Chapter 7
Headteachers Who also Inspect: Practitioner Inspectors in England

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Abstract The relationship between headteachers and inspection is complex, particularly when in service head teachers are employed as inspectors. This study takes the English case of inspection to examine how headteachers interpret their work and agency as inspectors. Employing ideas on 'boundary crossing' it is informed by, and contributes to, the literatures about the policy and practice of the implementation of school inspection. In particular, the chapter reflects on how headteachers who inspect see their role, examining their work across the boundary of school leadership and inspection. In considering how headteacher inspectors manage these dual identities we also examine the challenges of an inspection workforce comprising headteachers and their particular role in a self-improving school system.

Keywords Schools · Ofsted · Inspectors · Headteachers · Practitioners · Education policy

Introduction

This chapter focuses on a recent significant policy change in England with regard to school inspection—the move to substantially change the inspection workforce to mostly comprise practitioner inspectors, almost entirely headteachers. This represents a point of both intersection and tension between two key policy drivers in school policy in England which have been part of an international tendency that has been characterised as neoliberalism in education (Ball 2000, 2009).

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The first policy driver has been, an emphasis on increased scrutiny and accountability used by government as levers to impact on school practice (Perryman 2009; West et al. 2011)—effectively a centralisation of control (Woods and Simkins 2014). The establishment of agencies charged with policing and inspection has become an important element of the regulation of public services (Boyne et al. 2002). The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the schools' inspectorate in England, is one of these.

The second policy driver is a process of marketisation or quasi-marketisation (Ball and Youdell 2008) in education which has involved dismantling the role of local democratic oversight and responsibility for education, diversification of provision and a discourse of greater school autonomy (Woods and Simkins 2014; Stevenson 2011). England stands out in its readiness to adopt choice and competition policies although there is some convergence between the education systems of England, Germany, France and Italy (Mattei 2012). A new discourse and policy of a 'self-improving school system' (Hargreaves 2010, 2011) has emerged with headteachers positioned as 'system leaders' (Higham et al. 2009); extending the influence of school leaders who are deemed to excel is framed as a primary driver of school improvement. Indeed part of the argument for headteachers to be inspectors, discussed below, is that this would lead both to more consistent and accurate judgements.

Originally inspections were carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectors, members of the government inspection service, integrated into government. Ofsted was established in 1992 and is a non-ministerial government department with a remit to improve standards of achievement and the quality of education through regular independent inspection, public reporting and informed advice. The process of quasi-marketisation has influenced the relationship between government and Ofsted and how the inspection service is managed. The prevailing rhetoric is one of service delivery, emphasising the public as consumer. In the case of Ofsted, the 'goods' supplied to the public as consumer are the supply of information and grading of schools it produces.

Until recently, there have been few serving headteachers inspecting schools in England. However, since 2014 policy has changed with a further reorganisation of the inspection service and an increasing emphasis on inspection by serving headteachers. This policy needs to be seen in context both of increasing concerns about the quality of the inspection process and in particular the inconsistent practice of inspectors, and of a general policy movement towards the 'self-improving school led system' (Hargreaves 2010, 2011). Headteachers, then, are no longer simply the key 'subjects' of inspection, but are increasingly being encouraged to 'cross the boundary' and become inspectors themselves. This policy change raises a number of important questions including: how headteachers' undertake inspection and their interactions with teachers, other headteachers and other inspectors, and what are the implications of the new policy for the boundary between those inspected and inspectors.

This chapter begins to address these and related questions by reporting the views of a group of headteachers who also inspected prior to the current policy change.

Such people are referred to as 'serving practitioners', currently defined by Ofsted as those who have taught or had direct leadership and management of teaching in a school within the two years immediately prior to carrying out inspections. The reported research took place prior to current policy changes when headteachers were a relatively small proportion of the cadre of inspectors. Nevertheless, the study offers insights that are relevant to those headteachers who have begun to inspect more recently.

Moreover, whilst there is an extant literature on the experience of being inspected (for example, Fielding et al. 2005; Chapman 2005; Waldegrave and Simons 2014), research on the experience of inspectors is much more limited (see Lee et al. 2000; Woods and Jeffrey 1998 for accounts from the time that Ofsted was created). We do not normally hear the voices of inspectors, and even less those of the headteachers amongst them, whose role as inspectors is under-theorised.

The chapter is informed by both inductive and deductive analysis of semi-structured interviews with 12 headteachers who also inspect. The analysis is discussed using concepts drawn from social practice and socio-cultural theory: communities of practice and notions of boundary and boundary crossing. The empirical study was conducted by a practicing and experienced 'professional' inspector and so to an extent constitutes insider research, although none of the authors has experience as a headteacher. Both the affordances and limitations of this insider aspect are discussed below.

The chapter identifies several emergent issues: practitioner inspection as a boundary role involving boundary crossing and brokering; the role of the inspection handbook as a boundary object; and conflicts and challenges in boundary work. Before discussing these themes we offer a brief overview of inspection in England, including recent developments and further details of the methodology of the research.

Inspection in England

In this section we provide contextualising information on inspection in England most pertinent to the study reported in this chapter. We consider the practice and process of inspection, views on the experience of being inspected and recent policy developments.

