

# Landing on the other side survey

## Headteacher's Roundtable Consultation Analysis

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**This report summarises the findings of a survey of 77 school leaders and ex-school leaders conducted by Headteacher's Roundtable.**

**The nature of this consultation means that it does not provide a snapshot of what the sector as a whole thinks, however the open response structure means that it provides relatively detailed insight into a group of professionals' current sense of what needs to change. As such it is a valuable source of ideas and insight that can aid reflection on 'what next' for our education system.**

**It is clear that the depth of dissatisfaction with the current accountability system amongst respondents was profound and that most shared an impassioned desire to move towards a more supportive and sector-led paradigm.**

## Methodology

### Sample

The following analysis is based on a consultation survey disseminated by The Headteacher's Roundtable. There were 77 responses to the survey (once duplicates had been removed).

The sample was opportunistic: at the end of a short blog about a teachers frustrations with the sector, respondents were invited to respond to three questions:

- What needs to be stopped?
- What needs to change?
- What do we need to start doing?

### Limitations

The nature of the sampling means the findings should be treated with caution as they are unlikely to be representative of the views of the sector. It is possible that practitioners who shared the blog author's frustrations and worries would be more likely to complete the questions and the blog may have inadvertently 'primed' responses. Furthermore, practitioners with frustrations may have been more likely to answer these questions due to the way they were phrased, given that they ask about problems and the need for change.

### Analysis

Each response was coded with a single or multiple theme e.g. 'accountability' 'ofsted' 'comparisons'. The number of times each theme was mentioned was counted and calculated as a proportion of responses. This gives statistics on the proportion of responses that mentioned each theme and most statistics given were calculated in this way.

This analysis was used to identify common themes and quotes were extracted to represent the type of responses coded under each theme.

*'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'*

# 1 Responses to 'What needs to be stopped?'

When professionals were asked 'What needs to be stopped?' in the current education system the most common themes referenced in the responses were accountability systems, comparisons between schools and exams. Often, respondents' answers highlighted that these themes were interlinked and often respondents mentioned more than one.

Nearly half of responses suggested there was a need to stop the accountability system in its current form (see Figure 1). Between a third and half of responses specifically mentioned Ofsted. Respondents felt that:

- Ofsted was not focused on improvement but rather on punishing schools,
- the accountability system undermines collaboration in the sector,
- Ofsted judgments were too subjective and too high stakes.

*"The onerous accountability treadmill of Ofsted, where school improvement is forgotten at the expense of bashing schools."*

*"Ofsted and league tables need to stop. They create a system of competition, selection, and segregation. All children, all schools, and all staff (including leaders) should be valued. If we are to tackle inequality, these key aspects need to be stopped."*

*"Inspectors thinking their preferred way is the only way and judging school areas in which they are not expert. Discrepancies in judgements between inspections and huge concerns about reliability. Judgements being given that destroy whole communities, and the lives of the professionals unfairly taken apart by them."*

Between a quarter and a third mentioned that the way schools are compared, through league tables, needed to be changed (see Figure 1). These responses often also mentioned the accountability system more widely, a few made the specific point that this hinders collaboration and support:

*"Ofsted grading. League tables which simply put local schools against each other when we should be collaborating for the common good."*

