
From the editor



So, having been exempt from inspections for an average of 13 years, 83 per cent of the 371 “outstanding” schools that faced full inspections last year were downgraded.

The data was presented as a rooting out of falling standards: 62 per cent of schools dropped to “good”, 17 per cent dropped to “requires improvement” and 4 per cent fell to “inadequate”. The insinuation was that schools had been parading as “outstanding” without the goods to back it up, and the true picture had now been revealed. Thank God for Ofsted.

There are a lot of problems with this version of events.

Firstly, coverage of this data in the mainstream press made it sound as though these schools had dodged inspection. This decision was, in fact, out of their hands: their data suggested there were no problems and the government had decided that this meant they could be left alone. Most heads of those schools felt uneasy without a full inspection. One – whose school had not been inspected for 15 years – told me the situation was “ludicrous”.

Secondly, if a school has fallen three grades yet there were no red flags in the data and no safeguarding concerns reported to Ofsted, hence no override of the exemption, something seems hugely amiss. Was the data wrong? Did Ofsted simply feel the route to good pupil outcomes was inappropriate? Are the reporting processes for safeguarding – or for concerned parents – not fit for purpose? Or is the inspection process at fault?

Thirdly, there is an important difference between primary and secondary school outcomes: primary schools were twice as likely to be downgraded as secondary schools. So, were primary schools handed out “outstanding” grades too easily a decade ago? It seems unlikely that this would occur on a systemic level. Has primary education simply gone off a cliff in terms of quality? The government has spent the past decade lauding its literacy and numeracy outcomes, so, again, it’s unlikely.

Or, as many primary heads have pointed out, is the new inspection framework simply biased against primary schools – particularly small rural primary schools – owing to the obsession with, and huge weight of, curriculum expectations?

In addition to all the above, you can add the concerns about the quality and consistency of inspection expressed in previous *Tes* Daily briefings, and the problematic nature of graded inspections in general.

So, we must be clear that this purge of the “outstanding” schools says very little about standards. It may have uncovered a few schools in dire need of intervention, but the vast majority of downgraded schools are likely victims of changing rules and ideology (as Steve Rollett, deputy CEO of the Confederation of School Trusts, articulated [here](#)).

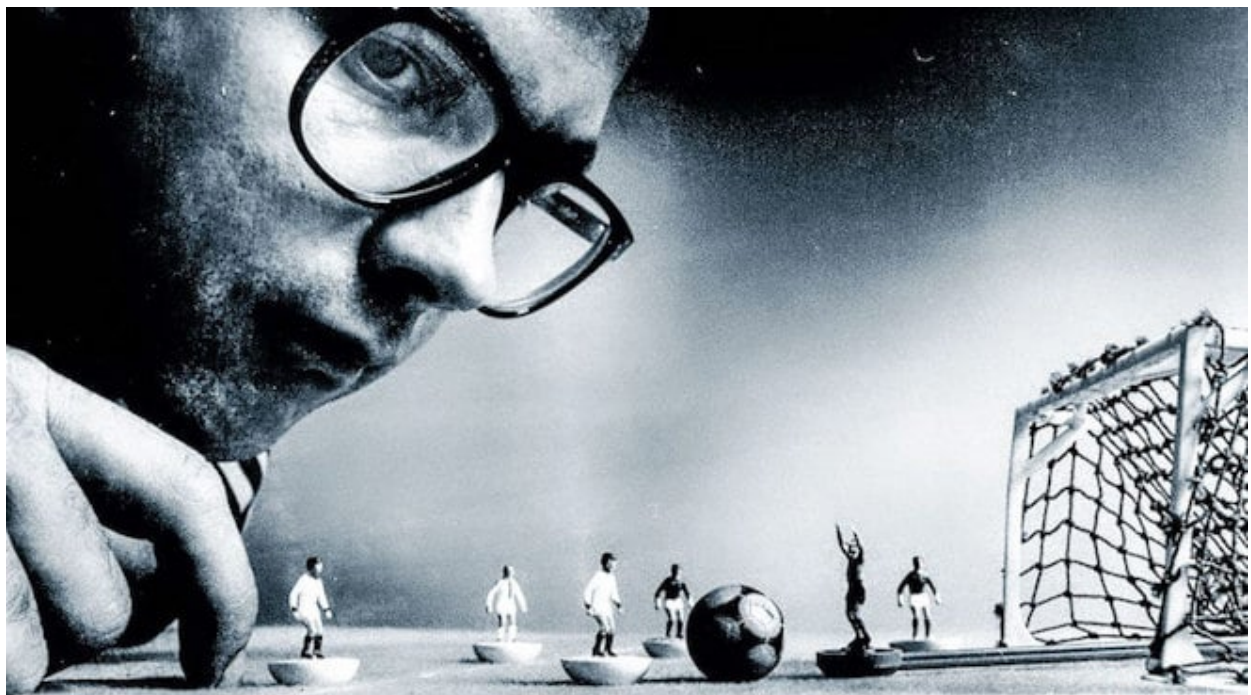
Maintaining standards requires comparability over time. There is no comparability if the nature, focus and ideology of inspection changes significantly from one chief inspector – or one education secretary – to the next.

In short, the data released last week says much more about the problems with Ofsted than about issues in schools.

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What made me laugh this week: In a hugely insightful interview with Sir Steve Lancashire by *Tes* senior editor Dan Worth, I suddenly came upon one of the most amazing pictures we have ever published. Take a look at the second image in [the piece](#) – I promise it is worth it.

What made me shake my head this week: While there was much debate about the content of [the ITT exemplar materials](#) the government released last week, I couldn't get past the typos and the word soup of the prose. If they aimed to bring clarity, they unfortunately failed quite spectacularly.

What I read this week: If we were in any doubt as to the pandemic's huge impact on learning, the combination of [the EEF's report on Year 2 reading](#) and [the EYFS outcomes figures](#) should have ended it. Some truly shocking data, and there is still no grand plan from government to tackle it.

ICYMI: the weekly news round-up



The key insights from the A-level and times tables check results, and Scottish teachers walk out over pay. Find the biggest stories from the past seven days in this essential round-up.

Catch up on the week's big stories

Heads up: this week's diary events

- **Today**, the first monthly figures for ITT applications in the 2022-23 cycle will be published.
- On **Tuesday**, a key [report on child mental health](#) will be unveiled by NHS Digital, following up on research that led to the introduction of mental health teams in schools.
- From **Tuesday to Thursday**, the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT) will hold its annual conference online. Matilda Martin will bring you all the news and insight from the event – follow her on Twitter at [@matilda_martin](#)

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