



How to keep calm and learn to love Ofsted

Lee Pace has been through the Ofsted grinding mill so often that he knows what to do to avoid stress and find value in the process. The secret is a little housecleaning.

It's a Tuesday morning, the phone rings and the secretary picks up! This is a very important phone call, so important in fact that the head teacher **MUST** take the call, no matter what! The call is redirected to the headteacher's office – within a few seconds it is clear that Ofsted are visiting – in two days time!!!!

The head replaces the handset and sits quietly, contemplating what might

happen. Eventually the cold shivers and churning stomach subside a little and without hesitation, the whole school is put into 'Ofsted Mode' meetings are called, displays are revamped, corridors are tidied, brilliant lessons are prepared and no-one leaves the staff car park until 9pm. The culmination of a year's worth of pent up anxiety and stress unravels in the space of a few short days.

During the inspection the teachers dread their door opening and in walking a suited stranger with a clip board and fountain pen. The senior leadership team hope that they can answer all of the questions and the headteacher hopes the chair of governors really knows what he/she is talking about! The school is on show! And it's horrible!

There is of course an alternative perspective; it doesn't need to be this way! Before I go into to detail, one thing I am NOT suggesting here is to plan your long term school approach around an Ofsted framework! Take a look at the evaluation schedule and there isn't anything too controversial or ground breaking in there



and never forget that the schedule is open to interpretation. The key is to make sure that your interpretation is the one that counts. The (not so politically correct) analogy I often use is that an Ofsted inspection is like the proverbial 'Mother-in-Law' coming to Sunday dinner. There is no need to change the carpets, paint the dining room or wear a suit - there is however, a need to vacuum the carpets, polish the furniture and remove the pyjamas in favour of presentable day wear! Also, like Ofsted, the visit can fill you with dread, but once it's actually over you don't feel so bad!

This may seem very idealistic and not the reality, but after a ten year period of experiencing Special Measures, HMLs, countless lesson observations and finally a couple of 'Good' Ofsted - I firmly believe that if a school is thoroughly prepared, the whole experience can be positive.

So just how do you prepare for an Ofsted Inspection under the new framework? The first point to make is that preparation starts now! Hopefully over the next few paragraphs you'll pick up a few tips to help you start your preparations!

Without wishing to be patronising, the new Ofsted Inspection Framework is divided into four sections.

1. The Achievement of Pupils
2. The Quality of Teaching
3. Behaviour and Safety
4. Leadership and Management

A key thread that runs through all of these sections, is the 'Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural' (SMSC) development of pupils. This is difficult to define, (don't go searching for a criteria; there isn't one!) but I often describe it as more 'Mother Theresa' and less 'Doc Martin.'

How can your school demonstrate SMSC?

The real key to aspect is the relationships between pupils and adults, if you have a teacher who prides her/himself on being called 'The Terminator' then it's fair to say that teacher won't have great relationship with pupils. Inspectors want to see blossoming relationships between pupils and adults, ones of trust and respect where children feel safe. It's also worth revisiting the behaviour policy; a question I often pose is: Does the policy focus on 'Carrot and Stick' or 'Nature and Relationships' the latter is of course, preferable; the very best behaviour policies focus on pupil/adult relationships. Assemblies are a very obvious demonstration of SMSC. Ensuring the children have opportunities to reflect on the themes and take part is essential; assemblies should be led with expertise, vibrancy and energy; when Ofsted are in, don't ask 'The Terminator' to lead the assembly!

Lots of schools have a 'Learning to Learn' (BLP or PLTS) ethos; schools should ensure that this is clearly visible in children's work and displays in the classroom -Think about this for a second, how would you respond to the questions: 'How is collaboration taught in your school? How does it progress from Y3 to Y6 or from Y7 to Y11? - skills progression should be clear in any 'Learning to Learn' approach. The learning environment is a great way to 'show off' SMSC. Displays that communicate group learning, areas for spiritual reflection and pupil voice (lots of 'post-its') clearly show how children are valued. School councils also offer the children opportunities for pupils to develop SMSC - ensure council meetings are minuted and their impact is evidenced in a 'celebration' book and corridor displays! Finally, clearly show how the older pupils are given extra responsibility in school, for example in a primary school it is common practise for children to answer the reception phone at break times, to take part in corridor duty, playground buddying, buddy reading and to help run the library. The key is to ensure that all of the above is evidenced!