Inspection Policy

All maintained schools and academies in England are subject to regular inspection. While the primary task of inspectors and the inspection system is to—using a phrase that originated prior to the establishment of Ofsted—report without fear or

favour—on what they evidence, a successful inspection system contributes more than simply delivering inspection judgements on a school by school basis. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's annual report to Parliament on the quality and standards of education in England is based on all the inspections conducted in the previous academic year. This 'state of the nation' report, along with occasional reports on specific phases or subject areas, aims to ensure that inspection drives improvement in policies as well as in individual schools.

Since 1988, all schools have had considerable autonomy over matters of organisation, staffing and finance albeit operating within a framework of oversight provided by local authorities. Since 2010, however, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition and Conservative governments have pursued a policy through which schools have been encouraged or—where they are deemed to be underperforming—required to become 'academies' which are directly responsible to the Secretary of State. Throughout this period, however, 'autonomy' has been strongly circumscribed by a performativity regime which judges schools both on their test and examination outcomes and, since 1992, their performance publicly judged through a national process of inspection (Power 1997; Hood et al. 1999; Simkins 2000; Macnab 2004).

In general terms, inspection enables governance at a distance (Clarke and Ozga 2011) where organisations (schools in this case) are deemed not to be trusted to regulate themselves effectively but must be monitored and held accountable by external agencies (Power 1997; Hood et al. 1999). As noted in the introduction, changes in England are a reflection of an international tendency identified by some as the effects of neo-liberalism in education, (see for example Apple 2006; Ball 2000, 2009; Ball and Youdell 2008), sometimes styled as 'new public management (Hall et al. 2013). Inspection serves as a means to maintain regulatory control and direction by the state within the content of new public management in which the state withdraws in favour of the market and private or semi-private organisations (Ozga 2009). The organisation of inspection had for more than two decades, from 1992 until 2015, been through contracts with non-governmental not-for-profit organisations and commercial educational businesses which employed the majority of inspectors on a part-time daily-paid basis.

Whether these approaches do lead to school improvement—including inspection—is at best contentious. Hood et al. (1999) and Boyne et al. (2002) referred to an evidence vacuum about the marginal effects of increasing or reducing investment in regulation by government. Some studies suggest that the impact of inspection on school performance may be neutral at best or even negative (Chapman 2002; de Wolf and Janssens 2007; Fitz-Gibbon and Tymms 2002; Shaw et al. 2003). While it may be argued that inspection visits have positive effects, few evidence-based conclusions can be drawn as regards the extent and consequences of them. So even though government policy has relied heavily on the idea of school improvement through inspection, there remain doubts as to the extent of the impact of this:

> It (Ofsted) has played one of the key roles in national educational reform by increasing schools' accountability for their actions, and systematically monitoring their long-term decision-making and progress. However, the widely used corporate slogan of 'improvement through inspection' is less robust in response to criticism. (Chapman 2002: 257)

The Practice and Process of Inspection

English maintained schools and academies are inspected according to a set of criteria focused on their performance which are regulated by legislation. The inspection framework has been amended frequently, in part to address topical policy concerns. The outcome of inspection is summarised in the grading of schools. Current grades are 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate'. Inspection reports and grades are published; and grades influence the frequency of inspection. From September 2015 schools judged '*good*' receive short one-day inspections every three years, as opposed to a longer visit every three to five years as previously. In contrast, schools that '*require improvement*' (grade 3) are inspected every two years, while schools deemed '*inadequate*' (grade 4) are assessed within three to six months of the judgement. Schools judged '*outstanding*' are exempt from the usual inspection cycle with inspections prompted by changes in performance or other data (Roberts 2015).

School inspection—and in particular the grade awarded—has 'high stakes' implications for schools. Schools judged '*outstanding*' are positioned favourably within the new schooling landscape, for example having the opportunity to sponsor other schools that are performing less well, to engage in teacher training or to access resources to lead professional development initiatives. In contrast, if a school is judged as '*inadequate*' or not to have improved adequately following a grade of '*requires improvement*', the headteacher and governing body may be replaced.

Inspections are conducted by an inspection team led by a lead inspector who has the responsibility for the organisation of the inspection and is primarily accountable for its quality. The size of the team varies depending on the school size but also the school grade. Full inspections, for schools previously judged as '*requiring improvement*', do not normally last longer than two days, with the number of inspectors driven by the number of pupils on roll. Most average size primary schools will have two inspectors, a lead inspector and a team inspector, both on site for two days. Secondary schools may have larger teams.

The *School Inspection Handbook* (Ofsted, January 2016) is the key document, or artefact, used by all inspectors in carrying out their inspection activities. It underpins the process of inspection and is the rubric against which inspectors measure the evidence they gather. It is used on a regular basis by schools through training, as well as by inspectors on inspection.

Prior to inspection taking place, inspectors will undertake analysis of school data. Schools receive notice of their inspection at or after midday on the working day before the start of the inspection. Once on site, inspectors spend most of their time observing lessons and gathering other first-hand evidence to inform their

judgements, focusing on features of learning. Evidence will include discussions with pupils, staff, governors and parents, listening to pupils read and scrutinising their written work. Inspectors also examine the school's records and documentation including that relating to pupils' achievement and their safety. Following the inspection the lead inspector drafts, the report for full inspections or a letter for short inspections. This is quality assured by a reader and sent to the school for a factual accuracy check. Soon thereafter, once any changes are made, the report is sent to the school for distribution to parents and is published on Ofsted's website.

