

Inspection, Accountability and Teacher Retention

Jane Perryman



From: [REDACTED]

Date: Wednesday, 26 February 2025 at 09:26

To: Perryman, Jane <j.perryman@ucl.ac.uk>

Subject: Re: Previous IOE PGCE student

Hi Jane,

Thank you.

I'm aware it will probably be a long, competitive process. I'll begin my application in September and want to get as prepared as possible.

I loved teaching so much, until the scales tipped and I was putting in more than I could justify, to the detriment of my family, and my own enjoyment of life outside of work. I still feel sad 6 months after leaving that I had to make the change. Teaching for me was like being held hostage by someone I loved; it was great because I loved it, but I had no time or freedom to do anything outside of it. That probably sounds a bit dramatic, but that's how it started to feel. The burnout was real.

Retention: the role of accountability

- Teacher retention: In 2022, almost 40,000 working-age teachers left the profession 9% of total workforce, the highest level since records began in 2010 (School Workforce Data, DfE, June 2022)



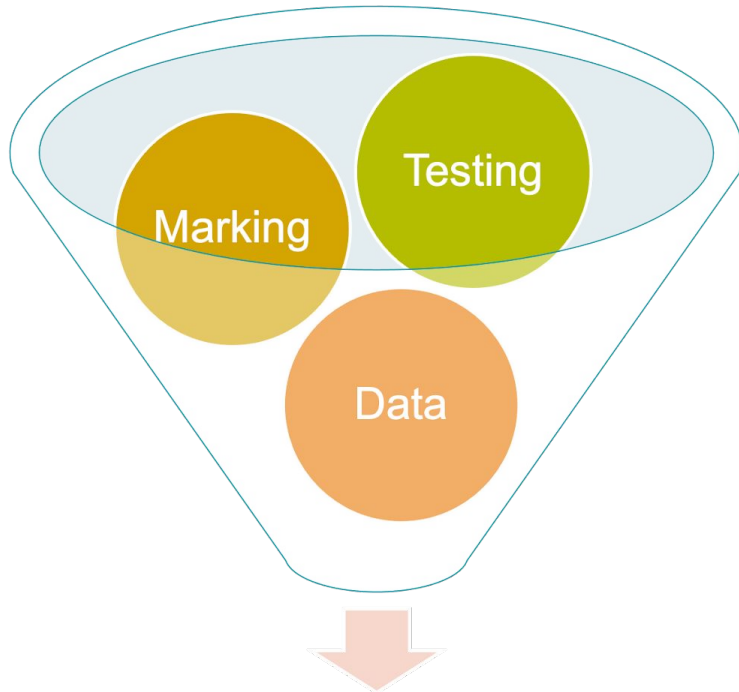
Internationally, schools are increasingly preoccupied with policies of achievement, particularly test results. A **results-driven approach**, with a plethora of strategies aimed at improving results.

Poppleton and Williamson (2004:308) found that teachers in **Australia, South Africa, Canada and England** reported the greatest negative impact on their work lives, explaining 'these were all countries that were experiencing **government initiated and tightly controlled reform**'.

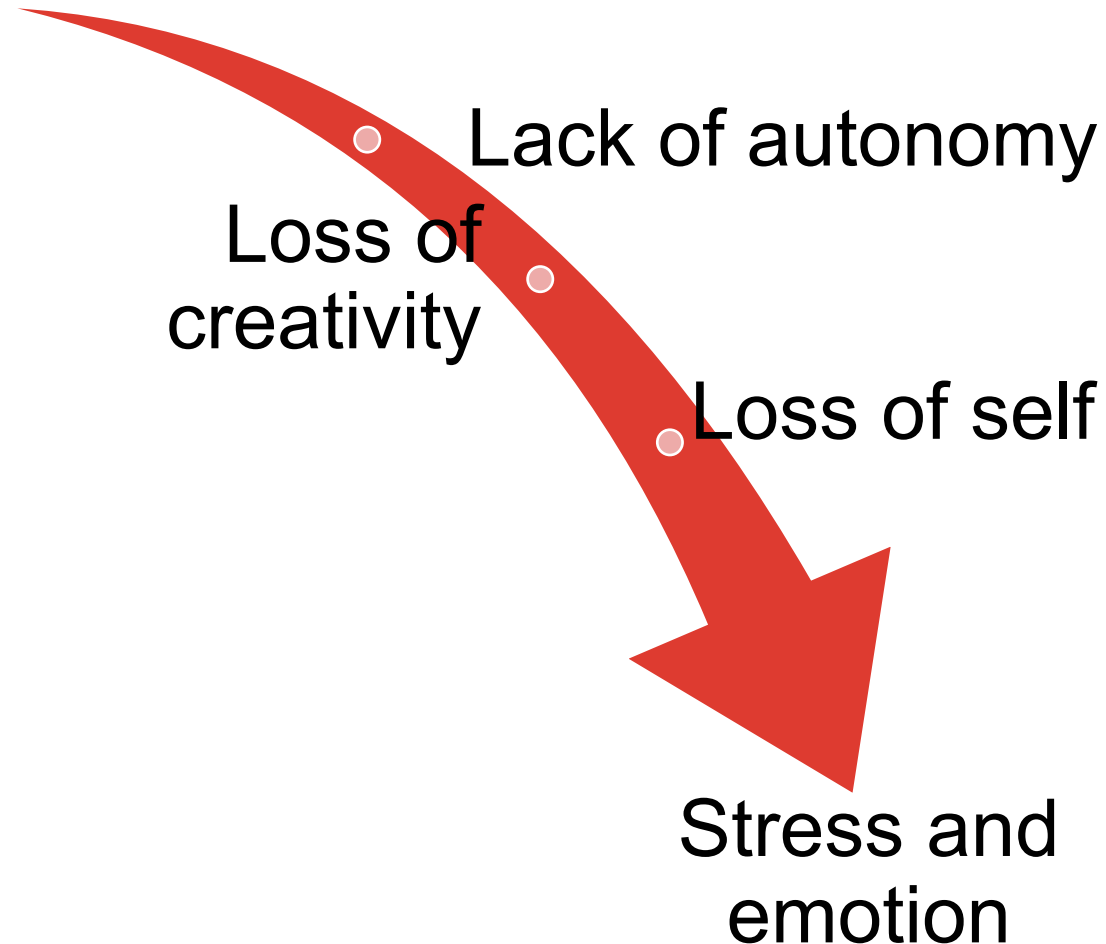
Performativity is a **regime of accountability employing judgements, comparison and displays of efficiency as a means of control**. Performativity is linked with the increased **accountability and surveillance** under which teachers find themselves and their schools in being judged in terms of outcome and performance

Retention and Accountability

Accountability
and performativity



Pressure



TEACHER RETENTION PROJECT 2019

Survey to last 5 years of UCL IOE alumni

Branching questionnaire

- Demographic information
 - Reasons for becoming teachers
 - Hopes and Fears
 - Actual rewards and challenges
 - Reasons for leaving
- Perryman, J; Calvert, G; (2020) What motivates people to teach, and why do they leave? Accountability, performativity and teacher retention. **British Journal of Educational Studies** , 68 (1) pp. 2-23. [10.1080/00071005.2019.1589417](https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2019.1589417).