Inspectors want to see blossoming relationships between pupils and adults, ones of trust and respect where children feel safe.



The Achievement of Pupils.

Now we move into the first of the four 'headlines' in the Ofsted criteria! This aspect of the inspection is of course, data driven! Ofsted look for evidence of how teachers are challenged to produce high standards of pupil attainment. Excellent evidence for this is performance management documentation, the teacher's own data analysis, (Outstanding schools often ask all teaching staff to produce termly progress reports) up to date planning files and children's IEPs. Ensure all these are monitored – 'Rigorously and Regularly!' Progress within lessons is also being highlighted in Ofsted reports, especially how teacher questioning is used to drive progress and challenge the more able pupils. Remember though, behind all of the data is a story, each cohort IS different and YOU know the cohorts, not Ofsted! It's not about having excuses for 'underperformance' – it's about understanding the reasons and being able to articulate these succinctly to the inspection team.



Teaching and Learning.

Put yourself in the position of an inspector walking, for the first time, into one of your classrooms; would the classroom environment 'blow them away' or would it look dull and unappealing? First impressions count – classrooms should be inspirational places! Ofsted inspectors are also hoping to see lots of collaborative learning, paired discussions and how SMSC thrives in the classroom! As ever, and quite rightly in my opinion, there is still a huge focus on 'AFL' – the use of success criteria to help children reflect on their learning is vital here. Inspectors are particularly highlighting the inspirational lessons they have seen, for example one report highlighted how a teacher had asked the pupils to investigate the best ratio of bicarbonate of soda to vinegar to produce the most effective volcanic explosion – when it comes to learning activities don't hold back on creativity!

Phonics is also rigorously monitored by inspectors, including sessions led by teaching assistants; Phonics needs to be differentiated, systematic and regular with high quality input by the adult; these same principles are also applied to 'guided reading' during an inspection. It does seem contrary to the proposed new national curriculum based heavily on 'subjects' but inspectors are looking for cross curricular



links; especially links with maths and reading – high quality displays are a great way to show how maths is integrated into the curriculum. In one school I visited, up on the display board were line graphs that were designed to create a scale drawing of the 'Clifton Suspension Bridge' – the displays looked magnificent and of course, showed a fantastic link with maths and Victorian Britain! There are no excuses for not using maths across the curriculum; it just takes a bit of thought! Marking is also important to a good Ofsted inspection, children should be regularly given next steps and comments should be linked to the learning intention. Finally, never forget the 80/20 rule – a rule I wholeheartedly agree with; it means that in any one lesson the teacher should be talking for only 20% - to put this in perspective, in a one hour lesson the teacher should be talking for no more than 12 minutes! Too much teacher talk ends all hope of a good lesson!

Behaviour and Safety

I've read lots of reports since January and the clear message is that children's manners are very important! Ofsted look for politeness, a calm and orderly corridor and expect playtimes to be harmonious! Children are also being asked about 'Types of Bullying,' for example physical, emotional and cyber. Ask yourself: What kinds of systems I have in place for 'E-safety?' Do the pupils know what to do if they are bullied on line? Are parents aware of 'E-Safety?' It is worth bearing in mind that lots of the evidence for this section is taken from the views of parents and pupils; paper evidence is not enough!

Attendance also comes under this heading, if the attendance at your school is below the average, what is being done about it and what impact is it having? If your attendance is above average, how can you prove that the actions of the school have led to this fantastic achievement? Perhaps a little in contrast to previous inspections, the safeguarding aspect of the inspections is minimal, but only if all statutory obligations are met!

Leadership and Management

For this section I'm going to focus heavily on middle leadership and management. It is clearly a focus for Ofsted and one in which they will monitor heavily. It should be said, that as a primary deputy head teacher I write from a primary perspective; however, many of the points I make can be applied to all educational sectors. To give advice on this, it is best to think of a concrete example. Perhaps think of your head/co-ordinator/leader of English and consider the following questions:

- What impact have they had in terms of raising standards? How can you prove this?
- When was the last time they monitored a series of lessons?
- How have they improved guided reading?
- What actions have they taken as a result of rigorous data analysis?
- How does their subject action plan relate to the school development plan?
- When was the last time they led a whole school twilight?
- How do they moderate writing results?
- How do they challenge underperforming staff?

