

## **Inspection and Emotion**

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### **Introduction**

In this paper I explore the emotional impact of inspection on the teaching staff of a secondary school. Inspection is increasingly a part of the accountability and performativity culture prevalent in the English education system, and the emotional impact on teachers can be profound. Using data from one school undergoing inspection, I will argue that the negative emotional impact of inspection on teachers goes beyond the oft reported issues of stress and overwork. Teachers experience a loss of power and control, and the sense of being permanently under a disciplinary regime can lead to fear, anger and disaffection. Foucault (1977: 170) argues that 'the success of disciplinary power derives no doubt from the use of simple instruments; hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and their combination in a procedure that is specific to it, the examination'. The examination, in the guise of inspections, is part of the increasing culture of accountability in education, which has created a system in which disciplinary mechanisms are used widely. I use the idea of 'panoptic performativity' to explore the experience of undergoing inspection. Panoptic performativity describes a regime in which frequency of inspection and the sense of being perpetually under surveillance leads to teachers performing in ways dictated by the discourse of inspection in order to escape the regime. Lessons are taught to a rigidly prescribed routine, school documentation and policies closely mirror the accepted discourses of school effectiveness and the whole school effort is directed away from education and towards passing inspection. It is this sense of relentless surveillance which leads to negative emotional consequences.

It is important to understand the links between stress and emotion, and to realise that stress is not always a negative concept. The original definition of stress was neutral, for example, 'the human body's non specific physiological response to any demand' (Selye 1956). Stress can have both positive and negative effects, as without some form of pressure, workers can

lack drive and creativity. The positive role of stress can be in enhancing job performance and maintaining motivation, and thus can be linked in a positive way with emotions. Emotions are important in teaching as they are in all professions in which performance plays such an important part (Goffman 1959). Teaching is a very interactive job, and teachers have to invest their self in their work, which leads to a sense that self-esteem becomes very bound up in success. Nias (1996: 108) concurs, writing that teaching calls for 'a massive investment in the self'. This is why realising the emotional effects of external mechanisms such as inspection on teachers is important, as negative emotions are bound to have a detrimental effect on teacher motivation and performance.

Though it is acknowledged that a certain level of stress is needed for creativity, too much stress can lead to negative emotions. Lazarus (1976: 47) noted that 'stress occurs when there are demands on a person which tax or exceed his adjustive resources'. This implies that pressure, combined with the ability to adapt, may or may not lead to negative stress. Two people, when faced with the same amount of pressure at work may react totally differently, depending on how their personalities can cope with pressure, and what other pressures are happening in their life at the same time.

Stress becomes problematic when it leads to negative emotions. Kyriacou (2001: 28) defines teacher stress as 'the experience by teachers of unpleasant negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration, depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher'. Similarly, the European Commission (2000) defines stress as 'the emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physiological reaction to aversive and noxious aspects of work, work environments and work organisations. It is a state characterised by high levels of arousal and distress and often by feelings of not coping'. Inspection, I will argue, is one regime which is 'aversive and noxious', and its emotional impact can be profound. The focus on the effects of inspection is more often on aspects of stress relating to overwork, but the emotional consequences can be far more important.

The interactive view of stress (Johnston 1989), in which stress is an interactive situation where teaching and schools exert pressure and teachers react in different ways, is probably the most useful definition. It acknowledges that stress can be maintained at acceptable levels - employers have a duty of care, but teachers must apply 'adaptive resources'. There is an increasing amount of interest in teacher stress, particularly in the context of teacher recruitment and retention. Johnson and Hallgarten (2002: 2) found that

since the 1987 Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act and the 1988 Education Reform Act, teachers had felt themselves under a government cosh whose blows became progressively heavier. They believed they suffered an imposed and outdated curriculum...a punitive inspection system, worsening staffing levels and tightening budgets, continually worsening pay levels...ever increasing bureaucratic demands and continued attacks on the profession by the government, which together produced low morale, below target recruitment to training, and the beginnings of staffing shortages

Studies in the UK by Brown, Ralph and Brember (2002) estimated that one-third of teachers were suffering from stress. They argued that in the 1980s and 1990s the number of teachers leaving the profession through ill health nearly trebled. They based their research on teachers from Manchester primary and secondary schools and discovered that common work-related factors which teachers found stressful were class size and ability, lack of discipline, pupil motivation and attitude, anxiety over test results, pupil disorganisation, student expectations of staff, conflicts with difficult pupils, and lack of escape. They also found relations with colleagues stressful in terms of uneven workloads, personality clashes, poor communication systems, lack of community spirit, little social or academic interaction with other departments, poor interpersonal relationships, and insufficient support. They conclude 'it is apparent that teaching staff are increasingly feeling inadequate in the face of rising expectations and greater responsibilities and workloads being placed upon them'. (Brown, Ralph et al. 2002: 11)

There are many studies of a similar nature, including Cole and Walker (1989) who found that 'an important source of stress for teachers is the feeling that they are not in control of the situation in which they have to operate' (Cole and Walker 1989: 164). This lack of a sense of being in control is a consequence of the increasing regime of accountability in which teachers work. It is this issue of feeling 'out of control' that I wish to highlight, and I will argue that the inspection regime in England and Wales is a primary site of this loss of control.