Being Inspected

Historically there has been a distinction between headteachers and inspectors, and this has influenced professional dialogue and relationships. Indeed, it has been argued that there has been a culture of, '*adversarial relationships*' (Winch 2001) between the inspectors and the inspected which has created a climate and legacy of mistrust (Macnab 2004). In this view, inspection is seen as time-consuming, expensive, bureaucratised and pressurised (Fielding et al. 2005; Chapman 2005; Clarke and Ozga 2011). Indeed, Inglis (2000) referred to inspection as '*a brutalising regime*'. Satisfaction with inspection is unsurprisingly positively influenced by the inspectorate's judgement of a school (Sammons and Matthews 2004).

The primary focus of inspections is on teaching and learning with overall judgements leading to a classification of schools (described above). However, an important element of the basis for this classification derives from a judgement made on the quality of leadership and management of the school, which in the current policy and media discourse in England is associated primarily with the performance of the headteacher. Headteachers invariably carry the responsibility for school failure and so inspection is high stakes (Lerman 2006) and there is no hiding place for headteachers given the public nature of an inspection event together with the published report which stays on the public record (Hayes 2001; Inglis 2000).

A positive grading confers symbolic capital. However, this relationship is precarious as lower grading in future inspections can lead to a loss of prestige, effectively demoting both the school and headteacher (Coldron et al. 2014). Consequently, school failure can be felt as a very personal responsibility (Crawford 2007; Hargreaves 2004). So, the relationship between headteachers and being inspected is one that is marked by anxiety and at best ambivalence, and often some antipathy, for at least some aspects of the inspection regime. The ways in which most headteachers engage with inspection is to forge their day-to-day action and the contemplation of new initiatives in their school with reference to the likely Ofsted reaction (Bottery 2002).

Perryman, studied one school in depth and, argued that teachers fabricated the situation in order to meet Ofsted requirements, but this fabrication led to inspection of the performance:

> Inspectors do not see the real school because of the level of stage-management, game-playing, performance and cynicism engendered by the panoptic regime. (2009: 619)

Clapham (2015) argued that recent moves to shorter notice of inspections has led to '*post-fabrication*', that is, schools are maintained in a continual states of '*inspection readiness*' such that it is not a fabricated version of events but has become the omnipresent reality. In practice, instruments for school self-evaluation and quality assurance often become copies of the instruments of inspectorates and school inspection visits often lead to changes in behaviour among a large majority of school headteachers (Ouston et al. 1997). Arguably therefore, inspection practices and expectations pervade and shape English schooling leadership discourse and practice.

Nevertheless, whatever the ambivalence headteachers may have about the practice of inspection, headteachers in general view that inspection is an acceptable price for relative autonomy (Thomson 2010).

Policy, Practitioners and Inspection

As stated above, since the introduction of the Ofsted inspection regime in 1992 there has been, until very recently, a tendency for a professionalization of the inspection service with most inspectors not being serving headteachers, and especially not other current school practitioners (in other words, those working in schools as teachers, middle or senior managers). However, arguments have been made during this period that there should be a loosening of the distinction between inspectors and teachers (Woodward and Chrisafis 2000; Winch 2001).

If the mechanism of school accountability has such far reaching consequences as inspection does in England, then it is important that schools and the public have confidence in the people that inspect. This point was commented upon by the Audit Commission when it noted that skilled and credible inspectors are the single most important feature of a successful inspection service (Audit Commission 2000). The initial impetus for increasing the number of serving practitioners arose largely out of the findings of the Education Select Committee (House of Commons 2011) which stated that too few inspectors have recent and relevant experience of the settings they inspect. This was linked to concerns about potential inconsistency in judgements. The committee took the view that this had contributed to a loss of faith in the inspection system and proposed an increase in the percentage of inspectors who are senior serving practitioners from the front-line. The argument was that this would increase the credibility and quality of inspection teams since inspectors have to be trusted and recognised as expert if they are to command the respect of the profession they seek to regulate. The intention was to put in place an organisation that was 'closer to the ground' (Baxter 2014; Baxter and Clarke 2013; Baxter and Hult, Chap. 3 this volume).

Although arguments for change were made with reference specifically to inspections and outcomes, they occurred at the same time and were supported by an increased emphasis on school leadership of system improvement, styled as a move to a self-improving system (Hargreaves 2010, 2011). As part of this move, successful headteachers have been designated as 'system leaders' (Higham et al. 2009) and enabled to support other headteachers and schools. In the English context, critical voices have argued that this too is a way of maintaining 'arm's length' central control (Hatcher 2008), although system leadership has also been identified as an international tendency for schools to collaborate and engage in mutual support (Pont and Hopkins 2008).

A new Chief Inspector was appointed in January 2012 from the headteacher ranks, signalling a policy shift towards emphasising school leadership of improvement and accountability. He set out his intention to include in the Ofsted workforce a much larger number of seconded practitioners serving in outstanding schools and to work with the National College for Teaching and Leadership[1] to promote a new Fellowship Programme to recognise those headteachers working with Ofsted to improve schools. Indeed, shortly after his appointment the Chief Inspector argued that headteachers cannot complain about variations in judgements unless they are prepared to bring their expertise to the process and he proposed increasing the number of headteachers involved in inspection. The strategy of Ofsted is to build bridges with schools and demystify the inspection process while addressing complaints of inconsistent grading.