An effectively leader of English would have clear answers to all these questions and Ofsted will be asking the same. And what if they choose the history co-ordinator to talk to – how would they answer some of the questions above? A quick and easy idea to professionally develop subject co-ordinators is to ask them to plan, design, deliver and evaluate a twilight session. This is what we did at my own setting and it was fantastic to see middle leaders grow in confidence and realise that their actions have real impact.

The sharing of outstanding pedagogical practise is also highlighted (often heavily criticised) in the latest inspections reports. If one or two teachers stand out as outstanding practitioners, how is this shared with the staff? I would recommend that the best teachers deliver a 'demonstration' lesson to other



A quick and easy idea to professionally develop subject co-ordinators is to ask them to plan, design, deliver and evaluate a twilight session.



professionals. As a year 6 teacher, I recently taught the Year 2s in order to share good practise, it was a great challenge for me, but more importantly, the class teacher had a clear idea of the school's 'best practise' pedagogical approach.

Of course, within leadership and management comes the governing body. The 'old chestnut' of ensuring that they act as a critical friend is prominent, so ensure any challenges during meetings are minuted. Also, governors are being questioned about 'Value for Money', for example the inspector might ask: 'So you sanctioned the spending of £100k for ICT over the past 3 years, what impact has this had?' I would certainly recommend that the ICT, English and Maths leaders present an update to the whole governing body at least once every year; communicating the developments in their subject and the impact this is having.

Self evaluation

So the 'SEF' has gone, but Ofsted still need a document that 'bundles' together all of the school's achievements! School self evaluation should be organised along the lines of the Ofsted inspection framework. Ensure that each section has an SMSC aspect to show how this is embedded in school practices and routines. Also ensure that each section has a 'context' element; this gives you the chance to give a bit of background to each part. For example if you are a new head, you can't be held responsible for past failings; this should be tactfully explained in the 'context' of the Leadership and Management section.

The key to all self evaluation is that is 'evaluative' and not just a commentary of what happens in your school – phrases such as: '...so that...' - '...ensuring that...' - '...the impact has been...' - '...developing the children's...' will help the document be more of a rigorous evaluation of school performance. By all means give a small commentary but Ofsted will look for impact!

In Summary...

Going back to the 'Mother-in-Law' analogy, when the house is clean and the meal is tasty you can relax, safe in the knowledge that the afternoon will go well. You've not had to build an extension or swap your children for the quieter ones down the road, you've not had to change your personality and you've not had to buy a new dining room table. Just like the visit of Ofsted, you want to be seen at your very best – this is why preparation is vital! Good luck!

Launching The Professional Learning Community for schools



Imaginative Minds Ltd is an established education publishing company with some of the best known titles in the education sector, such as School Leadership Today, Every Child Journal and Creative Teaching and Learning.

After 12 months of successful trialing, it is about to fully launch a new service in association with the Society of Education Consultants.

The Professional Learning Community will provide:

- all the staff in a school with 24/7 online access to the best professional practice library in the UK, perhaps anywhere
- access to new issues and regular updates from all its acclaimed publications
- access to in-depth cross-curriculum resources
- access for a school's leadership team to advice and support from the Society of Education Consultants

This new service is responding to the move in-school of teacher professional development and supports the formation of a school's own professional learning community. In its professional and advisory support service it is also responding to the decline of local education authorities.

The cost of providing this year-round professional learning service to schools, much of which will support their school improvement and classroom teaching performance efforts (in the light of stringent Ofsted requirements), will be less than the cost of sending one teacher on one course for one day.

We are offering very high commission rates for accomplished sales in order to quickly gain a large market share, with further products being offered to successful agents.

For further information about The Professional Learning Community, please contact Imaginative Minds to express interest.

Learn more about The Professional Learning Community at www.teachingtimes.com