MOTIVATION FOR BECOMING A TEACHER



According to our survey (closed option multiple answer),

- Wanting to 'make a difference' (69%)
- Wanting to work with young people (64%)
- Love of subject (50%)
- Inspired by own teachers (38%)
- To have an intellectual challenge (36%)
- To be creative (35%)
- Variety of work (33%)

WHY DID THEY LEAVE?

- To improve work life balance (75%)
- Workload (71%)
- Target driven culture (57%)
- Teaching making me ill (51%)
- Government initiatives (43%)
- Lack of support from management (38%)
-

WORKLOAD AND THE ACCOUNTABILITY AGENDA

- ***the pressures of data** - which children I need to push to make accelerated progress, which children I need to focus on to help them get a combined score in maths and English. **It just takes away from the purpose of my job** which is helping all the children in my class.*
- *lots of paperwork/data/ etc is done purely **for the sake of it**, feels like box ticking/jumping through hoops - not actually for the benefit of teachers or students or teaching or learning... then the next initiative is introduced and **your work becomes entirely futile***
- *We are expected to mark every piece of work the students produce. We are **constantly testing** the students so that we do not seem to have enough time to teach them properly. We feel that we are **teaching to the test**.*

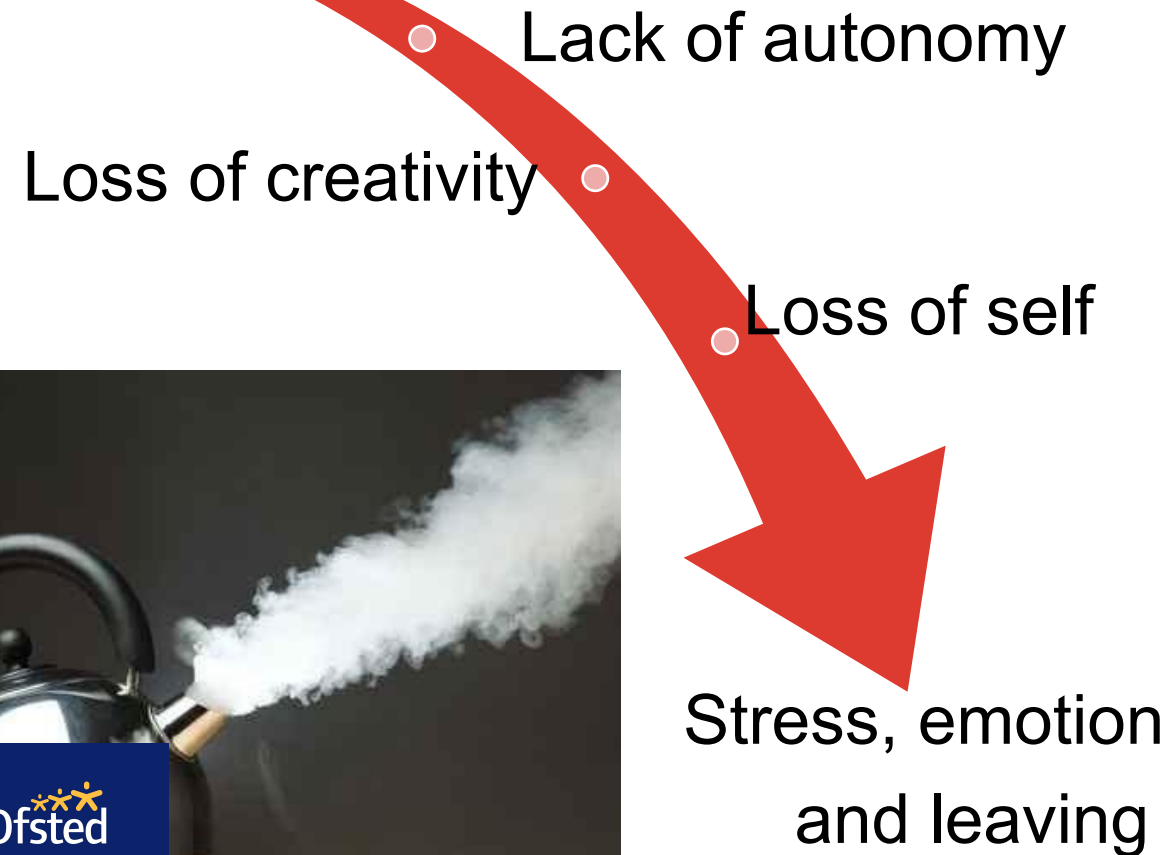
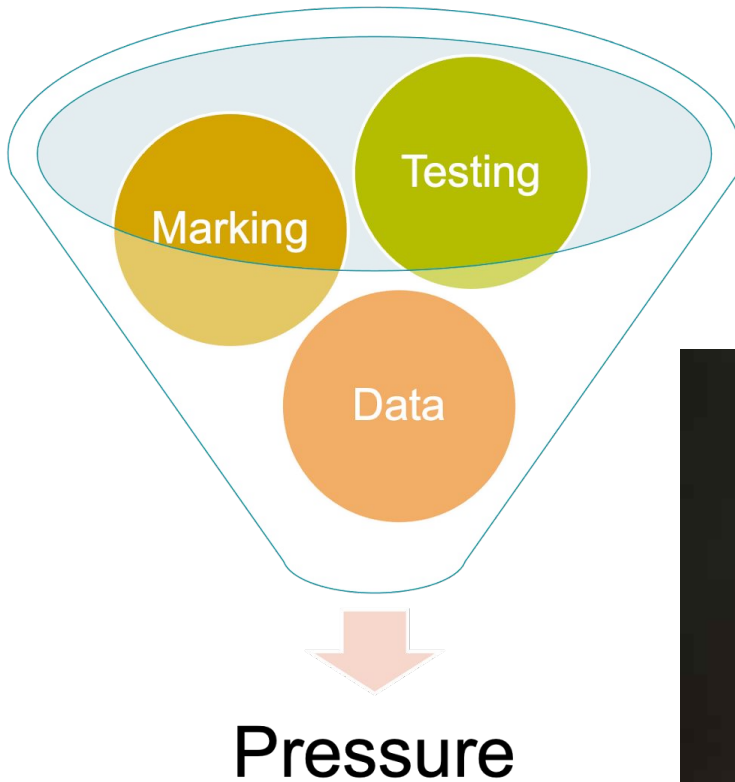
LOSS OF (TEACHER) **SELF**

*The workload and never-ending pace - it **stifles my creativity** and I think means I have to settle for good ideas rather than amazing ones. The data and target driven culture, and how all children are expected to progress at the same rate, year by year. **I think it prevents me from doing the best for all pupils.***

*I just couldn't cope with the **soul-destroying job** that is teaching - I had no time to relax or think about myself*

***No energy and time left to live my life.** Made to feel guilty if I take break at lunch I feel that my job as a teacher is **taking over my whole life.** I never feel like I can let go and forget about it, there is always something to do.*

Effects of Performative-Accountability



Views on Ofsted

For

Provides essential information for parents and stakeholders

Important safeguarding function

Inspection provides independent, external evaluation and identifies what needs to improve in order for provision to be good or better (Ofsted 2019).

