History of Education

Journal of the History of Education Society

ISSN: 0046-760X (Print) 1464-5130 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/thed20

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To cite this article: Russell Grigg (30 Jul 2025): "A Fever of Anxiety and Fear"? Historical Perspectives on School Inspections and Teachers' Well-Being in England and Wales: 1839–2024, History of Education, DOI: 10.1080/0046760X.2025.2525124

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2025.2525124

Published online: 30 Jul 2025.

HISTORY OF EDUCATION
https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2025.2525124

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

"A Fever of Anxiety and Fear"? Historical Perspectives on School Inspections and Teachers' Well-Being in England and Wales: 1839–2024

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the lack of historical perspectives in recent discussions about the impact of school inspections on teachers' well-being. Viewed through the lens of emotional history, it explores the significance of school inspectors' styles and personalities in shaping teachers' emotional experiences of inspection. Based on wide-ranging sources, the findings show that teachers have experienced inspection-related anxiety and fear over a very long period. But they have also enjoyed moments of mutual respect, pride and satisfaction. The paper illustrates how inspectors' roles, styles and personalities interacted and were key to either promoting or undermining teachers' emotional well-being. It also highlights insights from the past to inform current debates about school inspections. The research breaks new ground in offering a long-term perspective and has relevance to those interested in the intersection of inspection practices, teacher well-being, and educational accountability.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 14 March 2025
Accepted 21 June 2025

KEYWORDS
School inspections; teachers; Ofsted; well-being; emotions

Introduction

In 2023 a senior coroner ruled that an adverse school inspection judgment contributed to the deteriorating mental health and suicide of Ruth Perry, the headteacher of Caversham Primary School in Reading.[1] She concluded that the inspectors lacked "fairness, respect and sensitivity," while also raising system-wide concerns around inspection policies and training. In 1888 Francis Albert Silverlock, a 23-year-old teacher at London's Highbury Board School, jumped in front of a train following a poor inspection outcome in which the school managers asked him to resign.[2] He was fearful of an unpopular HMI who had a reputation for wanting his "pound of flesh." These tragedies occurred in different personal and historical contexts but prompted similar outrage in the newspapers. The press held the inspectorate responsible for conducting "terror-inspections" and contributing to a "fever of anxiety and fear" in schools.[3] The extent of such inspection-related suicides in the past needs further investigation, beyond the scope of this paper.[4] The purpose of this study is to provide a long-term perspective of how inspections affected

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teachers' well-being by considering the views of inspectors and those being inspected across a range of school contexts and historical periods.

The paper builds on the author's previous historical research in this field by focusing on the relationships between inspectors and teachers.[5] This is a neglected theme in the literature, which has concentrated mainly on the inspectorate's administrative development, including policy changes and how these were received in schools.[6] Key periods in the history of the inspectorate have been explored, such as the formative 1840s, the challenges of the payment-by-results system introduced in the 1860s and the changes that led to the creation of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in 1992.[7] Lawton and Gordon were among the first to present an evaluative, even-handed history of the inspectorate in England and Wales, admitting, "this has been a difficult book to write."[8] This reflects the complex and often controversial view of inspections as an accurate measure of a school's value. Similar challenges have been documented in the histories of inspectorates across Europe.[9] Cultural sensitivities within inspector-teacher relationships are noted in the respective histories of the inspectorates in Ireland, Wales and Scotland, for example, associated with inspectors' varying attitudes towards teachers' use of Welsh and Gaelic in school.[10] Social histories of elementary schooling have touched upon the idiosyncrasies of the early inspectors, their inconsistencies in methodology and their lack of teaching experience, factors which irritated and, at times, upset teachers.[11] References to inspectors' visits also feature prominently in school histories, although these often amount to little more than a series of verbatim extracts from logbooks.[12] What is lacking is an overview of the inspector--teacher relationship in England and Wales, although this is discussed in the broader international context.[13] While there were different kinds of school inspectors and teachers, the focus here is on Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) and their interactions with teachers in mainstream primary and secondary schools. The organisation and development of the inspectorate is beyond the remit of this paper.[14]

The study has the following research questions: What have been teachers' emotional experiences of inspection since they began in 1839? How have inspectors' styles and personalities affected teachers' emotional well-being? And what can we learn from the past about how inspectors can promote or undermine teachers' well-being? The paper is structured in four parts: the first two discuss theoretical and methodological considerations, the third focuses on the significance of inspectors' approaches and a conclusion draws together insights to inform current debates around inspection.

Theoretical Considerations

The theoretical basis for most studies of the inspectorate is Foucault's thesis of "disciplinary power."[15] This sees the inspectorate as a "regime of truth" which it reinforces through instructions, circulars, procedures, frameworks and handbooks. The inspectorate is portrayed as an instrument of control, likened to Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, the all-seeing circular prison. Over recent decades, there are suggestions that schools entered a post-fabrication world where leaders exercised their own panoptic gaze and policing spirit.[16] Inspector-led conversations with teachers are viewed as a means of codifying "true" knowledge, shaping teachers' understanding of what counts as high-quality education to the detriment of their professional autonomy, creativity and well-

being.[17] One of the criticisms of applying Foucault to the work of the inspectorate is the tendency to underestimate the positive, interactive and enabling aspects of power.[18] Arguably, in mainstream school contexts, power relations have been far more porous and reciprocal than in the "complete and austere institutions" such as prisons and monitorial schools originally conceived by Foucault. As Larsen points out in her account of the Victorian teacher's professional identity, any discussion of direct power over teachers should not overshadow "the more understated and unintended consequences of disciplinary technologies such as advice giving, supportive encouragement, and other seemingly innocuous practices."[19]

In recent years, dissatisfaction with an over-emphasis on rationality and poststructuralist approaches to power has seen an "affective turn" in the humanities.[20] Historians are attracted by "the singular, the everyday, the ephemeral and the unexpected."[21] As Phillips notes, the questions motivating such studies are not "What happened?" but "What did it feel like to be there?"[22] Schools have always been emotive places where frienships, examinations, discipline, uniform, songs, mealtimes, visits, buildings, lessons and teachers evoke strong and lasting feelings. On the premise that inspections have been (and remain) the most significant events in the school calendar, the emotional experiences of participants therefore warrant close attention.