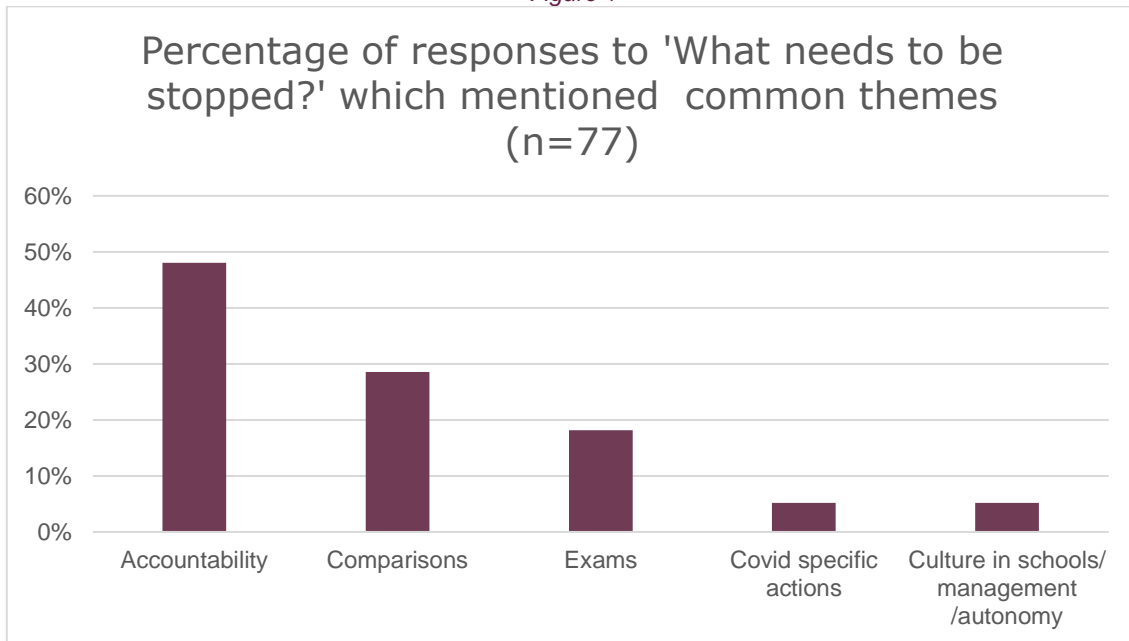
Around a fifth of respondents mentioned needing to stop or change exams (see Figure 1). For some this meant stopping the current format of exams, others mentioned stopping the high stakes nature of exams, however, the main complaint here related to exams and testing in primary schools: just over one in ten respondents mentioned testing and exams in primary including SATs and the reception baseline, just under one in ten specifically mentioned abolishing Year 6 SATs.

*'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'*



***"Testing in primary schools of all types, stop being judged by test results of children. No other profession is judged in this way it's insulting, demoralising and exhausting for all involved including the children."***

Figure 1



A few respondents described what they saw as the negative impact of testing and exams on staff and pupil wellbeing. Some believed that this led to a narrowing of the curriculum.

***"Relentless pursuit of grade success to the detriment of personal development and mental/physical well-being - of both staff and students. This means league tables and Ofsted."***

A few respondents also voiced their strong views about the impact of frequently changing guidance driven by changing policies and the shifting priorities of politicians, a theme which also emerged in response to the second question.

***"We need constant DfE updates stopped - each one is a sign that the original document was not well written or poorly planned. Each one costs schools time which affects wellbeing and has a monetary value. Each change that takes a school 1 hour costs the system 8000 working days better spent on educating children."***

***'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'***

## 2 Responses to 'What needs to change?'

When respondents were asked what needed to change, Ofsted was a frequently recurring theme. Just over a third of respondents mentioned the need to change Ofsted (see Figure 3). Respondents suggested that inspections needed to focus more on supporting schools.

*"Inspection and observation must be constructive and supportive; lead to productive conversations about individual schools and also about the national curriculum."*

*"Schools need to not be judged against a set of standards that lacks consideration for the stage of a journey they are or their context."*

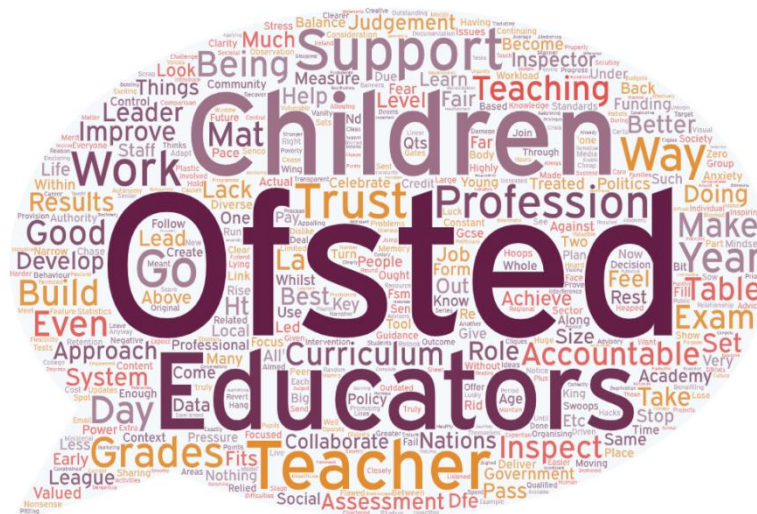


Trusting teachers and giving them more autonomy was also a commonly requested change (mentioned by around one in five respondents) (see Figure 3). For some this meant requiring less pupil assessment or trusting teacher assessment rather than testing, for others it meant less scrutiny and comparison (such as league tables) and greater recognition of the work teachers do.