These changes were aligned with bringing all inspection back 'in-house', with Ofsted directly managing the selection, training and quality assurance of the inspection workforce, including the Ofsted inspectors who are not direct employees, such as the headteachers. These changes also aligned with a revised approach to inspection that had the expressed aim of moving away from what was perceived as tick box culture (Baxter and Clarke 2013).

Now serving headteachers comprise around ninety per cent of the contracted inspector workforce. Currently, these headteachers normally need to be leading a successful school and have led their school to an overall inspection outcome of '*good*' or '*outstanding*'. If not, their suitability to inspect is assessed on a case by case basis. For example, they may have taken over the headship of a school and are demonstrably improving it. They are expected to inspect for a minimum of 16 days per year. Whilst the current study was undertaken when the headteachers who inspect were a growing but still relatively small minority within the inspection workforce, their accounts potentially provide insights into the potential outcomes and issues that may arise from recent changes.

[1]The National College for Teaching and Leadership is an executive agency of the Department for Education with responsibility for the school workforce including teachers and teacher training.

Henry J. Moreton was a doctoral student at the time of the research.

Methodology

The Study and Data Collection

The chapter is informed by an analysis of semi-structured interviews with 12 headteachers who inspect, each interview lasting approximately an hour. The sample of 12 is not necessarily representative of all such headteachers but working with a relatively small sample made it possible to focus on single cases so that the relationship of a specific behaviour (inspecting) to its context (inspection) might be investigated, as well as the relationship between the individual (practitioner) and the situation (inspection) (Kvale 1996). The headteachers interviewed were selected from the forty or so who were then inspecting for one of the three inspection service providers, contracted by Ofsted until August 2015. They represented headteachers new or relatively new to inspection work as well as those with more experience and from different school settings in terms of their size and denomination. Eight of the 12 interviewees were female, four were male. Ten were primary headteachers, while two were headteachers of secondary schools.

The headteachers worked for up to twenty days a year on inspection, with one exception who worked slightly more. In practice, most inspected for between eight and 12 days a year, which is typical of practitioner inspectors. At the time of their interview their inspection experience as measured in total inspection days ranged from ten to 70. The smallest number of inspections undertaken by any of the headteachers was five. Seven of the interviewees held posts in schools that were judged as '*good*' for overall effectiveness at their last inspection, four were from '*outstanding*' schools and one was from a school '*requiring improvement*'. Two of the interviewees were designated as lead inspectors but had chosen at the time of the interviews not undertake the lead inspector role.

The interviews were conducted by a researcher who was a practicing school inspector as well as being a manager of inspectors. An insider researcher has many advantages—for instance, the knowledge of inspections as an active member of the community of inspectors. However, it also has challenges (Drake 2010) including concerning g ethical issues around power. However, care was taken to ensure that the researcher had no management responsibility for those invited to participate in the research. Institutional ethical approval was gained and informed consent obtained from participants.

The interview questions were purposefully open-ended (Warren and Karner 2005). Most interviews took place in the headteacher's school while some asked to be interviewed at their home. The interviews took place over a six month period. The interviews, with the interviewees' permission, were recorded using a digital recorder. This ensured a verbatim and fully accurate record, facilitating rigorous analysis. It also reduced the potential for interviewer error, recording data incorrectly or logging an answer to a question that was not asked. Transcription of the interview recordings took place within a few days following the interview, and

before the next. The transcriptions were checked against the written transcript. All interviewees were ascribed pseudonyms and these are used in this chapter.

Analysis

The prime interest of the research was in the informational content of the interviews and the meanings attached to the content; the focus was on what was said, rather than how it was said. Verbatim transcripts were used in order to understand the circumstances of the participants in their own words, interpret their meanings and form conclusions that were well-rooted in the data. The aim of the data analysis was to obtain an understanding of the issues arising during the interviews, focussing on the headteachers' views, opinions, perceptions and experiences of inspecting alongside their headship. Coding categories were generated after the interviews had concluded. Initially codes were, where possible, formulated in the same words used by the headteachers and in line with '*in vivo*' coding (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Other codes were constructed through an interpretation of content and meaning (Renard and Bernard 2003).

These codes were developed and refined over time and then the meaningful patterns arising from coding were analysed to form the research categories. It was then possible to determine the common themes that recurred across the different interviews. These themes were the patterns that emerged across the data sets that were considered important to describe the phenomena relating to the original research questions. Like the codes and categories, the themes were refined over time in the move beyond description towards conceptualising from the sample.

Throughout the analysis and interpretation of the data an understanding of the ways in which the perspectives of headteachers who inspect compare to the versions given by others was sought, taking an inductive and contextualised account of the discourse.

Following the initial inductive analysis, further interpretation was undertaken using constructs drawn from social practice and socio-cultural theory: identity as participation (Wenger 1998); boundary crossing, brokering and boundary objects (Wenger 1998; Akkerman and Bakker 2011).

How Headteachers Who Inspect See Their Role

Headteachers who inspect can be viewed as boundary crossers. In this section we draw on the interviews to explore this idea, discussing boundary crossing in terms of brokering, boundary objects, the management of dual identities and the conflicts arising from headteachers working in inspection teams.