### **Inspection and panoptic performativity**

There has been a shift in accountability in teaching since the 1988 Education Reform Act, from teacher professionalism, with accountability to themselves, their colleagues and their students (self-regulation), to accountability to external agencies such as the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), OfSTED and the Teacher Training Agency (TTA). Nowhere is this sense of accountability experienced more strongly than within the inspection system.

The Education Act of 1992 led to the creation of OfSTED (Office for Standards in Education), which is a privatised inspection system. Inspection teams, who have to bid for contracts, are led by a Registered Inspector, and inspect schools according to a criteria-based system. The framework for inspections is revised frequently, with the most recent being outlined in 2005 (OfSTED 2005)<sup>1</sup>. The framework relevant to this paper is from 2003. Under this system schools are inspected every six years, with inspectors in school for a week during which time they observe lessons, interview staff and pupils and analyse documentation in order to evaluate standards achieved; pupils' attitudes, values and personal development; teaching and learning; the quality of the curriculum; the care, guidance and support of pupils; partnerships with parents, other schools and the community; leadership and management.

Following the inspection, the Registered Inspector reports to OfSTED and to the school in a publicly available document. The school then produces a summary report for parents and governors and an action plan to address any concerns raised in the report. If a school is not seen to be providing an acceptable standard of education the school becomes subject to

<sup>1</sup> This heralds a move to what OfSTED calls 'short focussed inspections' about once every three years.

Special Measures and subsequently receives termly visits from Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) to monitor progress until the school is removed from Special Measures following a full inspection, if deemed to have made sufficient improvements. In extreme cases, if OfSTED does not observe improvement, the school is closed down.

Stated so baldly, the inspection process seems quite benign. But schools undergo an intense period of intense preparation for inspections as OfSTED, and particularly Special Measures, form an important part of the disciplinary regime in education. 'The exercise of school inspection (is) one of improvement through threat and fear, an intentionally disciplining role' (Lonsdale and Parsons 1998: 110). I will look at emotional responses to OfSTED within the context of disciplinary mechanisms and performativity.

I have previously (Perryman 2003) used the idea of 'panoptic performativity' to explore the experience of undergoing inspection. Performativity is a term first used by Lyotard in 1984, when he suggested that post-modern society is obsessed with efficiency and effectiveness and that this efficiency is increasingly 'measured according to an input / output ratio' (Lyotard 1984:88). This has led to all kinds of businesses, (and more recently schools themselves), being judged in terms of outcome and performance. Thus league tables, SATs results and inspection reports are increasingly the measurements by which schools and teachers are judged. Performativity is linked with the increased accountability and surveillance under which teachers find themselves and their schools being judged in terms of outcome and performance. In the context of school inspection this means that lessons are taught in a particular way and school policies and documentation reflect the expected discourse. It is this sense of 'jumping through hoops' that can lead to teachers' sense of emotional dissonance, as they lose their sense of professional independence. As Mahoney and Hextall (2000: 78) write 'increasingly there are sets of regulations and requirements and expectations built around those teachers who are at the peak of their professional expertise and yet who don't have the autonomy to define how they work' – it is this resentment of external mechanisms that can have profound effects on the emotions of teachers undergoing inspection.

I link performativity to the panopticon. Foucault (1977) suggests that Bentham's Panopticon, a design for a model prison, can be seen as a metaphorical disciplinary mechanism that operates through a variety of institutional apparatuses and discourses. In the panopticon, individual cells were arranged around a central tower. By the use of backlighting, a supervisor could observe every cell without the 'inmate' knowing if they were being watched or not. Bentham called this 'a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind in a quantity hitherto without example' (1787: iii). He wrote that 'the object of the inspection principle is to make them not only suspect, but be assured that whatever they do is known even though that should not be the case' (Bentham in Miller 1988: 43). Thus institutional authority is invisible, but the objects of power, which in a school are the teachers and pupils, are visible and supervised. So used are the prisoners to being constantly watched, that they modify their behaviour and 'even if the inspector no longer keeps a list of future transgressions, even if he never again intervenes, even if he no longer surveys, the prisoners will now begin to do this by themselves: each will watch himself' (Bentham in Miller 1988: 17). Emotions, according to Boler (1999) are a site of social control, as the constant surveillance of a panoptic regime relies on internalised fear.

The performative culture in schools lends itself well to the metaphor of the panopticon and thus, as Harland (1996: 101) notes, 'the exercise of continuing surveillance through the process of monitoring and evaluation means that those concerned also come to anticipate the response...to their actions past, present, and future and therefore come to discipline themselves'. Inspection regimes engender an environment in which teachers behave as if they are under constant surveillance, which further creates a gap between teachers' sense of professional control. In 'performing the normal' to conform to previously defined rigorous criteria in an environment where surveillance feels permanent, the teacher can be subject to a number of negative emotions linked to loss of self.