A force for improvement (Spielman 2019)

‘The most comprehensive and thorough evidence base on what happens in classrooms anywhere in the world’
Husbands (2014)

Against

Adds to stress and workload (Boustead 2022)

Negative impact on teaching and learning (Thomson 2022)

Fosters a performative accountability culture - schools do ‘what Ofsted wants’ rather than work in the best interests of students (Perryman 2022)

Poor inspection outcomes disproportionately impact schools serving the most disadvantaged communities (Hutchinson 2016, Munoz Chereau et al 2022)

Neutrality and expertise of inspectors questioned (Richards 2020)

RESEARCH OVERVIEW



Literature Review

International Comparison of Inspection Systems

Survey of teachers and leaders – 6708 responses from 23 March to 26 May 2023

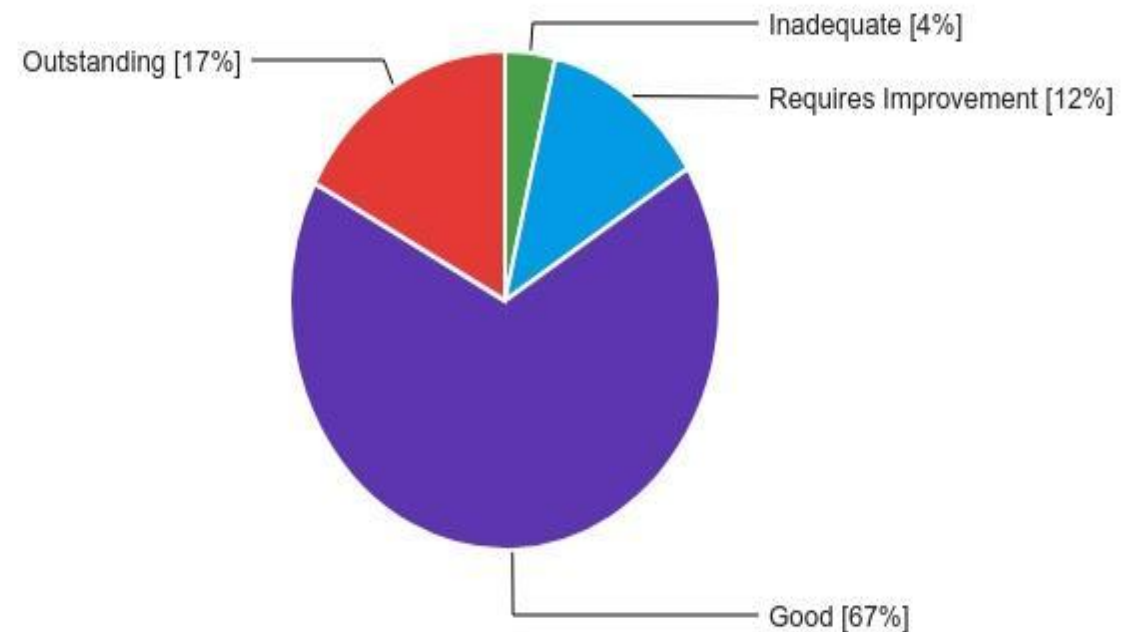
Focus Groups at NEU Conference April 2023 and online June 2023