Brokering

The headteachers sampled saw crossing the boundary between headship and inspection to be of value (Akkerman and Bakker 2011; Pont and Hopkins 2008; Thomson 2008), reflecting their commitment to inspection as a tool for school improvement, in their own schools and others. They stressed the contribution inspecting makes to their leadership and to the improvement of the school they lead, but also described how they can potentially act as brokers within the school improvement process more widely.

The act of brokering was exemplified when some of the headteachers in the sample cited how they explain the rationale for inspectors' judgements to the school's staff, or, more fundamentally, how they often 'manage' the expectations of the inspected headteachers who often, not unsurprisingly, think a higher inspection grade is merited. They do this at their own initiative and were not tasked to do so. Thus, one of the features of headteachers' engagement in inspection practice is the relationship with the headteachers they inspect, with several of those sampled perceiving the relationship to be markedly different from that between the headteachers and other inspectors. Examples were given where the inspected headteachers more readily confided or engaged in conversation with them, rather than other inspectors. As Deborah and Maurice commented,

> There's a lot of looks that go between you…sometimes they confide things in you on inspection because there's that camaraderie…you know what it's like. (Deborah)

> They do confide in me…off the record, head to head, "How do you think I'm doing"? (Maurice)

Rose suggested that other non-headteacher inspectors may be easily duped and commented on the way she brings the experience of headship to inspection,

> There's credibility that you know what they're going through on a day to day basis because you're doing it as well…I wouldn't say, "This is what I've done". What I would say is, "This was hard to implement, how did you go about it"?

The headteachers sampled drew out their unique relationships with teachers in the schools they inspect, especially their headteachers. For instance, Maurice commented,

> There's more,' "How is it going? How am I doing"? They do confide in me, off the record, head to head…that's where I come in and say,"It's all right, you're doing alright, don't worry".

Several interviewees referred to an '*empathy*' with the teachers they inspect and believe that teachers are more relaxed with them than they are with other inspectors. For example, Olive ensures that teachers know that she is a practitioner:

> I always say, "I was in my own school yesterday, I'll be back in my own school again on Friday".

Brenda underlined the importance of understanding the context of current working in schools: '*When heads say to me that they have excluded pupils, I understand completely*'. The implication is that as serving practitioners the headteachers have a clear knowledge and understanding of the significance of such issues in schools, the inference being that it is clearer to them than to others. This influences the view Rose has about how her identity as a headteacher influences her work as inspector:

> The way I inspect comes from the fact that I'm a serving practitioner. As a serving head it makes me go and look in the cracks. I would never walk in a school and presume because it was "nice" they've got it covered.

Nevertheless, the headteachers gave no indication that there is any collusion between themselves and the inspected headteachers, although they do sometimes act in a mediating role during inspections. For example, Olive commented that one discussion with a headteacher, '*moved into a counselling thing*', while Christine gave an example where she suggested she made a real connection with a teacher whose lesson she had observed where pupils' learning was judged to be inadequate. She said,

> I pulled very strongly on my experience as a head. I think there was some sort of acceptance that I was speaking to her as a head rather than an inspector.

So, by drawing on their day to day knowledge the headteachers illustrate how they help to facilitate a connection between people who are on either side of the boundary, in this case teachers or headteachers and inspectors, and they serve to build bridges and connect both sides (Fisher and Atkinson-Grosjean 2002). In doing so, the headteachers exemplify how they help to manage the divergent discourses (Walker and Nocon 2007) across the boundary between the inspected and the inspectors. The headteachers also explain how they contextualise issues for other inspectors on the inspection team and in doing so help to clarify the context of a school's performance.

The headteachers interviewed claim that they add to the inspection event both through their empathy with schools, in support of other inspectors, and the robustness of their judgements. As boundary brokers they are potentially in a position to help transfer best practice and to synthesise practice by being able to identify potentially valuable new beliefs and behaviours. Some of the headteachers interviewed encourage other headteachers to join the inspector ranks and several also mention that they would welcome being inspected by another practitioner.

Boundary Objects

Boundary crossing is assisted by 'boundary objects' of which the *School Inspection Handbook* is a prime example. This artefact represents the interface between the domains of headship (schools) and Ofsted, and serves both as an anchor for

meaning within each domain and as a bridge between them (Nitzgen 2004). Its use is pivotal in generating knowledge across the boundary. It is likely that every headteacher has a copy of the *Handbook* to hand, so, as a boundary object, it provides a common frame of reference for communication. It is also potentially an important means of changing practice in schools, since it is now used by most, possibly all, headteachers to support the evaluation of their school's performance.

The interviewees generally welcomed publicly accessible inspection artefacts such as the *Handbook*, noting that, in addition to governing the inspection process, they help lend objectivity to it. They fall back on the *Handbook* and cite how as boundary brokers they use it to rationalise judgements to the headteachers of inspected schools, most notably when explaining why a higher grade is not given. As Helen commented,

> I don't find a conflict when I'm inspecting but I do understand and empathize with a school that is trying to pitch for a judgement they just can't get. I am able to tell them why they can't get it and why we need to apply the evaluation schedule.