Although many inspections end with a positive report, the fear of the dire consequences of failing in schools which are less successful can lead to stress and negative emotions of fear, panic and loss of self. Under inspection, teachers may experience their greatest crisis of true

self. All work they do is dictated by the requirements of the inspection process, and despite being exhausted and sometimes fearful they must continue to perform for the inspectors. Ball (2003) remarks that under inspection 'what is produced is a spectacle or what we might see as an 'enacted fantasy' which is there to be seen and judged' . He goes on to say that 'the heart of the educational project is gouged out and left empty. Authenticity is replaced by plasticity'. In terms of emotion, authenticity can be linked to the extent to which one behaves according to what is considered to be the true self. If inspection forces teachers to behave in a certain way over which they have no control, then negative emotion can be the result. This is compounded by the need to be in full 'performance mode' during inspections, teaching fantastic lessons and talking very positively about the school. This can force people to display different emotions from those that they are actually feeling, which is called 'emotional dissonance' (Fineman 2000).

The pressure applied by outside forces such as inspection regimes can lead to negative emotional stress which can make doing the job effectively much harder. This in turn can set off a cycle of worsening stress, 'poor' teaching can lead to disaffected pupils who can then create classroom conditions to exacerbate the stress. According to Fineman (2000: 5) professional and organisational norms underpin what people in work roles should and should not display or feel. Carlyle and Woods (2002: 25) found that stress meant that 'teachers found that instead of demanding but pleasurable emotional labour, they endured burdensome and stressful emotional toil'.

### **The Research Context**

Northgate<sup>2</sup> is a mixed inner-city comprehensive for pupils aged 11-16. The pupils come from a four mile catchment area of significant economic and social deprivation. During its most recent inspection, there were 865 pupils on roll, 75% of whom were from minority ethnic groups. There were 37 languages spoken at the school, and 10% of the pupils were at the early stages of English acquisition. 30% of pupils had Special Educational Needs, 50% of the

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<sup>2</sup> This is a pseudonym to protect the school

pupils receive free school meals<sup>3</sup>, and there were around fifty refugees<sup>4</sup>. I chose Northgate as having failed an OfSTED inspection it had been under Special Measures for eighteen months, during which time it was monitored by frequent inspections by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI). It was released from Special Measures, then underwent another OfSTED inspection almost two years later. The research in this paper focuses on the time after Special Measures, and the preparation, experience and aftermath of the subsequent OfSTED inspection.

In order to protect the anonymity of the school, the actual dates of the relevant OfSTED inspection have been withheld. However, in order to prevent confusion, I will refer to the two school years of research for this paper as Year A and B. The first research for this paper was carried out just over a year after Northgate came out of Special Measures, (Summer, year A), a term later (Autumn, year B), in the subsequent Spring in the weeks leading to the school's next OfSTED inspection (Year B) and in the Summer following this OfSTED inspection. In research period A (summer), I interviewed the twelve teachers who had been at Northgate since before the school was put into Special Measures. They were a relatively senior group, perhaps due to their comparative longevity in a school with a high turnover of staff, and there were three senior managers and nine middle managers. Each teacher was asked for their views on the impact inspection had had on them. In the Autumn I interviewed seven of this cohort about how they felt about the prospect of the inspectors returning. The following spring (year B) I was given extensive access to the school in the six weeks leading up to and including the OfSTED inspection and interviewed seventeen teachers (including the original cohort) about the preparation for OfSTED. I then returned in the Summer term (year B) and re-interviewed the teachers about how they felt that the inspection had affected them.

## **Emotion in the Panopticon**

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<sup>3</sup> A benchmark for measurement of poverty

<sup>4</sup> All statistics from the OfSTED report, date withheld



When Northgate was under Special Measures, the school was inspected eight times in 18 months, and, in one particular intense phase, five times in nine months. When inspections were occurring at such a rate, there was a sense that they were continuous. Because there was so little 'recovery time' between inspections, the staff learnt to act as if inspection was continuous. The six weeks between inspections was spent gathering evidence for the next time, writing policies, observing and grading lessons and frantic meetings to ensure the whole school was working together. The experience for teachers was of constant inspections. When asked to reflect on their experience of Special Measures, teachers used metaphors such as *'treadmill', 'jumping over hurdles, 'jumping through hoops' 'a crazy cycle of working like mad followed by a period of near collapse'* and said that *'the frequency of inspections [was] demoralising and exhausting'*. (various, summer year A). To use the Panoptic metaphor, even if the school was not being officially inspected, 'the dark central tower' of OfSTED was always invisibly watching. Eventually, teachers under Special Measures need to behave as if they are being inspected all the time so it becomes second nature and thus the disciplinary mechanism is internalized.

Performativity in education can lead to a sense of deprofessionalisation as teachers can feel that they are performing in order to demonstrate their competence. Tomlinson (2001: 36) maintains that teachers have become 'a technical workforce to be managed and controlled rather than a profession to be respected'. When linked to the feeling of becoming deprofessionalised, it is clear that the inspection regime will almost inevitably cause strong emotions in those who are inspected. Lonsdale and Parsons (1998: 113) call inspection 'a non-negotiable, deprofessionalising accountability system, punitive in intent and practice, driving up standards by fear'. Inspections are usually linked to such issues as stress and overwork, but I would suggest the emotional impact of fear, lack of control and disengagement from the self is of equal importance.

