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ARTICLE

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP, INSPECTION AND VISIBILITY: PANOPTICISM AND POST-PANOPTICISM IN AN ENGLISH COASTAL AREA OF DEPRIVATION

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ABSTRACT: *This paper contributes to recent debates pertaining to neoliberal technologies of performativity including fabrication, panopticism and post-panopticism. These terms are discussed here in relation to constant visibility from recent school inspection arrangements in England and the impact of this on school leadership. Case study research within one seaside town was drawn from two schools, one, a state primary school and the other, a state secondary school, located within an area of deprivation. Both schools had been judged as requires improvement by Ofsted, but immediately before the fieldwork commenced, the secondary school received a judgment of good. Fourteen semi-structured interviews with thirteen leaders in a range of roles were undertaken to examine the conditions created by school inspection. Data is considered in relation to the features of panopticism and post-panopticism and shows leaders experience constant visibility, the pressures of performing to shifting expectations, and resultant staffing instability. This is not conducive to leaders working to improve schools, particularly those serving areas of deprivation.*

Keywords: fabrication, panopticism, post-panopticism, inspection; leadership

INTRODUCTION

This paper draws on research presented in this journal and elsewhere (e.g. Perryman, Clapham, Courtney, Page etc.) concerned with the way school leadership responds to the disciplinary gaze of Ofsted. Tensions emerge between school context and the demands of school inspection. This case study set within a coastal area of deprivation, drawing on 14 semi-structured interviews, brings further specific contextual concerns related to that of poverty and aligned social issues. Ovenden-Hope and Passy (2015) recognise challenges identified by academy leaders in coastal secondary academies as including educational isolation, difficulties with staff recruitment, 'failing' local primaries, engaging students and their families with education, student behaviour, the quality of teaching and learning within the school, and the shifting priorities of educational

policy (2015, p.36). Elsewhere, the authors define the first challenge, educational isolation, as 'a complex phenomenon, experienced by schools in three specific ways that are related to their location; geographical remoteness, local socioeconomic disadvantage and/or limited cultural opportunities and/or diversity' (Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2019, p. 8). These factors have proved resonant with my research and the context of the case study schools is important as there has been little research which addresses the impact of contemporary educational practices, such as inspection, on areas of deprivation beyond cities. Cities do not share the same factors as remote coastal towns. If challenges exist for leaders serving coastal areas, as Ovenden-Hope and Passy suggest, how might the disciplinary gaze of Ofsted impact on this? Resulting tensions between what school leaders feel are appropriate for the school, its community, and therefore its context, and the disciplinary requirement for preferred forms of leadership response thought to be demanded by Ofsted, are examined here.

Locating the research within a coastal town, focusing on two schools with recent or ongoing experience of Ofsted, provided an opportunity to examine the impact of school inspection on school leaders. Other authors have suggested this may result in fabricated responses of improvement (e.g. Ball 2008; Perryman, 2006, 2009) particularly for leaders and teachers who want to 'perform in order to escape the regime' (Perryman, 2006, p. 155). Even authors, such as Coe (2009), who advocate an empirical approach to school improvement and effectiveness, suggest there should be greater interrogation of school improvement strategies, stating that some improvement 'actually does harm' (2009, p376). This resonates with Perryman (2009) who observed that 'learning to perform the good school can be damaging' (p629). Coe states, 'many claims of school improvement are illusory' (2009, p363), concluding that by not effectively evaluating improvement strategies we 'will fail to do our best for the children whose education matters most' (p363).