However, historical studies of emotions pose well-rehearsed semantic and methodological challenges.[23] These include differences over the meaning of emotions, whether people shared a set of innate basic emotions (e.g. joy, anger and fear) across time, the role of culture in shaping emotion and accessing relevant sources. While we can never "feel" historical emotions in the same organic way as people did in the past there is potential to explore more closely the relationship between senses, emotions, language, and bodily reactions to gain a deeper, 360-degree understanding of people's past experiences.[24] The strong sensory dimensions to school inspections are illustrated through researchers' field notes from the mid-1990s; they recorded the sounds of schools preparing for inspection, including the mowing of the lawns, the fixing of broken toilets and the rapid fire of the staple gun as teachers brightened up their wall displays.[25] Amidst the clamour, teachers experienced a range of emotions: "pissed off" *disappointment* from not being observed, despite staying up until 3 am in the morning to prepare a lesson; *guilt* about facing parents if the report was poor; a headteacher's *worry* that one weak teacher could affect the whole school; and wide-ranging *fears*, including that of dismissal. Emotions are not isolated, static phenomena but multifaceted and rooted in the social and cultural context of the time. They can be both individually and collectively expressed. This paper defines emotional experiences as the feelings, sensations and appraisals associated with school inspections.

Insights from modern psychology suggest that emotions are how individuals handle situations they find personally significant.[26] This involves subjective experiences (e.g. ideas about inspection), physiological changes (e.g. faster heart rate) and behavioural responses (e.g. laughter, grimace, or raised fist). In addition to the basic emotions of joy, distress, anger, fear, surprise and disgust, appraisal theory also identifies social or higher cognitive emotions (e.g. guilt, shame, pride, admiration) that require awareness of one's own mental state as well as others.[27] Teachers' emotional experiences went beyond their immediate, automatic responses to inspectors' behaviours during their visits. They involved "felt judgements" after the inspection. For example, in 1880 a Lancashire

headteacher reflected on the visit of HMI Alfred Swinburne. This had caused him "infinite disquietude and anxiety beyond endurance."[28] It was not simply that the inspector had lowered the school grant: "I could bear that much better than his cool insolence and endeavours to humiliate me in every possible way." The headteacher's appraisal led him to conclude that Swinburne was not fit for office because he had apparently told school managers that he "liked to *funk* [instill fear or panic] teachers." The headteacher's feelings had moved to relief from "a horrible nightmare" when he heard that the Education Department had relocated Swinburne.

While documentary records lend themselves to emotional discourse analysis, words are not emotions, and they do not necessarily capture how people felt. Language needs to be set in the appropriate social context to understand what lay behind emotional expressions. The word "anxiety," for example, has been widely used in the narrative around school inspections, but it conveyed various meanings depending upon the context. Hence in the same general inspection report for 1854, different inspectors used "anxiety" in various ways: to share teachers' "anxiety" to promote their mutual improvement by forming professional associations; to express "painful anxiety" over children's understanding of grammar; to look forward with "great anxiety" to the awarding of increased financial aid to schools; and to celebrate the "care and anxiety" children demonstrated while cultivating their school garden.[29]

There is also a need to be cautious about the use of prescriptive sources such as inspectors' instructions, codes of conduct, guidance and frameworks. These do afford opportunities to compare over time the norms governing inspection and recommended methodologies. In the early 1990s, Ofsted set out in its codes of conduct for inspectors the expectation that they should "instill confidence, minimize disruption and anxiety and ensure the co-operation of staff."[30] There were echoes here of the first school inspectors when in 1839 they were directed to co-operate with schools and warned that they should not exercise control in their affairs.[31] Yet, inspectors did not always follow their guidance and so there is a need to be mindful of the gap between policy and practice. For instance, researchers reported early Ofsted inspectors who admitted to "bending the rules" to provide schools with general advice which went beyond feedback.[32]

Any discussion of emotions in history needs to examine carefully the contexts within which these were expressed. To illustrate this, consider the scene of an inspector visiting a village school in the 1880s to conduct examinations of pupils and teacher apprentices (pupil teachers). One such apprentice called Percy Bower struggled with pronunciation before the inspector, becoming increasingly sullen and agitated. He raised a "threatening foot," shouted "You silly owd bugger!" and then spat at the inspector before finally jumping out of the window sobbing and threatening, "You wait – I'll kill you!" This extraordinary act of defiance had social consequences. It entered village folklore and Bower was duly ostracised even though, according to the local historian's account, ordinarily he "would not hurt a fly."[33] The story illustrates Rosenwein's notion of "emotional sequences" where one feeling or emotion (anger) followed another (anxiety).[34] The broader evidence confirms that pupil teachers did experience considerable pressures during inspectors' examinations. One group of pupil teachers felt so "worried and harassed" that they lobbied their local school board for support against the inspector leaving one board member to concede: "It is just possible for the string of official supervision to be drawn too tightly."[35]

While this is a lively tale, there are questions about its authenticity. The account is related by a local historian, Harold Mills West. He was a former teacher in the 1940s who attended school in the 1920s. The narrative was crafted based on his grandfather's school memories, alongside his local knowledge of Suffolk village schools, but there is no exact source references or trace of Percy Bower in the census returns, possibly because this was a pseudonym. However, the empirical "truth" of the story is not the main interest given that school memory can be regarded as historical process as well as source material.[36] In psychological terms, Bower's experience represents a classic example of the "fight, flight, and freeze" pattern of human reaction to stressful events.[37] It illustrates the combination of affect, physiological and emotional changes, and the enduring disgust associated with the act of spitting at someone. This emotional episode is also interesting because it goes against the prevailing Edwardian social norms or "display rules" of how to express one's feelings in a school context: for Mills West, shouting, swearing, threatening, running away and spitting were the actions of a "rebel," "scamp" and "peasant." Consequently, respectable parents warned their children to stay clear of Bower, while the teacher was left to reflect on the inspector's report: "Far from satisfactory. The grant is reduced by one-tenth for faults in instruction . . . Discipline is wanting."

The paper focuses on fear and anxiety, most often associated with school inspections. Fear describes an emotional response to perceived danger, whether real or imagined. While fear is a natural means of survival and offers protection, chronic fear can cause physical and mental health problems. Anxiety is a feeling of unease or worry about a *future* threat. Its Latin origin suggests a constriction, choking or squeezing, which is a reminder of how anxiety also has physical symptoms such as a shortage of breath, muscle tension and trembling. HMI Swinburne recalled one anxious schoolmistress fainted during a visit in the 1900s because she had imagined that he was failing her pupils.[38] While uncertainty can be a source of creativity, acute anxiety can be detrimental to morale, relationships and performance.