Advisory Board and expert views

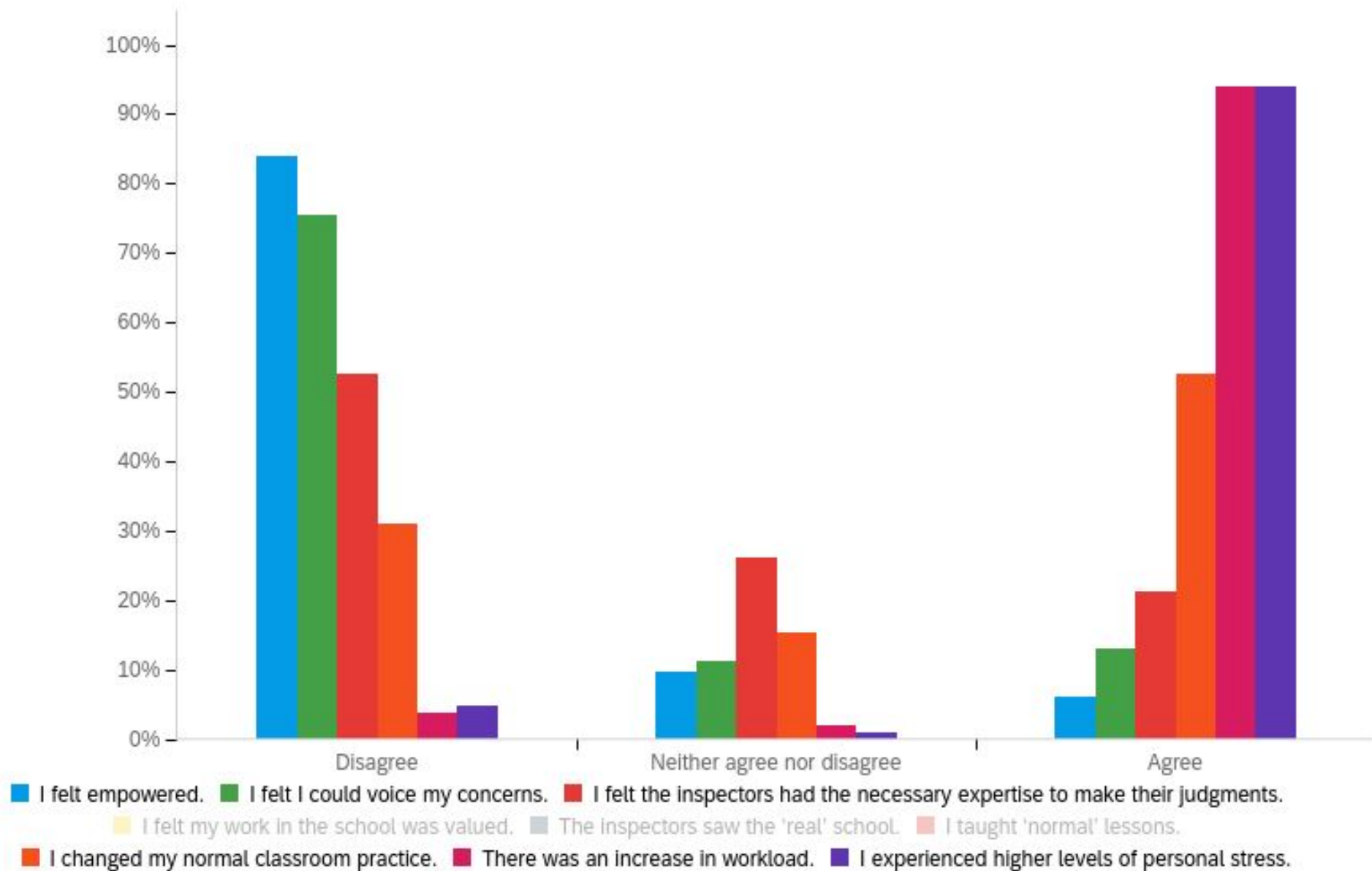


OVERALL EXPERIENCE OF OFSTED

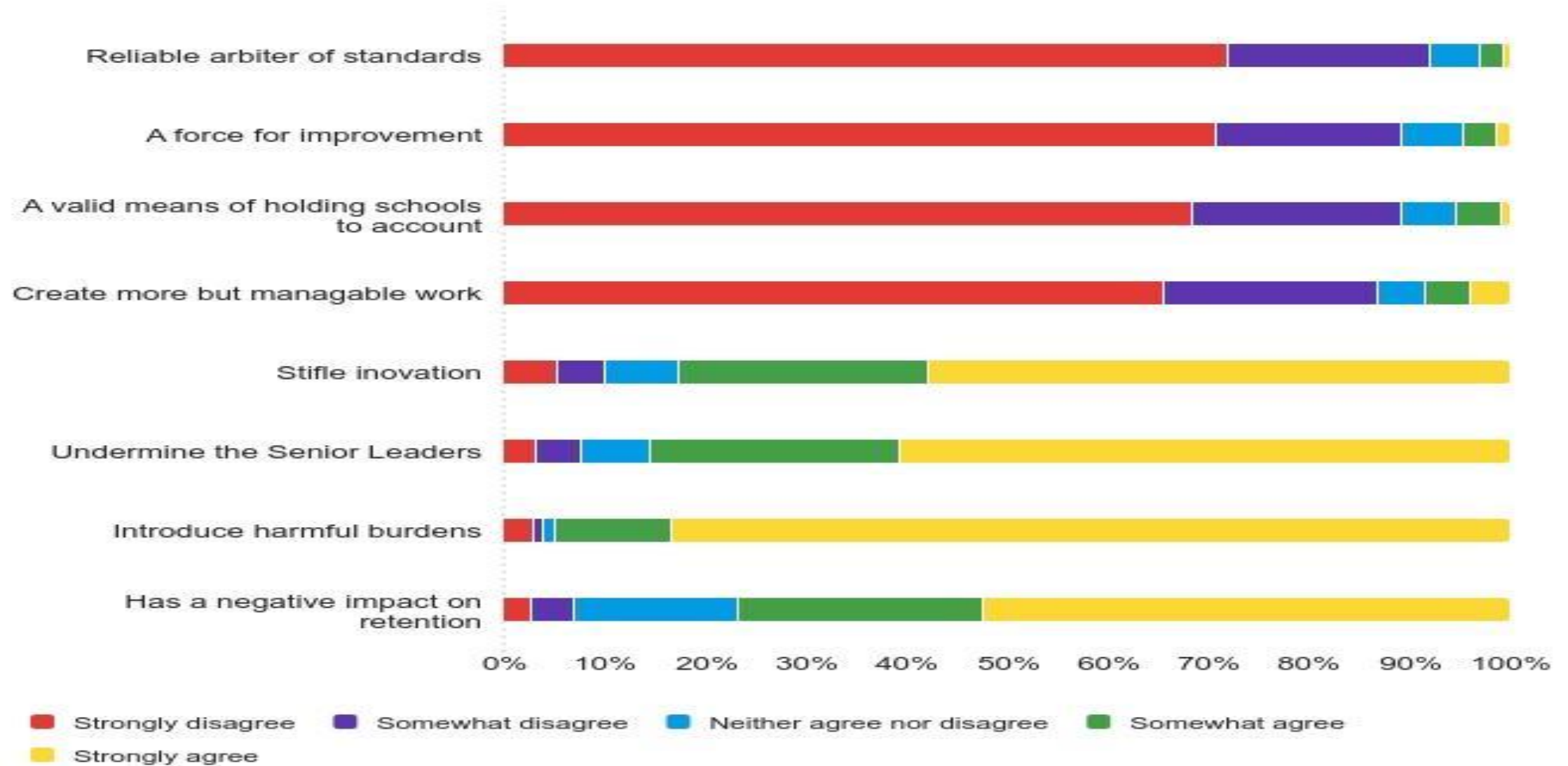
- Very negative 32%
- Somewhat negative 41%
- Neither positive or negative 17%
- Somewhat positive 8%
- Very positive 2%



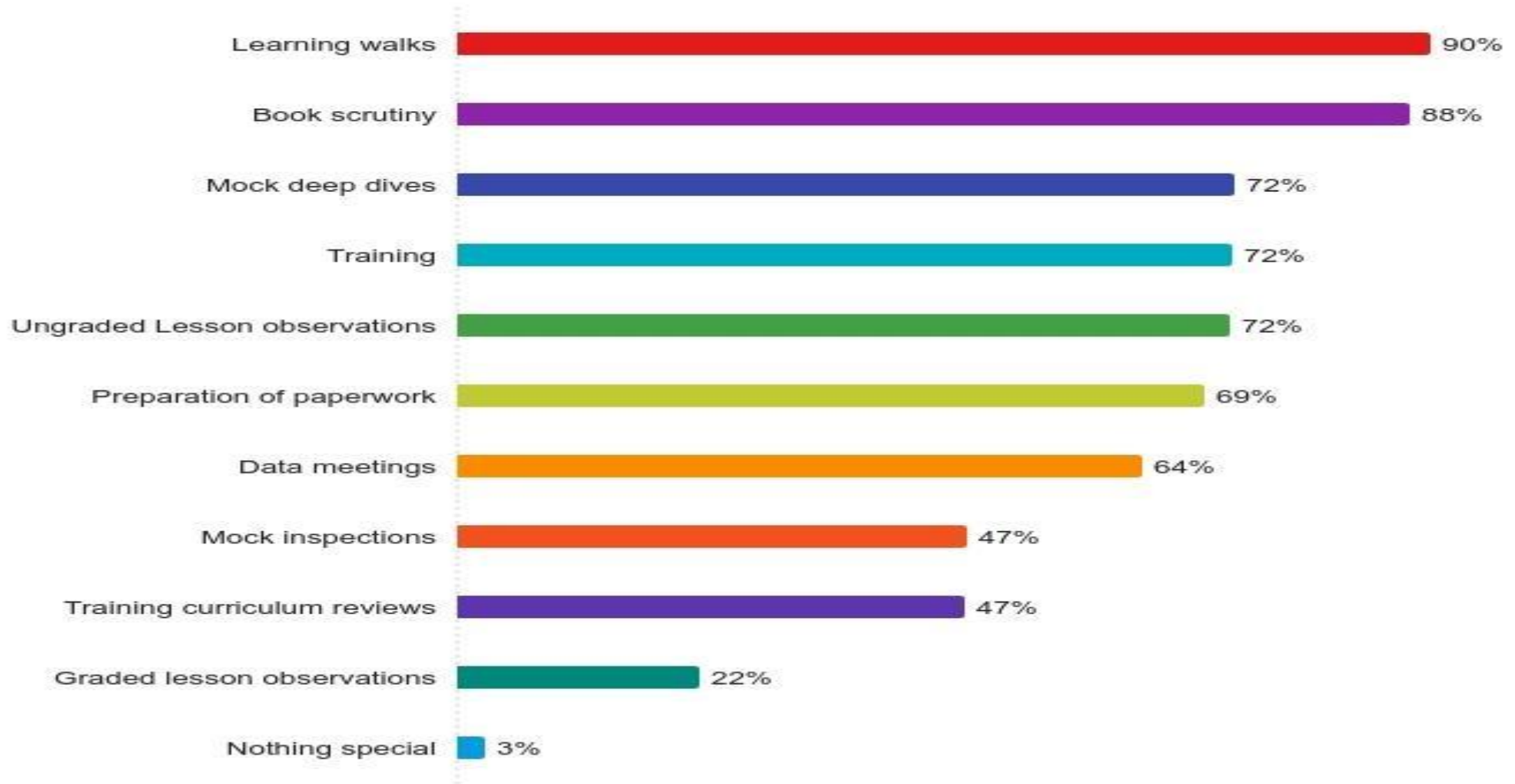
PERCEPTIONS OF INSPECTION



PROBLEMS WITH OFSTED



PREPARATION FOR OFSTED



'What Ofsted Wants'