The term panopticism has arisen from a Foucauldian tradition that draws from Bentham's design for an Inspection House and was adopted by Foucault as a metaphor for the ways in which power works to regulate and subjectify. Ostensibly, subjects, such as prison inmates, or workers, for example, are induced into 'a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power' (Foucault, 1991, p. 200). Foucault warns, 'Visibility is a trap.' (ibid.). The panoptic metaphor functions usefully in school inspections too, as accounted in the literature (e.g. Perryman, 2006, 2009) describing the omnipresent scrutiny felt through forms of surveillance accompanying school inspection visits. As the inspection frameworks have changed since 2011, the reduced notice period ahead of full or partial inspection visits has resulted in school leaders needing to ensure that their schools are inspection ready. Inspection readiness requires school leaders to ensure that all stakeholders are ready for an Ofsted visit at any time. This creates a high state of alert for all those involved (e.g. Clapham, 2015; Courtney, 2016). Ofsted's

inspection framework changed three times in the period between 2011 and 2012 (Courtney, 2016) and Courtney identifies that while some of the changes were 'an intensification of previous measures' (2016, p624), others represented 'a significant departure' (2016, p.625). There have been further changes in the inspection framework since 2012, most notably in 2015 and 2019, and although the fieldwork examined here took place at a time when schools were working largely to the 2012 framework, this research remains relevant to current practices in school inspection and schools.

Some scholars (e.g. Clapham, 2015; Courtney, 2016; Page, 2017a/Perryman *et al.*, 2017b, 2017b) have suggested that the conceptualisation of panopticism does not fully attend to the shifts in recent post-2012 inspection frameworks, proposing instead that the term post-panopticism may be of more relevance. Courtney (2016) sets out a clear distinction between the features of panopticism and post-panopticism. I will refer to these conceptualisations further in the paper. The ongoing debate between Perryman (2006), 2009, (2017a), 2017b), Page (2017a, 2017b), Courtney (2016) and Clapham (2015) regarding post-panopticism and post-fabrication is relevant to current school inspection in England and Wales and provides relevance to those in international settings including similarly high-stakes inspection systems, alongside those in contexts currently evaluating whether to develop an inspection system similar to that of Ofsted. This paper makes an empirical contribution supporting Courtney's conceptualisation of post-panopticism. The data demonstrates constant visibility and pressure of performing, common to both panopticism and post-panopticism, alongside shifting definitions, destabilised identities and feelings of anxiety and fear, aligning to Courtney (2016). Importantly, here, is a consideration of the impact of these conditions on leaders and teachers serving a coastal area of deprivation. Positive educational experiences are required if school pupils are to flourish, and yet the conditions identified in this paper raise issues about the possibility of this being achieved.

This paper is formed of five main sections. The next section will address the ongoing debate in the relevant literature and identifies definitions of panopticism and post-panopticism for this paper. The third section provides the methodology underpinning the fieldwork. The fourth section presents an analysis and discussion of the data and the fifth section provides a conclusion.

USING PANOPTICISM AND POST-PANOPTICISM TO THINK ABOUT SCHOOL INSPECTION

Panopticism and post-panopticism emerge as a product of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism as 'a specific economic discourse or philosophy' (Olssen and Peters, 2005) has manifested itself in the 'free market' (Wacquant, 2009, p. 1); 'quasi market' (Le Grand and Bartlett, 1993), i.e. opening up public services to non-state providers (Ball, 2013a, p. 212); promoting competition, not only

between businesses and educational providers but also between individuals as, 'different kinds of educational workers or learners' (Ball, 2013b, p. 131-2); and efficiency in all sectors that effectively demonstrate Lyotard's 'best possible input/output equation' (1984). Competition, comparisons and judgments are, therefore, features of neoliberalism and can be identified in education, for example, as one school is compared with another through Ofsted reporting on data, observations and pupil/parent feedback etc. This produces 'simple figures or categories' (Ball, 2003, p. 217), for example, grade one – *outstanding* etc. that form the basis for comparisons, such as through league tables of school achievement, pupil ability ranking, and other comparative documents. Comparisons between pupils, teachers, schools and systems produce a high-stakes environment in which constant visibility is the norm. This determines that the subject must perform in a specific way in order to be impressive. In turn, this forces fabrications which 'are produced purposefully in order for us "to be accountable"' (Ball, 2003, p. 224).