*"We need to be trusted as a profession that we will be professional in our assessments of children so no need for tests to "prove" we are doing our jobs correctly."*

*"We need to change the narrative about teaching, the profession and what is and has been achieved in schools. The constant negativity that is publicised, which comes from a complete lack of knowledge, is so demoralising for everyone working within education. We need to celebrate success and this has to be more than the results and where this places us as schools in league tables."*

Figure 2 – Word cloud of responses to 'What needs to change?'<sup>1</sup>



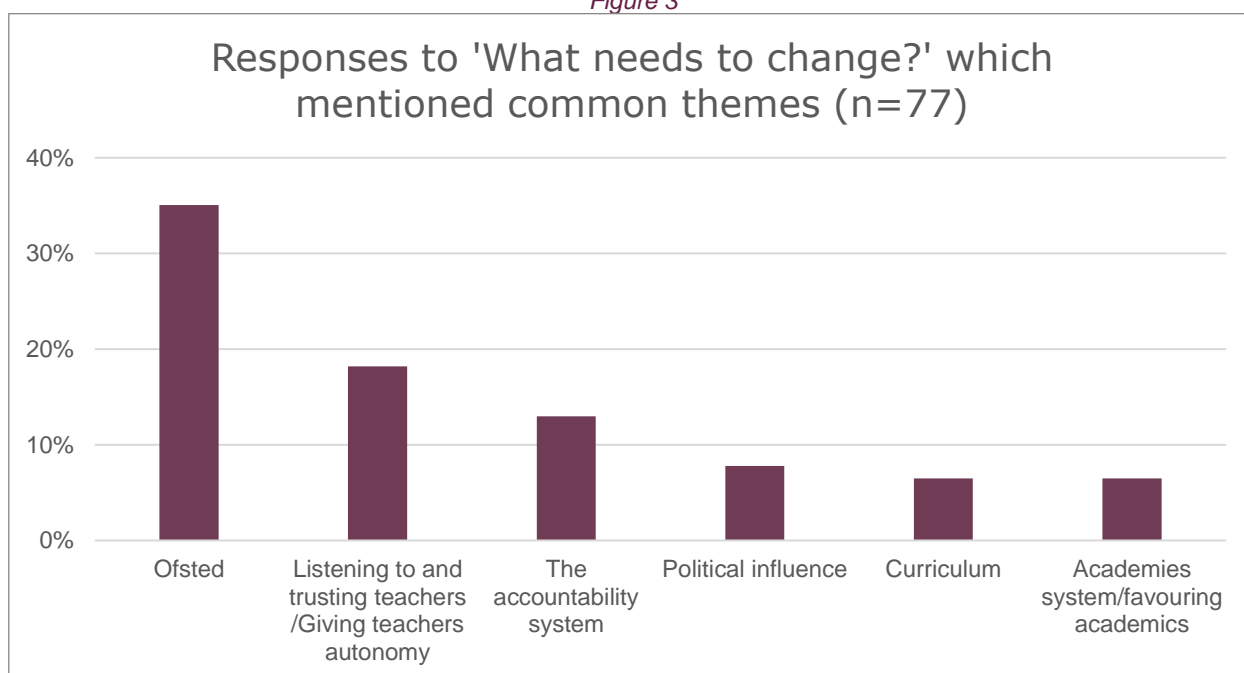
<sup>1</sup> The words 'change' 'needs' 'school' and 'more' were removed from the word cloud data as these were so commonly mentioned that they obscure other words in the word cloud.

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Just over 1 in 10 said the accountability system (including Ofsted and more broadly) needed to change (see Figure 3). They tended to argue that it was too punitive and the focus on grades was too great. Often respondents highlighted that Ofsted and high stakes accountability led to considerable fear and stress among teachers and leaders. A few explained they had left the profession earlier than they would have liked in order to avoid facing Ofsted or other accountability systems.