*You get tired of hearing **what Ofsted wants** and producing paperwork that has no other purpose - it raises the expectations so high all the time as you are in a continual state of readiness.*

***Every sentence has 'Ofsted' in it.** It leads to a very damaging micro-managing culture of accountability.*

*There is a constant refrain of '**When Ofsted come they will expect to see...**'. This leads to an enormous amount of pressure to make sure that any document you prepare is 'acceptable' and every piece of marked work meets the 'Ofsted' standard.*

*It's always there in the background. Decision making is done with an eye to how it will **feed into Ofsted preparation / outcomes.** Pressure is always there to be ready, 24/7, which is exhausting.*

Impact



*The school becomes...and stays...Ofsted driven, and it seems **at the expense of the most important people, the children**. People no longer even speak in terms of pupil-centred learning or meeting their needs. It is all about conforming to an imposed framework and compiling endless amounts of pointless data.*

*The worst thing was constant references to 'when Ofsted come in'. It made it **difficult to think about what was best for the children**. Everything was geared to what Ofsted will want.*

*I was often discouraged or not allowed to do what **I felt was best for pupils** because 'Ofsted'*

*Everything we did was in preparation for the dreaded Ofsted. More work. Everyday more work was required. **All the enjoyment was taken away from the job of teaching.***

*The focus is so far away from teaching and being the best teacher you can be. Secondly **the enjoyment is completely drained out of you.***

Context Ignored

- Local issues with austerity and poverty ignored
- National issues with student mental health, SEND provision & teacher retention ignored
- Pandemic impacts ignored

- “Our school is poverty stricken, with no pens, paints or resources we need to do our jobs as we would like to...**I work in a school with a high percentage of EAL. I have four children in my class who don't speak any English at all, another 4 children in my class with SEN. None of this is taken into account.** We are having ‘Mocksteds’ every few weeks with ever more things to add, include, adjust improve, change, more box ticking, more time away from the children”
 - Primary teacher
- My school is in a very deprived area - will inspectors understand? Will they recognise the unrelenting care and commitment of staff to children and our community? Will inspectors accept that our community was in poverty before Covid and now with the economic crisis, families are struggling like never before- children now have unforeseen mental health challenges. This leads to high level behaviours including violence towards staff. **Staff understand and give their utmost love and kindness everyday. Will Ofsted see this?**
 - Primary Head

Time/workload



It is over kill!** Many of the tasks don't benefit the students. Paperwork takes **days, weeks to complete** and deadlines are tight with **no time** in school to do them. Staff constantly work beyond their paid hours and often into the **late hours of the night and early hours of the morning** to complete **tasks that don't impact teaching and learning.

*As an example: The school had a spelling focus which meant that every child was tested on 30+ tests (each with 12-30 words); then each test for each child is colour-coded from dark green (more or less full marks), through light green, yellow, orange and red (hardly any correct). Then children are retested at intervals with the expectation that children gradually improve (some don't, and I suspect some just adjust the colours slightly for no good reason other than to look good). This is very time consuming - time which could be better spent on teaching and learning - and very tedious for staff marking and inputting the data. **What a huge waste of time!***

Anticipation



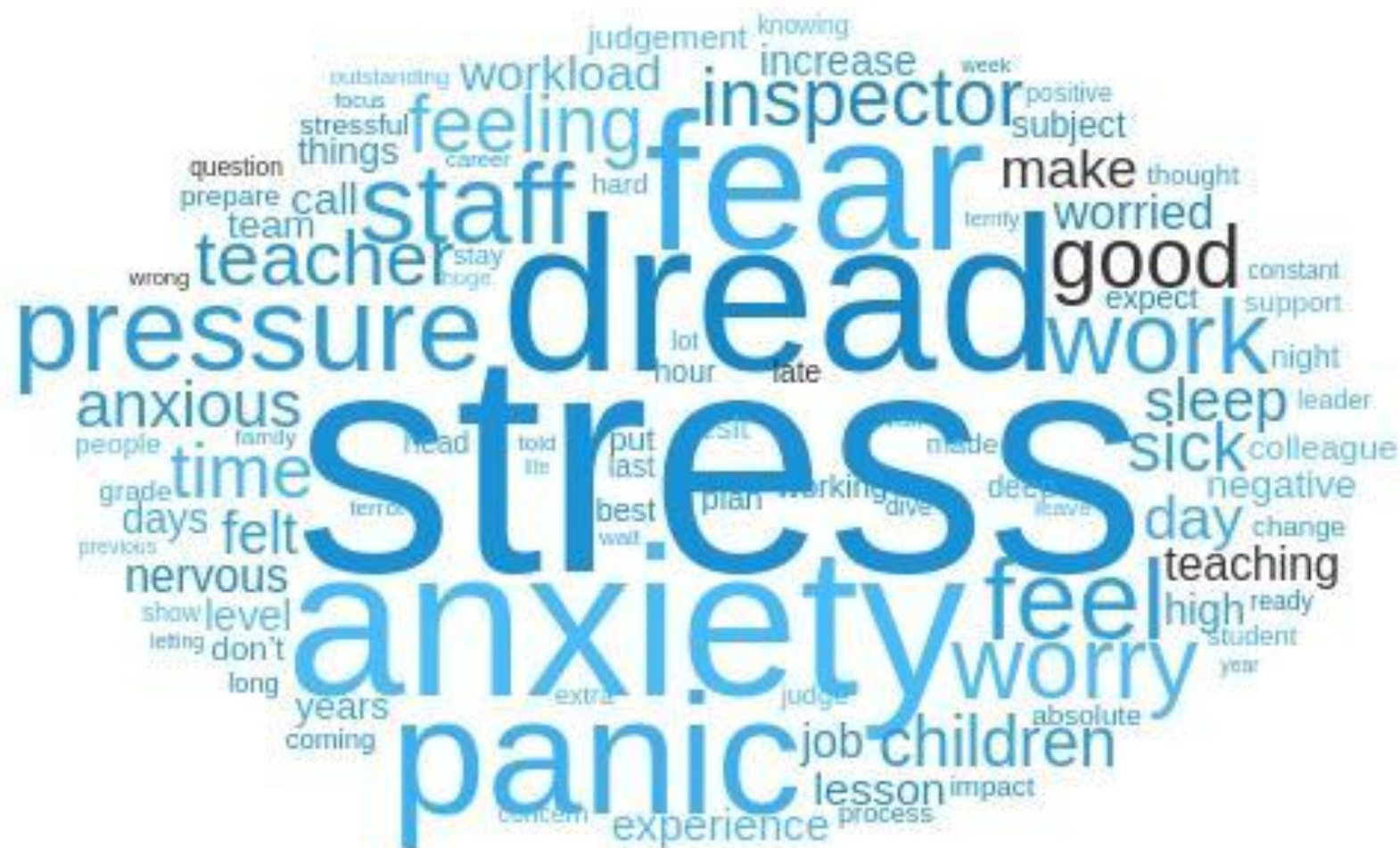
*The thought of impending Ofsted **strikes terror into most of us** and many of my hardworking and incredibly diligent colleagues are **considering leaving before it happens**. Most of us feel **physically sick** at the mention of inspection.*