Emotions are central to "personality," a term originally associated with actors' facemasks in ancient Greek drama. This is appropriate given that school inspections are often interpreted through performance theory where schools are seen to "put on a show" as teachers conceal their "real" emotions.[39] Teachers' animated words, gestures, tears, blushes and other bodily reactions are regarded as "performances" likened to the lines and actions that actors memorise. Helpful here is the concept of emotional styles to describe how individuals experience and share emotions, for example through their choice of words, facial expressions, gestures and appearance.[40] For inspectors, the art of communication was not a matter of words alone. As one inspector explained in 1960 when addressing teachers:

> there was the inflection, quality and timbre of the voice; gesture, facial expression, tempo, and the occasion of the communication. What was not said might be as important as what one did say. Language cannot be separated from the expression of social behaviour.[41]

This does not necessarily imply insincerity but highlights how feelings were guided by prevailing norms.

The importance of the inspectors' personality in shaping teachers' feelings during inspections has long been recognised. John Leese's (1950) *Personalities and Power in English Education* included fifteen vignettes of men inspectors whose strong personalities shaped both the inspectorate's policy and practice. He missed the opportunity to discuss

women HMI such as Maude Lawrence, appointed in 1905 as the first Chief Women Inspector of the Board of Education. She established a reputation of inspecting with "sound common sense" and was widely respected for "her honesty of purpose, and her courage, together with a remarkable power of dealing with people of all sorts."[42]

Methodology and Sources

The paper's methodology draws on secondary literature and archival research. The use of a broad range of sources helps to mitigate some of the interpretive challenges presented by each. There is a forensic need to "read against the grain" sources such as inspection and school-based records by questioning gaps, silences and contradictions. Or, as Rousmaniere put it, "looking sidewards into the picture presented to us in order to identify teachers' [and inspectors'] motivations, feelings, and reactions."[43]

In the nineteenth century, school logbooks were the main records reviewed by inspectors during their annual visits and for this reason they carry particular significance. A summary of the inspector's report was recorded by the manager or headteacher who was commanded by the Education Department to avoid expressing their personal views or feelings. Through detailed reading, it is possible to identify when this direction was ignored.[44] In 1893, for example, the headmistress of a Devon school complained that the "fate of a whole year's work may hang on the humour or caprice, and absolutely on the stroke of a pen, of some Assistant Inspector."[45] Despite being formally warned for inefficiency, she continued her entries and wondered why inspectors were welcomed as "friends" rather than with "suspicion." She had no sympathy from her successor, however, who was angered at taking over a classroom filled with "dirt, confusion, and disorder … with not one redeeming point." Such logbook analysis is a painstaking business. Around ninety-five per cent of the inspection entries in the sample for this study amounted to little more than a verbatim summary of the inspector's annual report. In a handful of cases, however, headteachers were critical of the pressures associated with the inspection process or wider education system. For example, the headteacher at one school in South Wales expressed his fear that parents were withdrawing children just before the inspection which would reduce the school grant considerably "and the Master for doing his duty again be the sufferer."[46]

The voluminous annual district inspectors' reports (1840–1899) published within the Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education (CCE) were searched using keywords for basic and social emotions. Personal correspondence, diaries, inspection handbooks and guidance were purposively sampled at the Jack Kitching Archive. Twenty-three inspectors' biographical accounts (1840–1960) were also consulted alongside collections of teachers' life stories.[47] Maclure's insightful history of the inspector was informed by the personal testimonies of 200 inspectors, MPs and civil servants, dating back to the 1930s.[48] While biographical sources provide a personal dimension to inspections, they are not first-hand accounts. Inspectors' biographies were mostly written in retirement, often when differing social and cultural norms operated, and subject to literary conventions. As Brown notes, "the autobiographical individual offers no single version of a life, simply different versions of themselves at different times, in different contexts, and to different questioners."[49]

Both biographical material and oral history include a negativity bias that ensures that painful events stay longer in the memory and are recalled more often than pleasurable ones.[50] Llewelyn remembered as a boy trying to comfort at home his crying mother, a teacher in South Wales, after she was docked pay for the poor performance of her pupils: "Soon we can go to work in the pit. But of this, she would not hear."[51] Childhood memories afford a neglected perspective on inspections.[52] Developmental psychologists have shown that people's earliest memories are often the most cognitively and emotionally significant ones.[53] Roberts recalled his Edwardian schooldays when "year after year inspectors came to condemn our great sooty edifice . . . They damned the unqualified staff, the stinking rooms, the appalling cultural results . . . a place of educational ill repute."[54] However, there is some evidence to suggest that late Victorian classrooms visited by inspectors were more enjoyable than the caricatures depicted in popular culture[55] Roberts himself admitted that he was impressed with the inspectors and admired their focus:

> Like Dutch uncles they went round the classes, treating us with a sort of old-world courtesy, always enquiring, and making us feel that, in school at least, girls and boys were the people that mattered.[56]

Abel Jones is also remembered as a schoolboy with positive interactions with "a friendly inspector" who told jokes that made him giggle.[57] Many years later, as HMI, Jones thought that this jocular style was a ploy to test the discipline of the class. Whatever the substance behind such a claim, inspectors spoke and acted in different ways according to the audience to elicit the information they required.[58]

For broader context, online searches of the British Newspaper Archive and Welsh Newspapers Online were conducted using emotional words, "school inspection" and synonymous terms (e.g. HMI, Ofsted, Estyn). Despite advances in technology, the limitations of such collections should be noted: only a small fraction of British newspapers is available in digital format; it is important not to conflate newspaper readership with the entire population; and such sources are generally framed by the newsroom mantra, "If it bleeds, it leads."[59] In recent times, senior inspectors have been critical of the media, left-wing academics and certain headteachers for escalating "natural anxiety into a neurosis" and stirring "group paranoia" about school inspections.[60] Newspaper reports need to be placed in context to better understand the complexities of teachers' emotional and psychological well-being during inspections. For instance, in 2000 there were several highly charged newspaper headlines around teacher suicides linked to Ofsted inspections.[61] However, at the time of these suicide reports, the National Union of Teachers found through its research that most schools were satisfied with the way inspections were carried out and that Ofsted dealt swiftly with any "rogue inspectors."[62] Teachers themselves have complained about the lack of even-handed news reporting. While in 2007 there were reports of "Pressure by Inspectors" "Driving Teachers to Suicide" and "Stressed Head Teacher Found Dead on Eve of Inspection," teachers also "felt oppressed by excessive and ill-informed media criticism."[63]

