports and one-word judgements, and whether these impact decisions about their child's education.

### Data analysis and reporting

#### **Public research**

Data cleaning, processing and analysis was carried out in SPSS. The data are weighted to be representative of the adult population in England. Subgroup findings reported in the public survey chapter are statistically significant.

#### **Parent/carers survey**

Data checking, processing and analysis was carried out in SPSS and Excel. Due to the method used, the data are indicative and cannot be projected to the total population of parents/carers in England. Data are not weighted and significance testing was not appropriate as the data are not from a random probability sample.

#### **Parent/carers focus groups**

Focus groups were audio recorded with participants' permission and transcribed. Qualitative data was systematically collated and summarized in a matrix using the Framework approach developed at NatCen. Data was organised by theme with verbatim quotes included where relevant.

Analysis involved an iterative process of sorting data by sub-themes and creating meaningful groupings according to participants' views and experiences across focus groups.