### **'A Living Hell'**

On the surface, the most oft-reported response to OfSTED in my research was comments about over-work. However, the fact that this was described as a living hell by one respondent indicates that it went beyond extra hours

*It's been a living hell ever since it was announced, it has been, because you go home you've got extra work to do, other meetings the borough want me to attend to get advice and stuff, so not only in here it's outside. (Caroline, middle manager, autumn year B)*

Helen, a middle manager remembers how she felt under constant inspection 'I was completely punch-drunk with inspections by then, it was just part of the general atmosphere of stress'. Her use of the phrase 'punch drunk' goes beyond over work and tiredness, but rather gives the impression of someone who feels that inspection has taken over her life, that she lives within an inspection panopticon. She is not alone - in an article in the TES aptly entitled 'Panic on Parade' Jeffrey and Woods (1995) describe the effect of an inspection on primary teachers – not in terms of the result of inspection, but the preparation for it. The urge to present the school in its best light is fuelled by OFSTED's terms of reference - looking for what can be demonstrated by tangible evidence. Thus some teachers see inspection as having a barrack room inspection approach, where they look 'everywhere, even under your armpits'.

In Autumn, Year B, people were worrying about the inspection to come. Although the school had not been given an inspection date, staff knew that one was due, as all schools released from Special Measures must undertake a full OfSTED inspection within two years. I asked people how they felt they would respond to OfSTED.

*I would feel nervous, everyone else would start to feel agitated, I would feel agitated along with everybody else now, I'd feel there's more responsibility on me now. So I would feel nervous, I would feel there would be extra workload, every night I would have to be here making sure this, that and the other were in place and life will*

*probably not be very good for the six weeks before OfSTED was coming in. I do remember having nights when I didn't sleep and the lessons were running through your mind and panic attacks and all that kind of stuff. (Mel, middle manager, autumn year B)*

The theme here appears to be fear. The teachers are not expressing their dislike at overwork, nor complaining about stress, but there seems to be a genuine fear. OfSTED is the dark central tower, the return of the prison in which all will be judged. Eileen remembered a conversation with her partner about the consequences of failing the inspection;

*So he was saying to me 'well what's at stake' and I said to him actually not only is it awful to go into Special Measures, because it's not good and no one wants it, the children don't want it, the parents don't want it, the teachers don't want it but also actually people do lose their jobs over it, so there is this side to it, where whole leadership teams in certain situations have gone, certainly heads have gone and deputy heads have gone because of a bad OfSTED (Eileen, senior manager, autumn year B)*

In spring year B I was able to spend six weeks in the school to observe its preparation for OfSTED, and also the inspection itself. It was a time of huge panic, seemingly from the time OfSTED was announced. For some, it had already proved too much.

*We've got a member of our faculty had shingles and was off for two weeks and that was stress, she was totally panicking because she believed that if you had one lesson that was unsatisfactory you could get sacked on the spot. Because she's been three years in other business, did a PGCE<sup>5</sup> 3 or 4 years ago, you read things in the paper and she's got shingles and that was purely the stress of it. Everyone is miserable, people are saying 'I've had enough, I don't want it, I'm thinking of going'*

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<sup>5</sup> Post Graduate Certificate in Education – teaching qualification for graduates

*and it's putting the icing on the cake because people are stressed. (Lynn, middle manager, spring year B)*

Again, this reaction is about fear, not complaints of overwork. Fear of the consequences of a poor OfSTED report drives people on in terms of massive overwork, and it is the emotion of fear, not stress of overwork that is the important reaction. I asked some people to quantify the amount of extra work they were doing

*Well at the moment in the run-up we're all doing about 10 hours a day, I think certainly the head is doing more than that, but on a personal level I think that no one's sleeping very well (Eileen, senior manager, spring year B)*

*At the moment I'm doing between 12 and 14 hours a day between start and finish and sorting stuff out and working at the weekend, like the morning or afternoon both days to try and sort it all out. (Janice, middle manager, spring year B)*

Mel listed her tasks, commenting on panic, and a sense of responsibility for her department

*I don't feel like I'm getting enough guidance as to what is required, so therefore I am a bit panicky about the admin side of things, the handbook and all the things that need to be in place which haven't been updated, so therefore I'm feeling like I have to be responsible for that even though it's not really my job, therefore I'm getting more stressed because I'm thinking someone else should be doing it but I've got to go ahead and do it. (Mel, middle manager)*

As Jeffrey and Woods note 'Whatever else was happening elsewhere in these teachers' experiences, the inspection cast a dark shadow over them all' (1996, p 329). The fear of the panoptic regime, of always having to teach and behave in a way acceptable to the inspectors was paramount. The respondents are not only over working because of fear, but also because of a sense of responsibility towards other department members.