Inspectors' Roles, Styles and Teachers' Well-Being

How HMI approached inspections was shaped by their roles. The earliest HMI were expected to promote education by sharing effective practices, encouraging school

construction, and emphasising the importance of schooling. In 1927 Selby-Bigge, Permanent Secretary to the Board of Education, considered that they were "as much missionaries as inspectors."[64] As civil servants, HMI also undertook an administrative role. They negotiated settlements, contributed to working parties, handled enquiries, and published reports. At times, inspectors found reporting an emotionally draining experience. Sneyd-Kynnersley considered it "a serious strain on memory, judgment, and conscience" while Abel Jones recalled "Many a Saturday at midnight, my wife would be typing my reports, to try and get a clear Sunday."[65] While both the content and style of reports were subject to internal scrutiny, the tradition of professional independence meant that HMI reported upon what they saw and not what others wanted them to report. For teachers, of course, news of reports triggered a wide range of emotions. Keyword analysis of primary sources and research studies reveals that disappointment, anxiety, frustration, surprise, guilt and shame were, not surprisingly, closely associated with ill-disposed inspectors and negative reports. Feelings of pride, happiness, joy, satisfaction and relief followed from positive outcomes, although such binaries were not inevitable. Occasionally, teachers complained about the manner of inspections even when reports were favourable.

A third role for HMI was to act as advisers. HMI Richard Faulknor Curry was welcomed as "a friend and voluntary counsellor" by teachers in Wiltshire and Bath during the 1900s.[66] But the advisory role has proved a contentious one. In submitting evidence to a parliamentary Select Committee in 1968, the National Association of Schoolmasters argued that "advice to individual teachers had little value" and insisted on drawing "an uncrossable line between inspection and advice."[67] On the other hand, John Blackie argued that throughout his period as HMI (1933–1966) most of his colleagues would have agreed that inspection and advice should not be separated: "to advise without first of all having inspected, or to set up as consultants without free discussion first, would be tolerably arrogant." Wyatt warned of the difficulties in balancing advice and inspection:

> The delicate task of deciding in every case first when and where he should attempt to give a lead, and when it is wiser to withhold his personality and to suffer what he feels to be the worse rather than to advise the immediately better … But the imposition of advice from without, unless it is intelligently appropriated, brings either opposition or blind acquiescence and misconstruction.[68]

While most teachers appreciated well-intention advice, the function could prove problematic and a strain on schools when inspectors pushed fads and "peculiarities" emanating from personal opinions.[69] As inspectors shared their passions with teachers, the danger was that teachers who applied (or misapplied) such advice then found subsequent inspectors holding different views, resulting in confusion, anger and mistrust among teachers. Occasionally, enthusiastic inspectors went too far and conducted inspections somewhere between "a revivalist meeting and a high sales talk."[70] Nonetheless, among teachers, the advisory role of the inspectorate has had longstanding support.

This was in keeping with the conciliatory and supportive tone set by the *Handbook of Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers* (Board of Education, 1905–1937), which drew heavily on HMI experience and intelligence. By 1944 HMI and teachers enjoyed "a civilized, professional relationship" and this continued after the war, cemented by HMI-

led specialist courses on wide-ranging subjects.[71] The inspections took the form of annual one-day routine visits, which were mainly advisory in nature. By the 1970s and early 1980s, there were even discussions about whether the inspectorate should be recast as a "professional advisory body."[72] However, the Rayner Report (1982) concluded that HMI had already contributed a great deal of advice to the education system and an over-reliance on this was detrimental to the advisory services provided by local education authorities.[73] In 1999, the House of Commons Select Committee on the work of the inspectorate concluded that it was not Ofsted's role to provide formal advice or school development. Rather, inspectors were regarded as "catalysts for change and improvement" through professional dialogue.[74] While the phrase "professional dialogue" gained popularity, at times it was misunderstood as a form of free consultancy instead of an opportunity to discuss evidence that underpinned inspectors' judgements.

A fourth and most controversial HMI role was that of examiner. This was more prevalent during periods of high-stakes accountability when inspection outcomes had a direct bearing on the professional reputation of schools and teachers. Evidence from school records, newspaper reports and periodicals, alongside inspectors' biographies, point to a deterioration in the inspector-teacher relationship during the payment by results era (1862–1895). In 1890, a headteacher in the Wye valley shared his anxieties about his inspection: "Very bad attendance this week. I feel heartless in trying to continue with such irregular attendance, and such discouraging report from the Inspector is enough to eat the life out of a poor fellow." The headteacher also confided that his pupils feared the examination day as it drew nearer to the extent that several declared "they will not come to school again because they fear the Inspector."[75] Yet, there were sympathetic inspectors. John Wilson, who inspected schools in the Scottish Highlands and islands, sought to console young teachers coping with loneliness and mental exhaustion under the "cast iron" code.[76] The Cross Commissioners (1888) pointed out that if inspectors were to be seen as helpers rather than mere critics, they needed 'a pleasant manner and sympathy' so that each school could "display itself freely and naturally."[77] With the relaxation of this regime in 1895, inspectors were viewed "no longer [as] omnipotent controllers of Grant and arbiters of fate, they assumed more human proportions."[78] However, this "sudden change" thesis has been questioned with suggestions that relationships developed in a more gradual and nuanced manner.[79]

While inspectors exercised more leeway in their judgements than is commonly thought, there is no doubting the general sense of relief among teachers and many HMI when payment by results ended. They welcomed the lifting of pecuniary pressures although the increased professional autonomy did not necessarily translate into exciting, adventurous lessons for learners. Edmund Holmes, who retired as chief inspector in 1910, reflected that having been on the path of mechanical obedience for 33 years, the old teachers were "helpless and hopeless" to change.[80] Leese makes an important point in highlighting how "the stimulus of fear had gone, and there was nothing to take its place."[81] The chief inspector had an important responsibility in setting the tone for how inspectors should relate to the teaching profession. Their styles have varied considerably, from the transformational Owen M. Edwards who led the inspectorate in Wales (1907–1920), to Ofsted's acerbic Chris Woodhead (1994–2000).