***The pressure** it creates in the build-up and during being in window is immense - **toxic** and not helpful.*

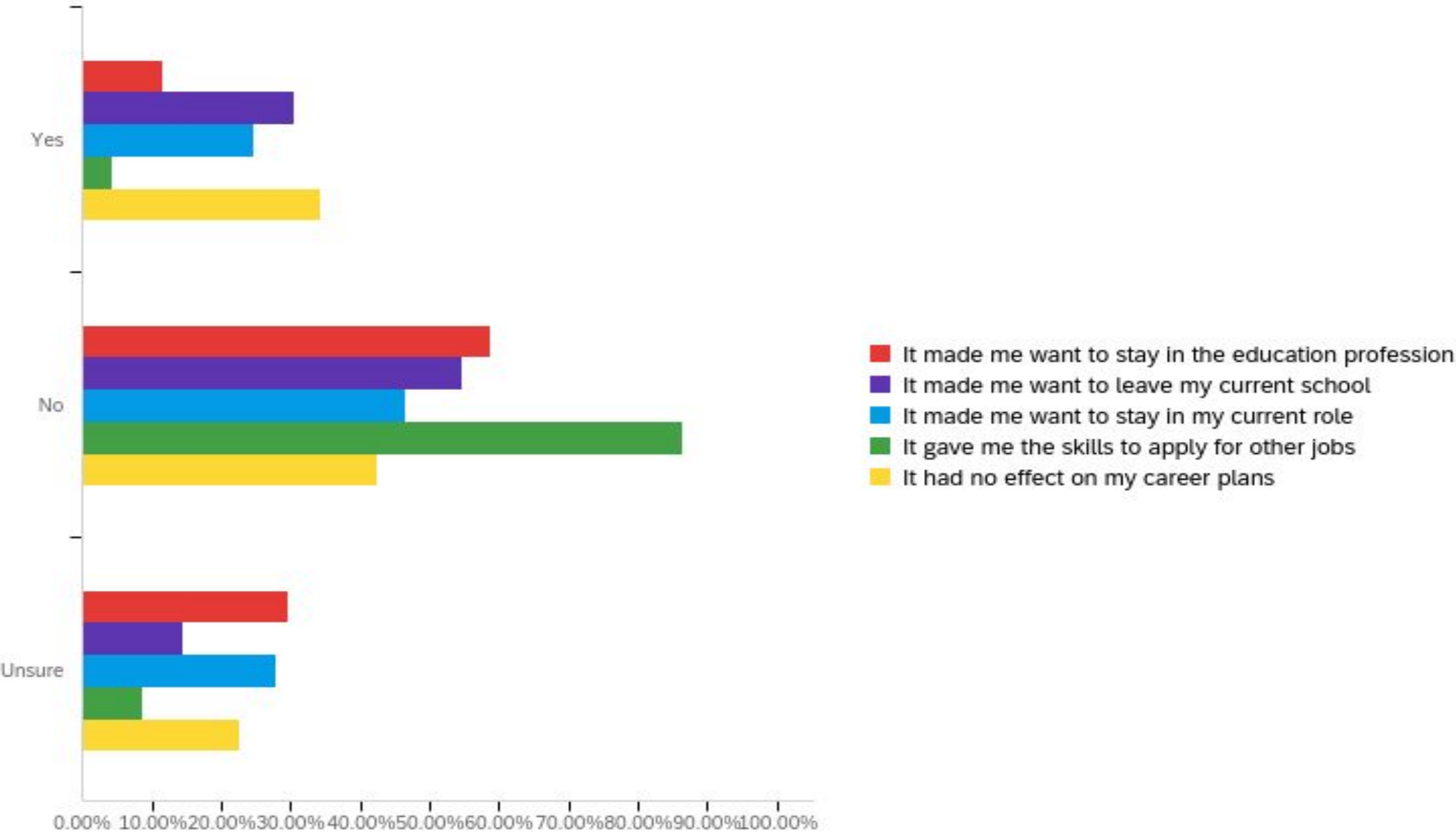
***Fear, dread and a panicked response.** A sense of chaos and a bracing for the increased workload and immense stress that is brought on from the moment news of an inspection arrives. Exhaustion, severe disruption to daily routines such as eating and sleeping, and strong doubts over confidence in my career.*



Thoughts and feelings when you know Ofsted are coming.



Q4.17 - How did the inspection make you feel about your career?



High-Stakes



*I feel **sick, anxious and worried about my career** and the school and the impact. I feel everything is riding on it and it is not healthy.*

*We all know that **a whole career can be trashed** by one observation and nobody wants to be the one that lets colleagues or the school down, in such a very public way.*

*The feeling that **my whole career was at stake** was overwhelming and having no one to talk to about this (as I was supporting and reassuring the team) felt incredibly isolating and incredibly difficult.*