## Resentment of the External Agenda

Alongside the concerns about stress caused by overwork were complaints about the loss of control, and frustration about the dominance of externally imposed systems. According to Cole (Cole and Walker 1989: 164) 'an important source of stress for teachers is the feeling that they are not in control of the situation in which they have to operate'. Simon, a senior manager, was keen to point out it was not the extra work brought by the inspection preparation he hated, but the fact it was someone else's agenda

*I work quite long hours anyway but it's a different sort of long hours. I am one of these people who tends to work long hours, but the difference is normally I do my job and I work quite long hours doing things I enjoy doing which are developmental, and I actually enjoy doing them whereas now I'm doing stuff that I don't want to do, I don't like doing it, I don't enjoy doing it and it's an absolute pain, so in a way it's about 20 times more wearing because its tasks that... I usually give up my own time at my own discretion, I choose to give up my own time to do things for the benefit of the school because I want to do to them, it's my choice, whereas now it's an outside agency that's imposing this situation. Things arise that are imposed on me and I find that a lot more tiring when I've got to do something for somebody else, it's a different sort of work, it's a much less healthy type of work. (Simon, senior manager, spring year B)*

Jeffrey and Woods (1996: 334), writing about primary teachers preparing for inspection also found this loss of control a theme, reporting that:

Whereas formally this was a voluntary state and one that realised and expanded the self, now it was more of a prison where their selves were to be fashioned according to the new orders. Just as an asylum for the mentally ill interrogates its patients and then makes that information the basis of its treatment, so the inspectors interrogate the teachers about the school organisation and then report back to them their failures - the practice that needs treatment

One cannot deny that the stress of OfSTED in some teachers is the spur to perform even better, and there are a few teachers who thrive under a performative regime. However, for most, the pressure of OfSTED will exacerbate stress to the point of producing negative emotions in individuals, and school regimes which are not able to be emotionally responsive to these individual needs.

It is important when analysing my own data to move beyond glib references to stress and look instead at the emotions within the statements. For example, in the following extract from my interview with Dave, asked about how he felt about an impending OfSTED inspection, there are five separate references to pressure, and eight different descriptions of negative emotions. These are far more informative about his real feelings than 'stressed out'.

*Absolutely terrified, because we've got to do it all again now, you couldn't, I don't think you could be a teacher if you were always under that kind of **pressure**, so we know that every five years you're going to be under some **pressure** to show what you can do, but the fact that we've had it quite recently and now we're going to have to have it again, it seems a very short period and it seems that there's enough **pressure** working at a school like this, this type of school as it is, and when you add and add and add **pressures** it does become very difficult and quite tense and it affects other parts of your life like when you go home so I think it's quite scary because I just know I'm going to be under **pressure** and stressed-out again so I'm not happy. Why is it that everybody feels like that? Is it fear of failure? Is it fear of hard work and having to prove your self? But if you're a good teacher and you're teaching fairly effectively, although sometimes in schools that this it's different being a good teacher than in other schools. Why are people so scared – you should be proud to show off what you can do I suppose but no one feels like that everyone's just shitting themselves. I don't know I haven't got an answer but I'm pretty nervous. I've got to say. (Dave, middle manager, spring year B)*

A further analysis of responses reveals a panoply of emotions which are largely dependent on where the respondents are in relation to an inspection – thus fear and panic before an inspection, loss of self during inspections, and joy followed swiftly by anti-climax and disillusionment after.

### **Panic, loss of self and lack of freedom**

As the time of the next OfSTED inspection approached, Northgate's teachers were working longer and longer hours, including weekends and half terms, and a sense of panic was setting in.

*The next two weekends, I'm going to be in on Saturday and Sunday. I've got no choice, I've just got no choice, I can't find the time just to stick things on the wall, I've got to sit down and laminate and put it up and position it and get all your key words, you know the score, this, that and the other and I just can't find time to do it in the school day. (Dave, middle manager, spring year B)*

*At break, how many teachers have come to me and said they came in three days over holidays, not everyone's got their plans done but they are in panicking. It's after the holiday and people are first talking about how much work they've done. It's been terrible. There's been a whole bunch of staff that hasn't gone away because they have been in here working, which means they are going to be worn out (Lyn, middle manager, spring year B)*

Dave despaired that he was ever going to be ready, displaying a sense of helplessness and lack of control.

*I feel like I'm doing a huge amount but I'm not sure that I am getting anything done, if that kind of makes sense, like I haven't got my lesson plans done, they're due in this afternoon and I've not got one, because at the end of last half term I was busy*

*dealing with day-to-day issues you know kids, parents want seeing, kids are being sent home, letters to be written, phone-calls to be made and those extra things like getting your stuff up on the wall, preparing, making sure everything's neat and tidy, marked up to date and all those bits and pieces that are expected to be done, I haven't done yet because every day is another school day, and today I thought I'd come in today, Monday, and people are being sent home and I have to fill in this and that and it's already twenty to three and I haven't done anything. (Dave, middle manager, spring year B)*

Overall, during the build up to OfSTED one of the primary emotions seemed to be hysteria. My field notes describe a typical break time scene.