In carrying out their various roles, inspectors had considerable independence. As one inspector put it in 1949, "you can inspect a school in almost anyway you please" as "there

is no uniform model of inspection and style."[82] Inspectors have always received guidance on how to inspect and were expected to follow the mantra of reporting "without fear or favour."[83] Such guidance, however, was mediated through a range of personalities and styles that inevitably brought tensions. Different cultural practices emerged, for example relating to how much time individual inspectors spent observing lessons, and these proved a source of contention within the profession. It is also important to acknowledge that there are many historical examples of school managers and teachers contributing to their own stress by failing to address longstanding issues around underperformance. Moreover, as school logbooks testify, there were many variables beyond the control of teachers and inspectors that influenced the emotional experience of inspection. These included the weather, disgruntled parents and outbreaks of sickness.[84] Inspectors also had their own pressures to bear, including accommodation and travel arrangements, which undoubtedly influenced their mood and approach.

Setting these factors aside, Figure 1 focuses on how inspectors' roles and styles had a bearing on teachers' emotional well-being. It is partly informed by the work of Dr Arthur George Hughes, Chief Inspector at the London County Council. From the 1930s, Hughes co-authored several highly influential books on teaching and education psychology.[85] He suggested a scale of good, neutral and bad relationships, ranging from love to fear and hatred, through friendliness, respect, tolerance, indifference, apathy and hostility. He admitted that this was over-simplified given that feelings overlap and vary according to context. Nonetheless, the scale does afford insight into how one leading inspector conceived relationships with teachers and is a starting point for a broader discussion around the emotions associated with this.

According to Hughes, good relationships were characterised by love, friendship and respect. Love might not seem the obvious emotion to associate with school inspectors' approach to school visits. However, the historical records show that many inspectors held a principled form of love, namely a desire to make a difference in advancing education within the schools they visited. At times, this meant speaking out on behalf of teachers

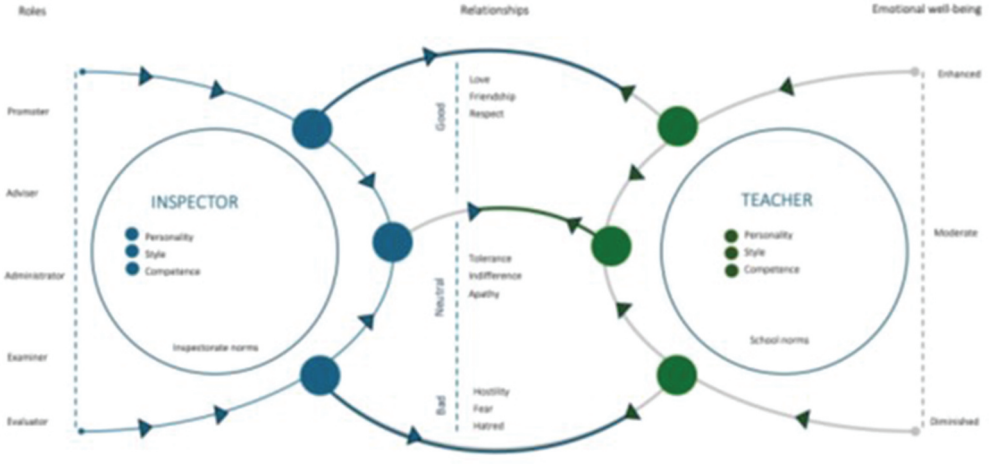

Figure 1. The dynamics between inspectors and teachers during school inspections.

while on other occasions they were highly critical of teaching practices, although keen to distinguish between teachers and teaching. Friendliness and approachability are often mentioned in the primary source material as characteristics of inspectors most valued by teachers. One Scottish inspector upon his retirement in 1886 attributed his successful relationships with teachers to the dropping of "officialism for friendship."[86] This kind of friendship was not of the simulated kind, but "based on respect, irrespective of [teachers'] particular qualities, temperament, character or intelligence."[87] Such relationships were strengthened when inspectors led teacher conferences and workshops outside of the school setting.

Hughes considered that mutual respect could be promoted if teachers looked beyond the machinery of inspection to see inspectors as individuals who experienced their own "long hours of nervous strain and hard work," while calling for "more inspectors with intuitive appreciation of the real possibilities of many different classroom situations."[88] For example, Christian Schiller was passionate about social justice and took a genuine interest in the school communities he visited. He began his inspection experience in Liverpool's dockside infant schools during the 1926 General Strike "where ragged children, silent, hungry and regimented, crowded sixty, seventy or even more to a class in grim, dirty, buildings."[89] Schiller stood out from his male colleagues who either disdained infant visits or saw this as the preserve of women inspectors.

The most appreciated inspectors demonstrated sensitivity by putting teachers and children at ease. Their emotional style included "small talk," positive non-verbal gestures, the sharing of personal anecdotes, and open-ended questions. They invested time in establishing open and ongoing communication with teachers. In his pioneering guide to conducting school inspections, published in 1876, Fearon recommended regular dialogue or "conferences" with the headteacher so that there were no surprises at the end of the inspection. He also shared a strategy that he found effective, namely if inspectors detected any nerves among teachers, the inspector "should find something in the school about which he can say a kindly and cheery word."[90] Such opportunism denoted the agility of the most effective inspectors who responded to the school circumstances that they faced.