***"It is far too punitive and too much rests on the outcome. The whole profession is in fear of it. Make it pass or fail and give points to help us improve. No need for extra grades and I say that as a leader in a 4 times outstanding school."***

Figure 3



Other themes mentioned by at least five respondents included:

- A need for politics and politicians to have less ongoing, less frequent influence in the sector to reduce frequent changes to systems
- A need to widen or reform the curriculum
- A need to reduce the focus on academies, stop favouring academies or return schools to LA control.

Several comments pointed towards wider societal issues and the widespread expectation that schools should make amends for these. A few respondents noted that the current covid-19 crisis had highlighted the need for change in the wider children, young people and family's sector to address this, whilst others highlighted the pre-crisis underfunding of schools and other services.

These respondents believed that change was needed in terms of:

- expectations of schools to address complex societal issues,
- how schools work with other services, and,
- funding for social services.

***"Teachers need to stop being blamed for the societal disadvantages many young people face when political decisions actually create the very poverty/social deprivation that makes educators work harder."***

***'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'***



*"The current crisis has clearly highlighted that schools have now become a sticking plaster for society. How can it be that the closure of schools has led to so many social problems? The social care sector needs some serious investment and this would enable schools to get back to focusing much more on teaching and learning."*

### 3 Responses to 'What do we need to start doing?'

Note, respondents' answers to the question 'what do we need to start doing?' were more varied than their answers to other questions, with the most common theme under which responses could be grouped accounting for fewer than one in five responses.

The most common responses to the question 'what do we need to start doing?' were categorised under the following themes:

1. Trust and listen to teachers: mentioned by just under one in five respondents

*"Acknowledging that a professional who works daily with their students (and may know the rest of the family) is the person best-placed to guide their development."*

2. Make the accountability system more supportive, either by making Ofsted more supportive (in some cases by removing gradings) and/or by introducing a peer-accountability system: mentioned by just over one in ten respondents

*"Working towards an accountability system that can support development and school improvement. Inspection should not be "jeopardy" as it is now. It takes a school community years to recover, and is absolutely not the best way to make improvements."*

*"We need to be clear that Ofsted is not the only measure, we need to create strong links with other local schools - same authority or not - and rely more on peer reviews, which would not be 'kind' to sister schools as the government may imagine but more reflective of an understanding without an agenda set forth by the government and Ofsted."*

3. Teachers and leaders to 'say no' to changes or initiatives they disagreed with, for some this meant a need to join together to make the sector's voice stronger or to reform the way that unions support the sector: mentioned by around one in ten respondents.

*"Having courage to say No to initiatives that have negative or no positive impact on outcomes for children and families."*

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***"In terms of unreasonable or ridiculous demands then school leaders need to say no. The teaching/school leader unions need to say no. Educational thinkers in groups like Headteachers Roundtable need to say no. We have a ridiculous division of school types that has been divisive and school leaders need to unify, whatever type of school they come from, the post a Covid world is one where 'United we stand, divided we fall.' "***

4. Widening the curriculum, either to tailor learning to individual children's needs or to focus on a broader range of knowledge and skills: mentioned by around one in ten respondents.

***"Paying attention to all subjects, all students. Recognising that not everyone needs to be a linguist, a mathematician, a historian. We need plumbers, electricians, musicians, artists. "***

***"Deliver a primary curriculum which places well-being, outdoors and the arts alongside core subjects. Learn from what we have prioritised during this pandemic."***

5. Valuing teachers including a move to ensure that the public recognise and value teachers and the work they do: mentioned by around one in ten respondents.

***"Valuing the teaching profession and supporting leaders/teachers rather than constantly leaving them in difficult situations, feeling undervalued."***

***"We need a teachers' 'momentum' style media blitz campaign - we need the public to respond to us as they have done for the NHS. We are drowning in misinformation campaigns and we have been sliding backwards for years. Teaching has changed - massively. and we need to get our professionalism recognised. It's obvious that the chartered college can't do it - and the unions can't do it. We must take back control of our image."***

## **4 Conclusion**

As noted in the introduction, the nature of this consultation means that it does not provide a snapshot of what the sector as a whole thinks, however the open response structure means that it provides relatively detailed insight into a group of professionals' current sense of what needs to change. As such it is a valuable source of ideas and insight that can aid reflection on 'what next' for our education system.

It is clear that the depth of dissatisfaction with the current accountability system amongst respondents was profound and that most shared an impassioned desire to move towards a more supportive and sector-led paradigm.