*At break time there was hysteria about lack of coffee cups in the staff room, as people tend to take them away with them to their teaching area and not return them. Staff only have 15 minutes for break, which is barely enough time to have a coffee, so on being greeted with an empty cup cupboard one teacher launched into a tirade of obscenities and looked as if she was about to cry (field notes)*

There also tended to be an unsupportive atmosphere developing as some staff started to let their irritation with others' panic show.

*Oh some people are ridiculous, some people are hysterical, one woman is hysterical because she doesn't know what she's doing. I don't know if her head of faculty has told her what she's doing but she doesn't seem to know anything. (Zoe, middle manager, spring year B)*

This is an example of how with the ratchetting up of emotion, the school environment can not provide emotional support. People also started to discuss the effect on their home lives. One of the recurring themes in the weeks before OfSTED was the effect that the inspection was



having on the teachers' family lives. Mel describes how all-consuming her OfSTED preparation was becoming

*I'm waking up in the middle of the night thinking of lesson plans and ideas and stuff like that, so obviously it's stressing me out. Last night for instance at quarter to one in the morning I suddenly had a brilliant brain wave for a starter of a lesson and I said to my partner 'how about that for an idea', and I told him about the numeracy starter for the lesson and at first he said 'Shut up, you're mad, go to sleep' but then he agreed with me that it was a good lesson so we ended up talking at 1 o'clock in the morning about my lesson plans for OfSTED, which normally I wouldn't really be doing! (Mel, middle manager, spring year B)*

Nearer the time of the inspection, Mel describes her guilt how the inspection has affected the amount of time she can spend with her children.

*I worked all over the half term and my partner took the children away so I didn't see them for three or four days, and I felt really bad, I feel like my children are not even part of my life any more, it's really horrible, just like 'Oh my God!' So I came in every day and I came in at the weekend and I came in on Sunday and that again was really stressful because I was sat here thinking 'why am I here on a Sunday morning rather than out in the park playing with my kids?' (Mel, middle manager, spring year B)*

She was not the only person to leave her partner and children at the weekend

*Well put it this way, it's the first time I've ever come in over the holiday to work, only Saturday morning, I had it limited and I'm going to come in this Saturday morning, and I never work weekends, I never come in on holidays and obviously it meant I left my partner and my children and he came and met me straight up in my classroom on Saturday, I said 'I'll meet you back at home' and he said 'no you won't because you'll work all day' (Lynn, middle manager, spring year B)*

Olivia complains about how the inspection is affecting her relationship with her partner, and her personality

*I seem OK here, but I am really horrible outside because I'm really stressed and I was really horrible to my boyfriend last night and I told him I couldn't help it, I really couldn't help it, and he's so nice. I spent a whole weekend working trying to get the paperwork sorted. I feel quite sick at the moment because I just don't feel ready. I've been a very stressed the last two or three weeks, I've been biting at people and very snappy (Olivia, middle manager, spring year B)*

In the week before OfSTED the tension reached new heights. Many people told me they would have to work over the weekend, so one of the first things I did after the weekend was to look at the visitors' book. All staff working at the weekend had to sign in, though some told me it was not always enforced. Whether all people signed it or not, I discovered that 21 teachers signed in on the Saturday, with at least two people working from 8.40am to 4.45pm, and most people staying for half a day. Twenty people are signed in for the Sunday, nine of whom were new names. Thus thirty teachers worked in school over the weekend before OfSTED, with eleven working on both days – this of course does not take into account those working from home. By now, some respondents were beginning to exaggerate hysterically;

*It's like there's an endless list that could go on for the next 10 years and I still wouldn't be ready for OfSTED! I'm working, because I always work, I never stop working, I never stop thinking about OfSTED, I never stop working for OfSTED, I have worked harder than I've ever worked in my whole life, I am going to die (Mel, middle manager)*

So the fear of inspection and the internalisation of the discourse of 'how to be a good teacher' during inspection led to panic, over work, loss of self and disrupted family life. What were the consequences of the process?

## Consequences

Northgate was successful both in coming out of Special Measures and in its follow-up OfSTED, so one might think that this would give the teachers I interviewed a more balanced view of the emotional impact, rather like a mother supposedly forgets the pain of childbirth once it is successfully delivered. However, despite short term joy, the consequences of undergoing the inspection regime seemed to be an anti-climactic end to the year, and a demoralised workforce, some of whom wanted to leave.

In summer Year A, I asked teachers to reflect on how they had felt when the school came out of Special Measures the year before. The primary reaction seemed to be one of relief, some respondents were content with a one-word answer, using words such as 'relieved' and 'delighted' and others expanded to bring in their feelings of joy.