At a strategic level, the appointment of former headteachers as inspectors' assistants (from 1863) and full HMI (from 1892) were important steps in building relationships with schools. The Cross Commission (1886), set up to explore the effectiveness of the Elementary Education Acts in England and Wales, reiterated this by recommending the appointment of well-qualified men with elementary school experience to the inspectorate. Even so, such appointments bred resentment and jealousy among some teachers. One anonymous Irish inspector, writing during a period of growing teacher animosity, described the "propaganda of hate" directed towards a body of men many of whom, ironically, were chosen from the rank of teachers.[91] In the modern era, Estyn's deployment of peer inspectors from current senior school leaders has been widely applauded for enhancing teachers' understanding of inspection processes and building professional capacity.[92]

The relationship between teachers and inspectors was sometimes characterised by tolerance and a degree of indifference. At times, inspectors' bureaucratic style contributed to relationships that were functional and courteous but with little personal interaction. This was partly shaped by how inspectors viewed the purpose of inspection. Matthew Arnold, the most famous nineteenth-century school inspector, maintained

that "inspection exists for the sake of finding out and reporting the truth, and for this above all."[93] An objectivist view of knowledge required inspectors to adopt standardised approaches and a detached stance. For his part, Arnold was more concerned with literary pursuits than inspections. As one biographer put it, "He began as a naïve H.M.I. and became, in time, a mediocre one."[94] Yet, somewhat counterintuitively, in Arnold's case this did not work against the interests of teachers because of his generosity in awarding passes and his staunch criticism of payment by results. In 1861, the Newcastle Commissioners recommended the appointment of general supervisors to monitor the consistency of HMI judgements and argued that the inspectors had too much independence, being "practically almost uncontrolled even by the central office."[95]

More generally, relationships with teachers improved when district inspectors undertook annual pastoral-style visits after the Second World War. This meant that they became more familiar with their school contexts and the demands placed on teachers. Martin Roseveare, the much-respected Senior Chief Inspector (1944–1957), placed an emphasis on winning teachers' trust through "politeness, courtesy, impartiality, fairness and openness."[96] Robin Tanner aimed to apply his mantra of "doing good as he went" around Oxfordshire during the 1950s and 1960s: "Certainly, the greater part of my time, especially on my many pastoral visits, was spent in listening, in sharing problems and interests so that I could identify myself with them, and in giving guidance and lending a hand."[97]

HMI then moved away from regular full school inspections towards national surveys and sampled visits, which meant that some schools were not inspected for many years thereby losing personal connections with HMI. One headteacher recalled that between his first teaching post in 1969 and his appointment in 1996, he never experienced a full inspection and was never observed teaching.[98]

Hughes recognised that poor relationships were characterised by hostility, fear and hatred. One provincial Scottish journal explained: "The Government inspector comes with high authority . . . his visits are arranged for as regularly and earnestly as if he were a 'Spring Cleaning'."[99] In such circumstances, as Hughes conceded, teachers may feel "extremely provoked" or even contempt for those who they regard as having no appreciation for the realities of teaching. A few individual inspectors were hated by teachers, mostly because of their manner. The Revd David James Stewart was probably the most unpopular nineteenth-century HMI: "the man who contrived to acquire the bitterest hatred among the London teachers" who, "whatever his other personal characteristics, seems to have delighted in humiliating small boys and girls and their unfortunate teachers."[100] Literary works have caricatured such inspectors as portraying an "air of aloof disdain" who through their interrogations left a trail of whimpering children and trembling teachers.[101] According to Sturt, "the fussy, the cranky, the cruel [inspectors] all found a perfect field for the exercise of their defects."[102] Such representations should not detract from the efforts of conscientious HMI's who struggled to come to terms with monitoring education policies they opposed. As one inspector put it quite openly in his report of 1873: "I feel as if I were writing a dispatch in the midst of a battle, so dire is the din of educational conflict around."[103]

The greatest source of frustration among teachers was the perceived inconsistency among inspectors, both in their approach and judgements. The nineteenth-century inspectorate made periodical attempts to strengthen quality assurance

arrangements, for example through the holding of conferences and the introduction of grade criteria. However, it was not until the 1980s that more rigorous guidance and induction arrangements for new inspectors were introduced, including residential training and a programme of workshops that covered wide-ranging elements, such as teamwork and writing style.[104] These developments were indicative of a new "audit society" which saw a growing emphasis on the use of quantitative data, performance indicators, league tables and measurable outcomes ("datafication"), suggestive of a more formulaic approach to inspections. One consequence of this was a recasting of the inspector's role as evaluator equipped with objective metrics to "measure" successful teaching, not dissimilar to the experiences of inspectors under the payment by results era. Commentators framed this as a conflict of values between the technocratic idea that inspection is about measuring the observable against set criteria and teachers' more holistic and humanistic vision of education.[105] In practice, Woods and Jeffrey found through interviews with lead inspectors that they sought to provide a more humane approach and were keen to avoid "cold, analytical, inscrutable judgements kept hidden from teachers" opting for "more openness, more feedback, more negotiability, more sensitivity than might be expected from a rigid application of the [inspection] framework."[106] MPs were among those who called upon inspectors to give less weight to test results and focus more on their professional judgment through lesson observation.[107]

The creation of Ofsted brought a radical change in the inspector-teacher relationship. HMI was famously accused by Kenneth Baker, Secretary of State for Education (1986–-1989), as being the "priesthood of progressive ideology," colluding with teachers and schools, Left-wing local education authorities and university academics.[108] As a new, non-ministerial government department, Ofsted reduced the number of HMI and brought in contracted teams of inspectors, with a shift in expectations around monitoring, reporting and assessing "quality" against criteria enshrined in handbooks. Lee and Fitz argue that this eroded the inspectorate as an "interpretive community" with its shared norms and professional practices.[109] Concerns were expressed around the quality of private inspectors compared to HMI. The changes also generated a sway of publications, alongside training courses and resources, advising schools on how best to prepare for their inspections. Many included a degree of scaremongering with the metaphor of "survival" being the most prominent.[110] One author gloomily declared: "Probably nothing has inspired more bitterness, resentment, anxiety, perhaps even fear in the profession." Teachers were to brace themselves for an "ordeal," "strain and tension," "trials and hardships," "punitive" and "debilitating" measures, "alien," "hectoring and unsympathetic" inspectors and so on.[111]

This was not hyperpole, at least according to several case studies of Ofsted inspections during the 1990s and 2000s. Teachers expressed concern over inspectors' interrogative questioning, standoffish body language and lack of approachability. They experienced "fear, anguish, anger, despair, depression, humiliation, grief and guilt."[112] Significantly, this was not a case of teachers experiencing negative feelings because their inspection reports were poor, or positive feelings where outcomes were good. The researchers found similar emotional responses in schools irrespective of their inspection report outcomes. While a few teachers spoke

about the "excitement" of inspections and most headteachers characterised relationships between staff and inspectors as "professional," there was a consensus that inspections added to teachers' stress during a period of national curriculum reforms.[113]

An insight into an individual's emotional experiences of inspection is afforded by a secondary school deputy headteacher's diary from 2000. He began by expressing his worries that the inspectors would not understand the challenging context of the school and was saddened to see "very good teachers paralysed by anxiety." On Monday, he found that the teachers' tensions were transferred to the pupils who became increasingly excited. On Tuesday, he lamented that his fate was "in the hands of others, the pupils and inspectors, and they are both unpredictable." On Wednesday, he noticed that many of the staff bore "faint smiles" although one colleague burst into tears on being told she was good. By Thursday, the staff are "exhausted, emotionally drained and irritable – and so are some of the pupils." The Friday 'passes in a blur' as the deputy headteacher admits, "I am close to tears as the week draws to a close and I consider the stresses and absurdities of it all." He concludes by raising a fundamental issue: "Is all this grief really necessary to affect change?"