This is something that is typically tackled by the lead inspector, rather than team inspectors such as Helen, but it does reveal something of the different relationship practitioners suggest they have with the headteachers they inspect.

Managing Dual Identities

Headteachers who inspect are held accountable in two worlds, as headteachers in their school and as inspectors within teams, leading to identities that are multiple and complex (Beijaard et al. 2004). In meeting these dual identities headteachers who inspect cross a boundary and the process of boundary crossing has implications for maintaining and accommodating dual identities. The headteachers have moved through the teaching ranks, implying that by the time they become inspectors they may reasonably be regarded as 'experts' in their field. Their expert status underpins their professional identity and as headteachers they are powerful professionals who enjoy relative autonomy over their working practices. They are the professional leaders in their school and currently virtually all headteachers who inspect lead good or outstanding schools.

However, the headteachers sampled do not consider themselves as 'expert' inspectors. This is because their knowledge develops through practice (Sole and Edmondson 2002; Wenger 1998) and is limited compared to non-serving practitioners who may be inspecting on a more regular basis, perhaps even weekly: it is notable that only two of the practitioners had taken a role as lead inspector and none was doing so at the time of the interviews.

As inspectors the headteachers are called upon to judge the performance of schools led by their peers and this is not without pitfalls. The study revealed the extent to which inspection can be a highly emotional activity for inspectors. All the headteachers found inspecting to be a challenging and, often, an anxiety-inducing

process. For example, Maurice, the headteacher of an '*outstanding*' school, said that inspecting is for him,

> an extremely nerve-wracking process and even now I get butterflies going in. I remember sitting outside a school, the first one, about an hour and a half early.

Indeed, there are indications that for the headteachers inspection was more emotionally charged than for 'professional' inspectors. Maurice expressed the view that inspectors, who have been out of school, '*get cold to it*' and do not realise how '*scary*' a process it is.

Half of the headteachers also cited instances of frostiness exhibited towards them by some of the headteachers they inspect. For instance, Brenda felt a sense of hostility from other headteachers with no sense of community: '*Not all headteachers see us as real inspectors. Some worry that we know too much*'. Similarly, Frank said about some of his headteacher peers,

> It is sometimes like drawing teeth. We are in the game and sometimes even the best headteachers are not on the same wavelength…I've tried to use the headship side of things in a positive way. However hard the message the crucial part is that they feel the inspection is being done with them, their context is understood, and that you are dealing right with people.

Several headteachers expressed elements of dissonance with the inspection discourse as they see it practised from within, and several reflected on some of the negative aspects of inspection with some strongly critical views about how some inspectors go about their work. This mirrors their general dissatisfaction with the inspections of their own schools, in spite of inspection outcomes which were mostly positive.

Several comments suggest that the headteachers' involvement in inspection necessitates their suppressing some of the core elements of their professional identity (Baxter and Clarke 2013). Some are frustrated by the inspection rubric as set out in the *School Inspection Handbook*, while several voice concerns that schools which are characterised by low standards and are situated in areas with challenging economic circumstances are disadvantaged by the Ofsted inspection rubric because the *Handbook* does not take into account contextual value added factors. As Robert and Frank commented,

> I've felt the judgements are harsh on one or two occasions. I've thought, "What would I do with these kids? Could I do any better, probably not?" (Robert)

> The main conflict is, what is a realistic expectation for a school to achieve because it is far easier for schools in the leafy suburbs to get outstanding? (Frank)

These comments illustrate the headteachers' non-alignment with some aspects of inspection practice reflecting that professionals may face issues between different perspectives and practices, and that boundaries may be questioned.

One of the other hurdles to be faced by headteachers who also inspect is that their credibility is at risk if their own school's performance is not judged to be '*good*' or '*outstanding*'. Credibility is what distinguishes and differentiates them

from other inspectors. Deborah, for example, cited the additional pressure she felt to be accurate in the assessments of her own school's performance, '*As an inspector I can't face having somebody coming and shoot down my judgements*'. This struck at the core of Deborah's credibility as a headteacher because she acknowledges that her judgements about her own school and its performance need to be accurate and validated as such by inspectors.

Diana made a related point, '*I am more vulnerable because we're just a satisfactory school*'. The use of, '*satisfactory*' (a grade 3, now termed '*requires improvement*') is significant in reflecting Diana's anxiety because, as noted earlier, headteachers who inspect are normally expected to lead a '*good*' or '*outstanding*' school. Otherwise their circumstances are looked into and exceptions may be made on a case by case basis. Staff of the inspected schools may research the inspectors' own schools, which they might look at alongside the inspectors' curricula vitae which they receive the afternoon before the inspectors' visit. Intuitively, one supposes the teachers of the inspected schools would not be impressed if inspectors' leadership was judged as '*requiring improvement*' or '*inadequate*'. Serving practitioners will be only too aware of this.

Adopting a dual identity, as inspector as well as headteacher, enables the headteachers to face the challenge of negotiating and combining ingredients from different contexts. One means to negotiate tensions in identity that arise from participation in multiple communities of practice is through the development of a new and distinct identity. Intuitively one might suppose there would be a sense of sameness (Brubaker and Cooper 2000) among inspectors who are headteachers because they are a defined sub-group within the inspector workforce. The fact that headteachers are part of such a sub-group might be expected to manifest itself in solidarity, shared dispositions or collective action. However, those sampled suggest that where such notions exist it is only in a general sense, typically when the headteachers draw out the advantages they bring to the practice of inspection in comparison to non-practitioners. The headteachers sampled did not emphasise being part of such a sub-group with clear and distinct links or ties. Thus, the participants in this study are best characterised as 'headteachers who inspect' rather than 'headteacher inspectors'.