*Relieved, relieved, I felt we were due to come out of Special Measures, I felt the school had worked really hard to get out of Special Measures, and I felt the school, because of the hard work we'd done, the school had calmed in terms of some of the areas of difficulty like behaviour, so I was quite pleased and relieved obviously.*

(Dave, middle manager, summer year A)

*Great, because we were all celebrating and we thought we deserved it, we thought we'd just get rid of all the restrictions so it was a big celebration.* (Eileen, senior manager, summer year A)

*I felt elated. It was a release of pressure for the school, they put on us for about two years.* (Mark, middle manager, summer year A)

These reactions match with OfSTED's (2001) research into English schools removed from Special Measures which says 'There are some fairly predictable reactions: relief, elation, recognition of success, euphoria, pride and delight at having all the hard work rewarded'.

During this period of research, a year after the school came out of Special Measures, teachers talked about the sense of relaxation and control they were experiencing.

*I think everyone is a bit more relaxed. I'm just not under pressure the whole time although everyone puts themselves under their own personal, professional pressure I don't feel I'm always getting judged on every last thing I do and I am just a bit more relaxed about teaching and a bit happier doing it. (Dave, middle manager, summer year A)*

*It's certainly far less stressful to know that you haven't got somebody breathing down your neck every half-term. You really feel as if you can actually do your job, don't you? (Rob, middle manager, summer year A)*

There was a strong sense, a year on, that teachers could work on their own agenda. People referred to relaxation, not being judged and freedom in a way that suggested that emotionally they were empowered, and did not feel as if their lives are out of control.

I found a similar reaction when I returned to the school two months after the OfSTED inspection (summer year B). It had gone very well and the inspection report started with the sentence '*Northgate is an effective and rapidly improving school that provides good quality of education and good value for money*'. I expected to find a positive and upbeat staff, and at first, people agreed, this had been the reaction

*I think overall everyone felt upbeat about the results of OfSTED, I think there wasn't even a single faculty that didn't get some kind of praise. (Eileen, senior manager, summer year B)*

*It certainly gave a boost of confidence to the school and made many of them feel as if they were doing something right (Steve, senior manager, summer year B)*

*After they'd gone, of course, there was a big high because everybody was going 'oh right we've passed, we've passed'. Big high.'* (Donna, middle manager, summer year B)

However, these positive emotions were quickly replaced by anti-climax as people questioned the very nature of inspection

*But there was a dip, there was a sense of relief, a sense of anti-climax, started to come in after the relief, there was a high, which lasted about a week, then a sense of anti-climax, 'was it all worth it'?* (Bob, senior manager, summer year B)

*She said my lesson was good, but I didn't feel like that at all, I felt just anti-climactic really to be honest.* (Dave, middle manager, summer year B)

This was echoed in research by Golby (1996). One of his respondents, 'Josie', a mature female teacher remarked 'Since OfSTED I have felt very deflated and let down, and am even less convinced of its value'.

Despite the positive OfSTED report, people remembered it as a negative experience. This is not unusual. Maden (2001: 312) notes that 'predominantly positive inspection reports were not doing much to raise the spirit of teachers at several schools, many having found the inspection experience diversionary and professionally depressing' and 'Reacting to some of the sound-bites and rhetoric from government ministers and the chief inspector of schools, some staff also expressed a general fed-up-ness with the heroes and villains drama unfolding around them, replete with 'super heads' and 'glitzy make-overs' for failing schools and teachers'. (Maden 2001:314). This is echoed by Northgate teachers.

*I found OfSTED quite intimidating and quite pressure full* (Dave, middle manager, summer year B)

*The experience of OfSTED was a horrible pressure (Lyn, middle manager, summer year B)*

*OfSTED for my subject was pretty dreadful, it was just a total nightmare.(Olivia, middle manager, summer year B)*

*I think it was a very frightening experience for classroom teachers, some of whom had a difficult time, relatively inexperienced ones. (Eileen, senior manager, summer year B)*

Lynn pointed out that the OfSTED inspection was not only stressful, but people were also starting to feel like failures

*People were in the playground talking about it now, because I was on duty, just saying if 'I was seen last lesson I would have failed'. So people are feeling failures, and they're not. If we were that much of a failure then the school wouldn't be running as well as it was, but people are feeling terrible.(Lynn, middle manager, summer year B)*

One of the major themes was exhaustion, people seemed unable to raise themselves for the remainder of the term. There was a sense that term was drifting to a close.

*People have tended to switch off, obviously there's people leaving the school as well so they're kind of relaxed. (Mark, middle manager, summer year B)*

*Ever since then, its like you've sort of limped on through the rest of the year, we've lost the impetus in lots of ways.(Olivia, middle manager, summer year B)*

*I think people worked incredibly hard and got anxious and then after the inspection was over, there was a sense of a dip, as people took it easy, couldn't be bothered with doing this or that, just felt if they were a bit ill they didn't come in, which lead to a*

*feeling of... even though we'd done very well. (Eileen, senior manager, summer year B)*

*People are tired, people have had enough of it all, it was full-on for so long, we had months of it, the month or so of build up and then them coming in and people have just said 'Right, summer, I'm just going to see it out now until summer'. I'm getting impatient and losing patience and I'm tired every day. Every day I wake up now and I think once people have had six weeks' away from the constant 'sir, sir, sir' they will come back and start getting it back. There was just a slight feeling when OfSTED had gone of everyone taking an out breath, and they haven't started taking the in breath again (Dave, middle manager, summer year B).*