The question strikes at the heart of the inspectorate's longstanding challenge of how to carry out inspections to identify schools' strengths and areas for development, while evoking the minimal degree of fear and anxiety. The House of Commons Select Committee discussed the work of Ofsted and suggested fostering the notion of "optimal tension" between inspectors and teachers so that their relationship was neither too stressful nor too close.[114] Over the past 25 years, the UK inspectorates have worked hard to achieve this through a raft of measures including: tightening quality assurance processes, dispelling persistent myths around what inspectors expect, involving school leaders ("nominees") within inspection teams, and through engagement events such as Ofsted's recent "Big Listen" campaign.[115] The recent replacement of single-word headline school inspection judgements with report cards is designed to ease anxieties and provide a more holistic view of a school's performance, although whether this will make much difference to the inspection experience remains to be seen.[116] In Wales, Estyn has an ambitious vision that by 2027 all schools will welcome its inspectors as "willing partners" in the education system, rather than viewed as being from "the Dark Side."[117]

Conclusion

This paper affords several insights into the history of school inspections. Foremost, the inspector's style, personality and competence were key to teachers' emotional well-being. Feedback from schools and the inspectorate's own literature made this clear time and time again. This was summed up in 1950 by the Ministry of Education's advice to HMI that everything they do and say is given weight by teachers. Hence, their most important duty was to leave the school with the impression that they "have spoken with fairness and deliberation, listened sympathetically and with understanding to what has been said."[118] The historical records suggest that most HMI adhered to such advice. There are enough historical examples of sensitive inspectors to offer something of a corrective to their conventional depiction as cold, aloof, unsympathetic figures. The inspector's role certainly required a degree of emotional distance to ensure credible independence in the

accountability process. This fed the nineteenth-century caricature, which was compounded by the lack of teaching experience which proved a longstanding frustration for teachers.

Nonetheless, the most skilled HMI were able to enhance teachers' well-being through their readiness to listen, ongoing dialogue, and a willingness to reflect the school's context fairly in their reports. This left teachers feeling understood and fairly treated. For the inspectorate, there are implications here for recruitment, professional development and quality assurance, to ensure that there is a recurrent focus on identifying and fostering inspectors' social and emotional competencies. Inspectors' relationships with schools were at their strongest when pastoral visits and regular professional conversations were central to their programmes. The more conscientious teachers thus viewed inspections as continuing learning experiences rather than one-off, infrequent external events. In recent times there are optimistic signs that the inspectorates are moving towards more collaborative and transparent models of accountability designed to ease pressures on schools. While a degree of inspection-related anxiety and fear are inevitable, these emotions can be a springboard for positive experiences provided sufficient attention is given to *how* inspections are conducted.

Notes

1. *Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, Ruth Perry: Prevention of future deaths report*, December 19, 2023.
2. Betts, "My Boys Did Rather Badly," 17–23.
3. "Distressing Suicide of a Teacher," *South Wales Echo*, March 10, 1888; "The Ruth Perry tragedy must mark the end of Ofsted's reign of fear," December 10, 2023.
4. Reports include: "Suicide of a School Board Teacher," *North Wales Chronicle*, April 28, 1888; "Critical inspectors' reports could trigger suicides," *The Times*, June 1, 1989; "Tragic teacher felt 'best not enough,'" *Sunday Life*, March 26, 2000; "Stressed headteacher found dead," *The Telegraph*, July 12, 2007; "Heads to wear black armbands when Ofsted visit after 'sensationalist' rating blamed for suicide," *The Telegraph*, March 21, 2023; *The Independent*, December 10, 2023; At least eight teachers' suicides have been linked to Ofsted inspections. Waters, "Ofsted."
5. Grigg, "Wading Through Children's Tears."
6. Boothroyd, *History of the Inspectorate*.
7. Dunford, *Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools Since 1944*.
8. Lawton and Gordon, *HMI*.
9. Ozga, "History and Development of the Inspectorates."
10. Coolahan and O'Donovan, *A History of Ireland's School Inspectorate*; Bone, *School Inspection in Scotland*; Keane, *Watchdogs or Visionaries?*
11. Horn, *Education in Rural England*; Hurt, *Education in Evolution*; Lowndes, *Silent Social Revolution*.
12. Exceptions include: Silver and Silver, *Education of the Poor*; Marsden, *Educating the Respectable*.
13. Evertsson, "School Inspection and State-Initiated Professionalisation"; Łapot "In Search for Historic Sources"; Baxter, *School Inspectors*.
14. See Dunford, *Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools Since 1944*.
15. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Foucault, "Governmentality."
16. Clapham, "Post-Fabrication and Putting on a Show,"
17. Perryman, "Inspection and the Fabrication of Professional and Performative Processes."
18. Haugaard, "Foucault and Power."