Managing Conflicting Judgements: Working in a Team

Several of the headteachers sampled are critical about aspects of the conduct of inspections, lending weight to the view that Ofsted inspection is sometimes characterised by dislocation (Clarke and Ozga 2011) while also mirroring the critical views of inspection practice as reflected by many commentators as described earlier. Arguably, and perhaps more significantly, most are concerned about the inconsistent practice they experience while inspecting, especially on the part of some lead inspectors in the way they interpret the inspection rubric. Furthermore, a third of the headteachers sampled commented that some lead inspectors are

dismissive of the evidence presented to them, reflecting their frustrations that their views are not always given credence, and too often dismissed.

Further some of the headteachers said that some lead inspectors fail to follow through on the critical evidence presented to them or use the evidence provided to them selectively, and to the school's advantage. Several examples were given where their otherwise critical and contrary evidence was dismissed by some lead inspectors. For example, an inadequate judgement of teaching had been made by Maurice and the teacher was revisited by the lead inspector who saw improvement. This was a source of some irritation to Maurice who is cynical about what he suggests was the contrived (and better) inspection outcome for the school. Maurice makes the point succinctly,

> An outstanding school and they were going for outstanding again. I saw two requiring improvement lessons and I was pretty much told to lose the evidence. I felt undermined.

Rose also found herself being under pressure to make an overly positive judgement,

> I was very naïve at the time. I was new to it. I thought, "Perhaps he's trying to mentor, coach me and make sure". It wasn't until I'd done another couple that I started to reflect and really took exception to it, and now I'd just say "No".

When the headteachers' judgements do not seem to fit in with what the lead inspector wants their sense of moral purpose is challenged, suggesting there is neither solidarity nor shared dispositions on all inspection teams. This raises the issue about the corporate nature of some inspection judgements. The unease the headteachers experience at first hand highlights conflict and their non-alignment with their identity as inspector. It also lends weight to the view that crossing this boundary calls for personal fortitude since the headteachers' judgements are not always held in as high regard as they had expected, including by some lead inspectors.

Nonetheless, the headteachers appear to be sanguine even when disgruntled. This is because of their novice position as inspectors and the fear of rocking the boat and receiving an evaluation from the lead inspector which they perceive may have negative consequences. Also, despite the concerns expressed above, the headteachers are generally impressed with the inspection skills displayed by most other inspectors with whom they work and aware of their own limitations. Although she has inspected for some time, Helen comments,

> I still feel wet behind the ears in terms of my ability to inspect even though I've done seventy odd schools.

Furthermore, the headteachers sampled mostly enjoy good working relations with other inspectors and welcome the interactions, suggesting that headteachers' participation in events is often motivated by the possibility of meeting and exchanging ideas with their peers. Indeed, the headteachers value being members of an inspection team because headship is quite an isolated position at times and several comment that working as a team inspector contrasts to headship where they are very much the leader of the team.

Prospects for the New Inspection Policy

Earlier in the chapter we discussed the recent policy change to move towards a situation where the majority of inspection is carried out by practitioner inspectors. We now consider the prospects for this policy drawing on perspectives of headteachers who inspect and the analysis of their boundary crossing role. We consider firstly the challenges of policy implementation in terms of the recruitment and deployment of a largely new inspection workforce of practitioners, including the issue of the take up of the leadership role. Secondly, we consider whether the policy will be successful in fulfilling the two aims of the policy pointed to earlier, namely improving the view of and receptivity to inspection by the educational workforce and the accuracy and consistency of judgement. We then consider the long term prospects for the policy and the possibility of the emergence of a new community of practice of practitioner inspectors and the relationship between inspection and the self-improving school system agenda.

The Challenge of Implementation of the New Policy

It is an obvious, but important, point that the new policy of inspection largely by practitioners can only succeed if headteachers are willing to be inspectors. A previous study of primary headteachers, where Robinson (2012) found a considerable animosity to engagement in inspection, noting that '*the judgemental role of Ofsted without consequential school improvement was abhorrent for headteachers*' (2012: 69). The headteachers we report on here took a more balanced view and by choosing to inspect might be seen to be embracing the culture of compliancy (Ball 2000) thereby taking an active as opposed to a subversive role in the change agenda. Our evidence supports this insofar that all our heads are committed to and see the value of inspection. However, this does not mean that they are uncritical of the inspection process as they experience it, or that they are subject to no anxiety, ambiguity or conflict as they undertake their work.

The ambition of Ofsted to move towards having the majority of inspection undertaken by serving heads from well performing schools is challenging. There are many reasons why heads may not choose to follow the route undertaken by our sample. Some of these will be matters of principle—fundamental objections to aspects of the inspection regime. Others are more pragmatic. The reasons Waldegrave and Simons (2014) set out for headteachers being unwilling to become inspectors included the up-front costs to their schools and the time involved, while some did not want to be part of the Ofsted brand.