*Of course, people were sick, there was a sick list seriously, and I always thought that was merely... that was just like just something that people said 'oh yes everyone goes sick after OfSTED' but god they were! For two days afterwards the list for cover, people obviously just flaked out and thought 'oh my God' (Donna, middle manager, summer year B)*

*But then the fall out from OfSTED is that everybody feels that they worked really hard and OfSTED was the kind of thing that they worked for, and it's really hard to get people to go back up again, because everybody gave 100 per cent and is completely worn out and then the impact of that is lots of staff disaffection. If you like, it's almost like the year finished when OfSTED went. (Janice, middle manager, summer year B)*

Maden too found that inspection had a negative effect as one head responded 'it set us back a year no question. It drained me and it drained the staff.' (Maden 2001: 311).

One of the consequences of the OfSTED inspection, whether direct or indirect, was that many of the staff were leaving

*The school has lost a lot of experienced staff. We are losing, I don't know what proportion of the staff we are losing, but a fair proportion, not since the end of that first year has there been so many staff leave. It's probably getting on for about 20.*

(Alistair, middle manager, summer year B)

Two of the leavers explain why

*I was getting more upset about being here, going home and being more upset and I just thought 'life is too short and no I don't need to be here', so I decided to make a change.* (Lynn, middle manager, summer year B)

*I had kind of intended to leave this year anyway, but the fact that things have started to get, even from my point of view, it was becoming unsustainable* (Mark, middle manager, summer year B)

## **Conclusion**

One of the major impacts on the school following OfSTED was disaffection. Shaun, due to leave the school to take up a job outside mainstream education, explained the weariness that inspection regimes caused him personally

*I have lived under the 'about to be inspected regime' or 'just been inspected regime' for approximately four or five years. It's a terrible burden under which to operate and it puts everyone under stress. The actual process of the inspections creates massive amounts of work, the benefits of which are not seen necessarily in the quality of teaching and learning but are only related to making sure you're keeping the people coming in doing inspections happy by providing them with certain kinds information, presenting information in certain ways to suit their particular criteria. So the actual inspection itself does generate extra work as well as the stress levels and it doesn't necessarily help you plan, teach and prepare your lessons in a better way because*



*you're doing it to a set formula which you wouldn't necessarily think was the one that might be best to assess the performance of children and teachers if you had the chance to devise your own system for inspecting learning and teaching. (Shaun, middle manager, summer year B)*

Other teachers explained how it made them feel about their careers

*There is a limit to how many hours you can put in per day and still have a life and if you put in more than that then eventually you will want to leave the job and you won't have a life. (Carol, middle manager, summer year B)*

*I'm not sticking around if it's continuing like this. Physically I haven't got the energy keep banging my head against a brick wall, if it continues like that. I'm not really prepared to stick around for that. (Lola, middle manager, summer year B)*

*You just get on with it don't you, sink or swim. I mean you can always move! I might just get fed up. I might give it up altogether! (Dave, middle manager, summer year B)*

Day and Leitch (2001) in their research into the effects of increasing accountability on teachers emotions found 'reforms imposed by a series of government policy decisions are continuing to challenge [teachers'] ability to continue to provide the high levels of emotional consistency so necessary to good teaching'. The emotional impact of inspection, with its fear and loss of control and a sense of self can in the worst cases lead to teachers being unable to continue their work. This is echoed by the research of Mahoney, Menter and Hextall (2004: 454), who in assessing the emotional impact of the introduction of performance related pay found that 'instances were cited of staff leaving teaching because of it. Negative emotion such as anger does not become positive, when, after while it quietens to cynicism and weariness'.

This perhaps calls into question the whole issue of seeking school improvement by way of a system which creates such a negative emotional impact. At Northgate it seems that the

emotional impact of the inspection led to disaffection, and teachers starting to rethink their careers. Perhaps if inspection were less externally imposed, if it were a mixture of internal moderation and external support, described by Wilcox and Gray (1996: 112) as 'inspection with a friendly face', schools would be able to lessen this impact.

It is not the purpose of this paper to argue that some sort of inspection system should not be in place, but the atmosphere of panoptic performativity engendered by the current system does not seem healthy, nor good for education in the long run, especially if it leads to organisations becoming 'an organisation for 'the gaze' and for the avoidance of 'the gaze'' (Ball 1997:332). This was certainly the case at Northgate which increasingly seemed like an organisation existing purely for the purposes of 'passing' an inspection. Indeed 'the school became a sort of apparatus of uninterrupted examination' (Foucault 1977:186), although in this case the examination was of teachers and not of pupils, and it is this sense of permanent examination that leads to emotional disaffection, and ultimately teachers wanting to leave the profession. Perhaps the new OfSTED framework (2005) with its move towards shorter inspections and a greater emphasis on self-evaluation will be an improvement, though the sense that because of a very short notice period of a matter of days schools will need to be in a state of almost perpetual readiness is of concern.