The measurement by which judgments are made, however, may shift. The term governmentality, which Foucault defines as 'the tactics of government that make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not' (1991, p103) assists understanding of the instability surrounding judgments. In school inspection, for example, what might be deemed *good* or *outstanding* by Ofsted becomes continually defined and redefined. Schools preparing for inspection, i.e. all schools, are placed into states of flux – uncertainty creates instability. Dean (2010, p195-6) describes techniques of government that include different forms of technology, for example, the technologies of agency and the technologies of performance; both relevant here. Government can consist of any deliberate attempt to control 'aspects of our behaviour according to particular sets of norms and for a variety of ends' (Dean, 2010, p18). The shaping of the individual in this way – here, school leaders, produces for Foucault, a subject that is 'convenient' (Foucault, 1991, p. 95) and therefore, easier to govern. Working with and against Foucault to understand school inspection, has resulted in the terms of panopticism and more recently, post-panopticism, becoming widely discussed in the literature.

As stated in the introduction, Foucault uses Bentham's Inspection House design to exemplify panopticism, widely discussed in this journal and elsewhere. Briefly, the design induces in the inmate (or in an educational context, a school leader, teacher or pupil, for example) 'a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power' (Foucault, 1991, p. 201). Foucault concludes Discipline and Punish (1991) by suggesting that what presides over punitive mechanisms is 'the necessity of combat and the rules of strategy … that permit the fabrication of the disciplinary individual' (1991, p.308). If a school leader deviates from following regulatory norms, there is an external or internal mechanism to provide correction. Forms of

panoptic surveillance machinery prevail. Perryman (2006, 2009) established the concepts of surveillance and resultant, fabrication, in schools through the lens of panopticism, introducing the term panoptic performativity to demonstrate the neoliberal performative climate for school teachers working under the school inspection regime (Ofsted). With the shift to short notice school inspections, researchers (e.g. Clapham, 2015; Courtney, 2016; Page, 2017a, 2017b) have questioned the extent to which the panoptic metaphor is sufficient as a term to describe surveillance culture that currently exists in schools. Schools can no longer prepare for inspection but must be ready at all times.

Leadership strategies to ensure inspection readiness have resulted in internal measurements being made of the quality of provision through various initiatives, such as learning walks and mini inspections. Leaders must also be alert for signs of shifting parameters. As norms become unstable, Courtney suggests compliance becomes 'more desired but less possible' (2016, p632), therefore disrupting the possibility of fabrication (2016, p634). Clapham (2015) focuses specifically on the shifts occurring to fabrication brought about by recent changes made to Ofsted arrangements, including short notice inspections suggesting this results in teachers being in a constant state of inspection readiness. The two teachers in Clapham's studies, Mia and Omar,

... wanted inspection to be of what usually went on in schools. They wanted to put on a show, but not just for the inspectors, they wanted the inspectors to see the shows they put on day-in and day-out (2015, p.625).

In removing the possibility of fabrication for inspection, Clapham (2015) argues, the ways of working within a school cannot be left to chance. Clapham identifies inspection readiness present in the day to day conditions brought about by a high-stakes inspection climate as the conditions of post-fabrication (2015, p625). This is not conducive to creativity or risk-taking in Clapham's study and the school was found to promote 'identikit inspection ready lessons' (2015, p625). Page, too, argues that fabrication is no longer valid as each day the 'panoptic uncertainty' of the past (Perryman *et al.*, 2017b, p. 4) is replaced by continuous and visible surveillance (ibid.). Clapham and Page agree that instead of fabrications or performance, 'in order to escape the regime' as Perryman (2006, p. 155) had earlier argued, these become instead, routine practices regardless of where the school might be in relation to the school inspection cycle.