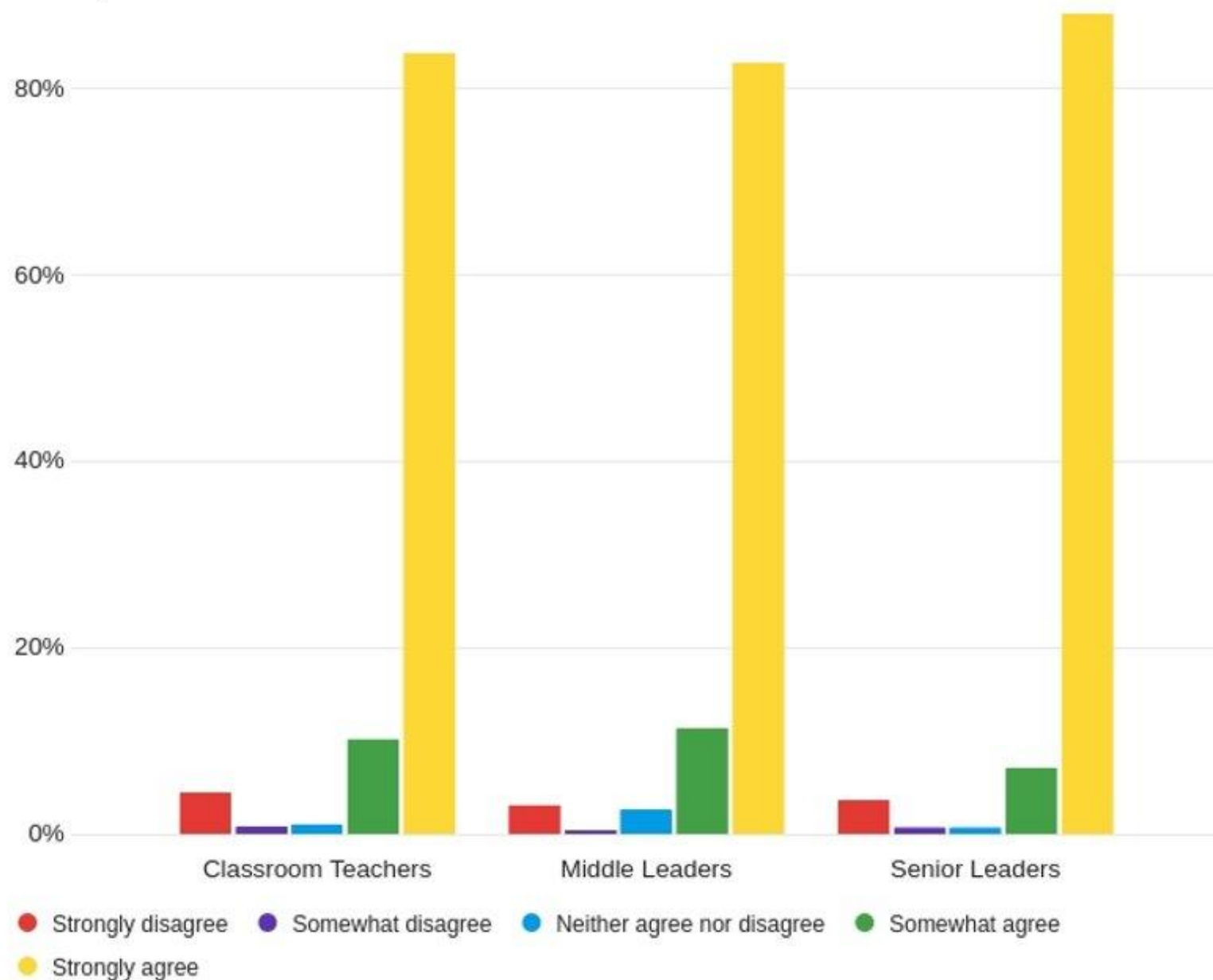
***The careers of mine and my colleagues are now up in the air.** The next four years are going to be based on the next two days.*

*Anxiety and stress at the prospect of having **my entire career judged** from a single lesson or a single day (two at most)*



During the inspection I experienced higher levels of personal stress.

3960 Responses



The experience



*As headteacher, I can honestly say I have never experienced **such intense pressure and stress** in the time from the initial admin phone call until the end of the inspection*

*I did not sleep the night before the inspection and **found it difficult to sleep** for around a week afterwards (despite it being a good outcome).*

*The process was **extremely gruelling**. I **experienced extreme stress**, to the extent that I had to go out of the school for a short period after the lead advised me the outcome was going to be ok, and found it very difficult to function during the feedback meeting*

It was positive because we got good. But I worked 50 hours over three days. Had two hours sleep each night. Missed my daughter's nativity play (she had the starring role)

The Aftermath



*The school was found to be inadequate. The Head an inspirational and outstanding leader one of the best I have worked for, wept. Thanked us as staff. **Took the blame and resigned, leaving the profession...** I left the school, the profession and went to work abroad. I devoted my career to the State Education system right up to being a Senior Leader. Sadly you could not pay me enough money to return under the current conditions.*

*I decided to **retire early** as a consequence. I was hardly sleeping constantly in fear of an inspection process that was too stringent, too arbitrary, too narrow and demanding for a primary school. My staff were exhausted and I was having to place greater demands upon them that I morally could no longer do, so I resigned*



The Reaction



*The team were **all burnt out, mentally ill and physically exhausted**. There was a strong sense of demoralisation across the whole team. At the end of the academic year **6 out of 12 class teachers resigned**. Only 1 of the 6 who have left has returned to teaching.*

*Following the last inspection **5 teachers resigned**. Most of them had been teaching for over 30 years and were excellent teachers. Of the ones that remained, most wanted to leave but couldn't for financial reasons.*

*I am **considering early retirement** after 30 years in my vocation.*

*I took **early retirement after my fourth inspection!** Says it all really, there wasn't going to be a fifth for me. The whole process was exhausting, unnecessary and provided no new information to move us forward.*



Summary



The performative-accountability culture is the root of the retention crisis in England with inspection an extreme example

Extra tasks are expected in preparation for Ofsted, and the resulting workload increases pressure and stress.

The experience of inspection itself is described as brutal and toxic and can lead to people resigning, retiring early, changing roles or changing career, and for some even the fear of the next inspection can lead to them leaving.