19. Larsen, *Making and Shaping of the Victorian Teacher*.
20. Clough, *The Affective Turn*.
21. Sobe, "Researching Emotion and Affect," 692.
22. Phillips, "On the Advantage and Disadvantage."
23. Barclay, *History of Emotions*.
24. Smith, *Sensing the Past*; Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*; Barclay, *History of Emotions*.
25. Jeffrey and Woods, *Testing Teachers*.
26. Niedenthal and Ric, *Psychology of Emotion*.
27. Mather and Fanelow, "Editorial Overview."
28. "School Inspection: Grievances of Teachers," *Ayr Advertiser*, May 13, 1880.
29. CCE Report for 1854, 494, 508, 518, 548.
30. OFSTED, *Guidance on the Inspection*, 18.
31. Boothroyd, *History of the Inspectorate*, 3.
32. Centre for the Evaluation of Public Policy and the Helix Consulting Group, *OFSTED System of School Inspection*, Appendix 3.
33. Mills West, *Suffolk Country Schooldays*, 22.
34. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feelings*.
35. "Notes on the Swansea School Board," *Western Mail*, June 7, 1877.
36. Yanes-Cabrera, *School Memory*.
37. Skinner and Edge, "Self-Determination, Coping, and Development."
38. Swinburne, *Memories of a School Inspector*.
39. "Education: 'The inspection lies in wait for us - like an execution'," *The Independent*, May 11, 2000.
40. Gammerl, "Emotional Styles."
41. "Teachers warned: Don't produce a race of bores," *Chelsea News and General Advertiser*, September 23, 1960.
42. "Obituary: Dame Maude Lawrence," *The Times*, January 13, 1933.
43. Rousmaniere, *City Teachers*, 8.
44. Wright, "Teachers, Family and Community"; Drake, *School and Community*.
45. Sellman, *Devon Village Schools*, 110.
46. Pendoylan Church in Wales School Logbook, October 25, 1873 (Glamorgan Record Office, E/SE/43/1/1).
47. Goodson, *Studying Teachers' Lives*; Thomas, *Teachers' Stories*.
48. Maclure, *Inspectors' Calling*.
49. Brown, *Postmodernism for Historians*, 122.
50. Vaish, "Not All Emotions are Created Equal," 383–403.
51. Llewelyn, *Sand in the Glass*, 10.
52. del Mar del Pozo Andrés, "From Personal Memories to Public Histories of Education."
53. Reese and Fivush, "Development of Collective Remembering."
54. Roberts, *Ragged Schooling*, 141.
55. Gardner, "Oral History in Education."
56. Roberts, *Ragged Schooling*, 149.
57. Jones, *From an Inspector's Bag*.
58. Barron, *Social World of the School*.
59. Robertson, "Negativity Drives Online News Consumption," 812–22.
60. Woodhead, *Class War*, 112; "Point to paranoia," *TES*, November 25, 2017.
61. "Teacher Killed Herself After Rap by Ofsted," *The Mirror*, April 7, 2000; "Stress in Classroom 'is Killing Teachers," *Daily Telegraph*, April 25, 2000.
62. "The inspectors who failed the test," *The Observer*, April 9, 2000.
63. "Pressure by inspectors 'driving teachers to suicide'," *The Telegraph*, April 10, 2007; "Stressed headteacher found dead," *The Telegraph*, July 12, 2007.
64. Selby-Bigge, *Board of Education*, 123.
65. Jones, *From an Inspector's Bag*, 80; Sneyd-Kynnersley, *HMI- Some Passages*, 275–6.

66. Anon, *Richard Faulknor Curry*, 7.
67. Blackie, *Inspecting and the Inspectorate*, 61.
68. Wyatt, *Occasional Reports No. 7*, 40.
69. "National Teachers and the Inspectorate," *National Teacher and Irish Educational Journal*, December 11, 1891.
70. *Inspectors' Bulletin*, September 3, 1949. Jack Kitching Archive (JKA), KIT 2/3/2.
71. Blackie, *Inspecting and the Inspectorate*, 25.
72. DES, *HMI Today and Tomorrow*, 34.
73. DES, *Study of HM Inspectorate in England and Wales.*
74. House of Commons, *Education and Employment*, para 99.
75. Fletcher, *Portrait of the Wye Valley*, 55.
76. Wilson, *Tales and Travels*, 110.
77. The Cross Commission, *Final Report of the Commissioners Appointed*, 324, 325.
78. Sellman, *Devon Village Schools*, 112.
79. Dunford, *Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools*, 47.
80. Holmes, *What Is and What Might Be*, 112.
81. Leese, *Personalities and Power*, 254–5.
82. *Inspectors' Bulletin*, September 2, 1949. JKA.
83. DES, *HM Inspectors Today*, 3.
84. Wheeler, *Spare the Rod.*
85. Hughes and Hughes, *Learning and Teaching*; Hughes and Hughes, *Education.*
86. "Presentation to Mr T.A. Stewart. School Inspector," *Aberdeen Journal*, March 29, 1886.
87. *Inspectors' Bulletin*, September 1949. JKA.
88. Hughes and Hughes, *Education*, 254, 256.
89. Griffith-Beale, *Christian Schiller in His Own Words*, ix.
90. Fearon, *School Inspection*. However, one contemporary reviewer of his book pointed out that a good deal of the ill-feeling between inspectors and teachers was due to the lack of consideration on behalf of the former.
91. "School Inspectors. The Attitude of Teachers," *The Irish Independent*, November 2, 1916.
92. Donaldson, *Learning Inspectorate.*
93. Marvin, *Reports on Elementary Schools*.
94. Honan, *Matthew Arnold*, 258.
95. Newcastle Report, *State of Popular Education in England*, 230.
96. Maclure, *Inspectors' Calling*, xxxii.
97. Tanner, *Double Harness*, 140.
98. Noakes, *Early History of Worple Road Infant.*
99. "An inspector of Schools Sixty Years ago," *Banffshire Journal*, June 12, 1894.
100. Maclure, *History of Education in London*, 64.
101. Ashby, *Joseph Ashby of Tysoe*, 18; Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, 192.
102. Sturt, *Education of the People.*
103. CCE Report for 1874, 216.
104. KIT 2/3/4/29. JKA.
105. Cullingford, *An Inspector Calls*.
106. Woods and Jeffrey, "Choosing Positions."
107. House of Commons, *Children, Schools and Families Committee*, 6.
108. Baker, *Turbulent Years*, 168.
109. Lee and Fitz, "HMI and OFSTED."
110. Harpley, *You Can Survive Your Early Years Ofsted Inspection*; Findlater, *How to Survive an Ofsted Inspection.*
111. Laar, *Surviving School Inspection*.
112. Jeffrey and Woods, *Testing Teachers*, 123, 133.
113. Osborn, *What Teachers Do*; Centre for the Evaluation of Public Policy and the Helix Consulting Group, *OFSTED System of School Inspection.*
114. House of Commons, *Select Committee on Education and Employment*, 21.

115. Ofsted, *Hearing Feedback, Accepting Criticism*.
116. Chantler-Hicks, "Ofsted Report Cards Verdict."
117. Seith, "Estyn Chief."
118. Ministry of Education, *Education in 1949*, 96.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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