While recognising that fabrications are disrupted, rather than specifically employing the term, post-fabrication, Courtney indicates that post-panopticism serves usefully to describe the 'matrix of uncertainty' (Courtney, 2016, p. 638). This makes 'the continued application of a panoptic interpretation decreasingly useful' (p. 638). Where once, 'normative stability' (p. 627) secured understanding of what was required by schools, the recent changes to school inspection resulted in '"fuzzy" norms' (p. 623) which masquerade as stable (p. 631). This is interesting and aligns with the hyper-enactment of policy observed by Colman

(2020), as leaders straddled an 'enacted chronology of recent policy iteration' to ensure they captured that deemed appropriate by Ofsted at the time of inspection. The hyper-enactment of policy describes an excessive response to enacting policy prompted or influenced by school inspection, or other disciplinary mechanism. Here, neoliberal, rather than contextual or value-based priorities dominate decision-making in the hyper-enactment of policy.

Alongside the contribution made by Courtney to defining the features of both panopticism and post-panopticism, Page (Page, 2017a/Perryman et al., 2017b) and Perryman et al (2017) also make important contributions. Page has suggested that researchers have 'clung doggedly to the panoptic' (2017b, p. 3) even though this notion of surveillance is 'rendered obsolete' (2017b, p2). We are in a post-panoptic era, Page (2017a/2017b) suggests, being keen to point out that the impact of short notice inspections creates a strong sense of the future presence of Ofsted for teachers and leaders. Perryman et al. (2017b) have evidenced the post-panoptic in their recent re-examination of earlier data produced on policy enactment. The authors conclude that 'the veneers of success to demonstrate to the inspectors are likely to be present all the time, and teachers will be rehearsed, trained and inculcated in Ofsted-friendly "effectiveness" in a permanent way' (ibid. p. 161). There is then, the substantial argument for fabrications to be deemed irrelevant under the current school inspection regime, and for the panoptic metaphor to assume less relevance than that of post-panopticism.

The debates in the literature about the relevance of fabrication alongside the terms panopticism and post-panopticism under recent inspection frameworks are important. Courtney (2016) recognises that the possibilities of fabrications become less possible because of 'conscious, total visibility to all' (p629), 'fuzzy norms' (p633) and 'subjects' inevitable failure to comply' (p629) brought about because there is 'no typicality in post-panopticism' (p632). These three features of post-panopticism drawn from Courtney's theorisation align with Colman's conceptualisation of the hyper-enactment of policy (2020) where uncertainty about the expectations set by Ofsted, and continued surveillance, result in the straddling of various policy texts simultaneously across the school.

METHODOLOGY

The Study

Seatown,[1] a coastal area of deprivation in England (The English Indices of Deprivation, 2015, Department for Communities and Local Government), provides the context for the case study. A primary school (ages 4–11 years), Shoreside Primary Academy and a secondary school (ages 11–18 years), Sandside Secondary Academy formed two units of analysis. Being from different age groups and stages was important to the research design as this allowed

for specific contextual responses across both schools, enabling focus on context rather than school type. At the time of the fieldwork, the schools had received recent scrutiny from Ofsted. Both schools had been judged as *requires improvement* by Ofsted, but ahead of the fieldwork commencing, Sandside Secondary Academy received a judgment of *good*. Policy enactment under the disciplinary gaze of Ofsted, rather than specific school type, provided the 'embedded units of analysis' (Yin, 2014, p. 50) within the single case study design.

Data was provided by leaders at all levels who were interviewed between 2015 and 2016. The leaders ranged from Principals to subject leads and year heads. While many were very experienced, several were within the first five years of teaching. Fourteen semi-structured interviews with thirteen different leaders are drawn from in this paper. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. Non-probability, purposive sampling was used, i.e. a specific group has been targeted to ensure that I was able to hear accounts from those that had an experience of the recent school inspections in a leadership role. The specific approach can be more appropriately described as theoretical sampling (e.g. Silverman, 2014, p.62; Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011, p. 158); a strategy, rather than procedure (Charmaz, 2006, p. 107).

The first phase of data analysis of the interview transcripts was achieved using both theory and data-driven themes (Robson, 2016, p. 471). Surveillance, performativity, fabrication, panoptic and post-panoptic were central in the theoretically driven themes. While the use of broad themes or categories offered a starting point to address the data, it was analysed using specific thematic codes that enabled 'a comprehensive, contextualised, and integrated understanding' (Bazeley, 2013, p. 191) of the data. I took steps to review, particularise and describe the codes, concepts and themes that led to the subsequent theorising derived from the data (Bazeley, 2013, p. 251).