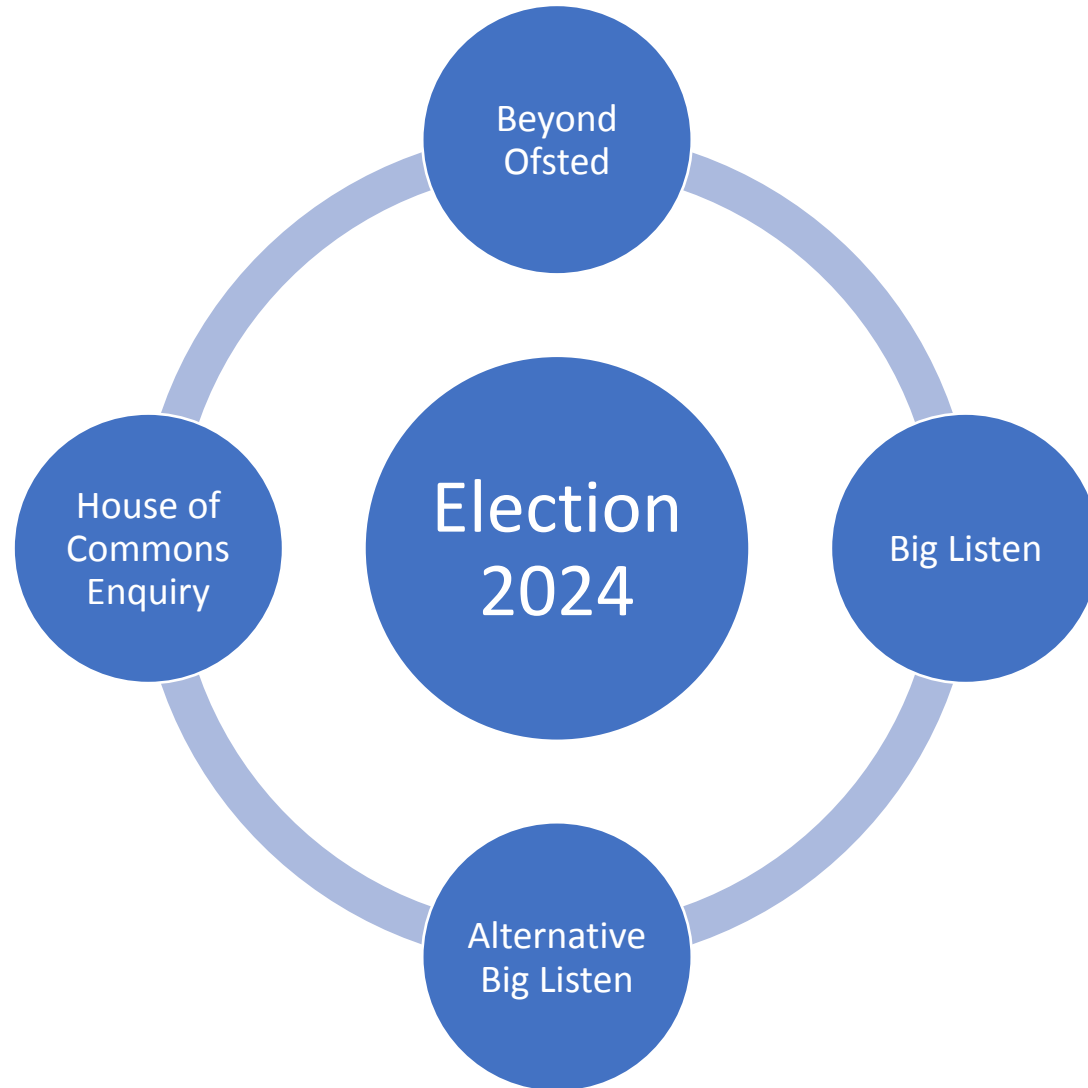
A CALL FOR CHANGE



- **What should inspection be for?**
 - helping schools identify strengths and weaknesses **(77%)**
 - making sure every child has access to high quality education **(75%)**
 - ensuring the school is meeting legal safeguarding requirements **(72%)**
- 79 per cent of respondents wanted to see a **complete overhaul of how inspections work**
- Themes: **removing grades and moving towards support, reforming the inspectorate, reduced stress and more trust, and reform to safeguarding.**
- Strong desire for change, including calls for an **immediate pause.**

Country	Estonia	Ireland	Sweden
PISA ranking	5th	12th	16th
When an inspection is done			
Cyclical			●
Differentiated/risk-based	●	●	●
Thematic		●	●
To gain an educational licence	●		
On a complaint	●		●
Who inspects schools			
Experienced teachers	●	●	●
Qualified non-teachers			●
What is inspected			
Meeting legal requirements	●	●	●
Provision of learning, support and guidance		●	●
Learning outcomes			●
Leadership/management		●	●
Threshold for failure	●		
What evidence is gathered			
Review of school documentation	●	●	●
Review of school data	●	●	●
Interviews	●	●	●
Lesson observations		●	●
Reporting			
School is given an overall grade			
School is graded on individual standards		●	●
Strengths and limitations of school are identified		●	●
Public school specific reports	●	●	
General thematic reports		●	●
Role of inspectorate post-inspection			
Advising on sanctions	●		
Imposing sanctions	●		●
Providing support	●		
Checking on progress		●	

Reform 2024



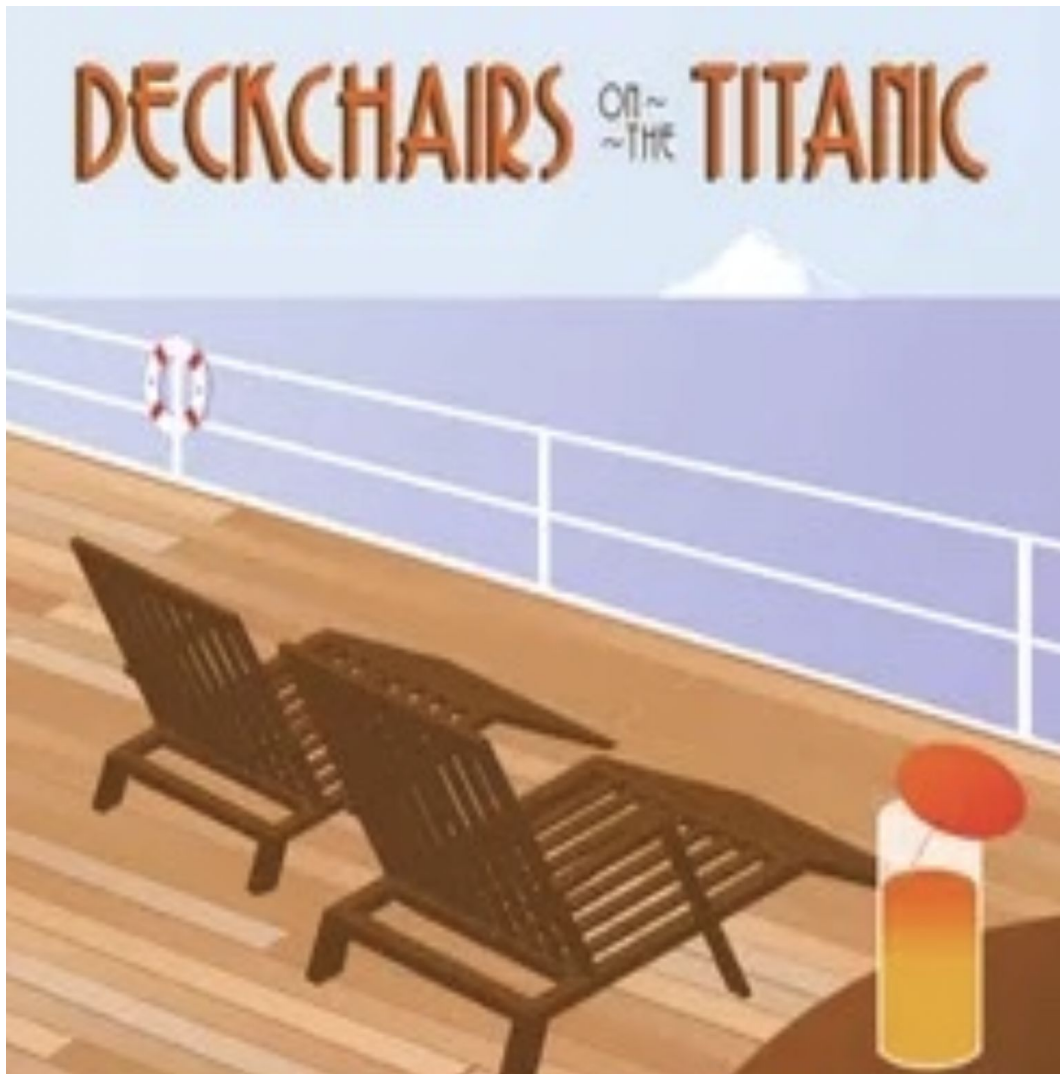
No overall grades – report card

Annual safe-guarding checks with grace period for 'fixes'

New phase appropriate frameworks – curriculum focus stays

Reports take local context into account and emphasise inclusion

Consultation on new 2025 framework



- Pause inspection to allow time for real accountability reform
- Trust teachers and leaders as professionals
- Current system is high-stakes/low trust – this needs to be rebalanced

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