More fundamentally, as some of our heads commented, there are risks associated with failing the Ofsted training or if their own school receives a 'requiring improvement' or even worse an 'inadequate' grade at its inspection. Either has the potential to damage their credibility both as headteacher and inspector. Several of

the headteachers in the sample do not publicise the fact that they inspect and keep a low profile in their localities. The impact of headteachers who inspect is also dependent on their schools accepting that the inspection regime uses them in this way. Governing bodies have to be persuaded that the added value for the school is significant enough to agree release, an important consideration for policy makers.

More fundamentally for the long term perhaps is the question of whether headteachers can be persuaded to lead inspections. While our headteachers have a mostly positive view about their inspection work, and two had led inspections previously, tellingly eight of the headteachers express no desire to move on from their role as team inspectors to leading inspections. Financial gain, status and/or 'power' all seem insufficient motivation to overcome what they perceive as the challenges of leading inspections. Those in the sample who once led inspections say they have no intention of doing so again, and certainly not while still a serving headteacher. Factors deterring the headteachers from leading include time management, keeping up to date with the changes to the *School Inspection Handbook* and inspection protocols, writing the inspection report and addressing complaints.

This reluctance to lead inspections has implications for the management of inspections, especially when the composition of the contracted inspector workforce is predominantly comprised of headteachers. Ofsted would have to make adjustments to workloads as well as finances to encourage more practitioners to lead teams.

The Potential for Changing Schools' Relationship to Inspection

The release of headteachers from schools can be difficult. Achieving the right balance in the inspector pool as well as inspector deployment will also require careful management by Ofsted. As well as undertaking fewer inspections than other inspectors, historically headteachers also tend to withdraw more often from inspections at short notice because of unplanned events in their school. These issues may affect the number of inspectors required, the cost of maintaining serving practitioners as 'fit and proper' against their activity levels and the management of their performance. In short, the use of more practitioners may lead to higher maintenance costs and in a larger workforce than would otherwise be needed, thereby increasing the potential for inconsistency, the very issue raised by commentators and headteachers as being one of the perceived problems with current inspection practice. Further, an advantage of the previous arrangement of having a core of 'professional inspectors' was that comparative judgements were made on the basis of experience of inspecting a wide variety of types of schools. There is a risk that the recruitment of 'well-positioned' headteachers (Coldron et al. 2014) from a relatively narrow range of school types may lead to judgement of other schools in relation to inspectors' judgements and beliefs about their own schools. In

this way, the role of the key boundary object, the *Inspection Handbook* would be undermined. The outcome may less consistency rather than more.

Notwithstanding these potential problems, the headteachers in the study reported here believe that they made a specific contribution to the inspection process both through the respect that they are given by other headteachers and the practitioner knowledge they bring to inspections. It is likely that as headteachers form the majority of the cohort of inspectors, relationships between themselves and the headteachers of the inspected schools will change both at the individual as well as the macro level, and presumably, for the better. However, this rapprochement will be undermined if, as is likely if these 12 headteachers are typical, headteachers continue to be reluctant to lead inspections.

The New Inspection Workforce and the Self-improving System Agenda

Headteachers who inspect are learning to adopt and develop perspectives through their inspection practice, and are '*thinking paradoxically*' (Close and Raynor 2010: 217) because they are effectively standing outside the experience of their headship and looking at school improvement from the contrasting standpoint as an inspector. This an important point when considering their potential as system leaders. As Woods and Simkins observe, as new patterns of school structure emerge, '*choices have to be made about the kind of identity and agency that players in the system want to aspire to*' (2014: 336).

The recurring theme among the headteachers in this study is the demonstration of their disposition to enter the work of inspection. Their sense of commitment to the duality of their professional lives, as headteacher and inspector, resonates with the concept of a systemic leadership orientation (Higham et al. 2009; Robinson 2012; Boylan 2010). Significantly, any disenchantment the headteachers in the sample have about inspecting and/or inspection does not appear to impact markedly on their views about the value of an inspection process overall, or their place within it.

Conclusion

Changes to the 2012 English Ofsted Inspection Framework have not only affected the criteria under which schools are inspected but have also resulted in a re-modelling of the inspection workforce and the recruitment of far more in service head teachers as part-time inspectors. In this Chapter we have outlined the policy background to recent changes in inspection policy in England including previous research on the policy and practice of inspection and the experience of being inspected. We have used the concept of boundary crossing as a means to understand

the experience of inspection of headteachers who were inspecting prior to the recent policy change. The study reported gives insight into the potential challenges for those headteachers who are currently taking up the inspection role.

The focus on headteachers as system leaders including as inspectors is not unproblematic from the perspective of proponents of neo-liberalism. Ironically, at the time of writing, the current HMCI, who was recruited directly from a post as a headteacher and has announced his intention to retire at the end of 2016, is proving to be a source of challenge to government plans as a result of his public utterances on a number of politically contentious matters, for example pointing out the shortcomings of multi academy trusts (private but publically funded chains of schools).

Finally, we have argued that the participants in our study are best described as 'headteachers who inspect'. It remains to be seen that the current changes in the inspection workforce will lead to the development of a more distinct professional identity of 'a headteacher inspector', or what the potential consequences are for the blurring of the boundary at scale between those who inspect and those who are inspected.

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