The school leaders documented in the next section are as follows:

Sandside Secondary Academy – the outgoing Principal, Teresa; the current Principal, Suzanne; Vice-Principals, Robert and Sylvia; Achievement Director, Juliet; Curriculum Directors, Paul and Imogen.

Shoreside Primary Academy – the outgoing Headteacher, Deborah; Year Head, Violet; Subject Coordinators, Kath and Bea.

FINDINGS

The findings are presented in three sections. The first section considers the ways in which school leaders experience constant visibility, either directly from Ofsted or from the process of being continually in a state of readiness for an inspection visit. The second section considers how school leaders experience the continued pressure to perform derived from constant visibility and Ofsted's shifting expectations. Contrasts between the experiences of some leaders depending on inspection outcomes are identified. The final section demonstrates

the ways in which school inspection impacts adversely by creating instability within schools' leadership teams.

Constant Visibility: always on a Bit of a Knife Edge

This section considers the ways constant visibility, both through data-driven accountability and through classroom observation, impacts the school leaders at the case study schools. Data-driven accountability and classroom observation relate to both preparations for Ofsted, and the inspection visits themselves. Kath illustrates the extent that data accountability is present in her daily practice as a Subject Co-ordinator at Shoreside Primary Academy:

> . . . giving each teacher their own analysis sheet to fill in . . . because in year six it's like a permanent attachment, isn't it? So, every few weeks even the kids have got it in their books for each individual child so they're in the back of the maths book, the back of the English book. There's their grids - the 'kid grids' - points grids, so they can see what they do really well and what they need to work on in order to get another point or twenty (*laughs*).

This aligns with Imogen, an experienced leader in the role of Curriculum Director at the secondary school, Sandside Secondary Academy, who expressed concern about the extensive focus on grades and targets:

> You're very much focused on what you have to do to get the kids' target grades, and sometimes you feel you are just teaching for the exam and don't get time to do the nice things in teaching because you have so much syllabus to get through. Locally, we are still competing with the other school . . . The children themselves think more about the grades than "Oh, I've made this much progress since I've been here" . . . We just don't have the curriculum time to diversify as much as we'd like to . . .

Accountability data serves as a key determinant for school inspection and Imogen suggests that relentless focus on targets in a climate of competition might influence 'the nice things in teaching'. This includes not having more time for a diverse curriculum. This has been more recently captured by Ofsted too, as a 'reduced curriculum' offer (Gov.uk, 2020, p. 23).

Imogen went on to demonstrate the shift in inspection practices and the ways both inspection and its concomitant practices impact:

> Before that, they would come in and see what behaviour was like... the teaching. You would get personal feedback and there was a sense of pride and wanting to impress these people. There are two aspects: we know we have an Ofsted coming up and what are the criteria? Make sure everyone knows what they are doing. But when we get the call, that's when it's awful. When I started teaching, we didn't get observed very often, but new teachers today get observed very regularly (NQTs etc.). Whereas for me, having not been used to so many inspections, it gives a sense of panic . . . . Younger teachers are more used to performing and have more energy.

Page (2017b, p.27) identified that while more recently trained teachers may be accustomed to a high visibility culture, some of the longer serving teachers were required to accept this with nostalgia or leave the profession. Imogen, here, however, identifies that Ofsted inspections induce 'a sense of panic'. This contrasts somewhat with Kath, one of the Subject Co-ordinators at Shoreside Primary Academy, who, while also being an experienced leader, appeared to accept both the role of data and the school inspection processes, including observation, with a high degree of energy and commitment. Throughout the interview, however, she was sceptical of the value of this. This is captured below as Kath described the effect of the intense scrutiny from Ofsted as making her feel as if she is 'always on a bit of a knife edge'. This seemed to matter less to her own performance as a teacher, but was more closely related to her responsibility as Subject Co-ordinator:

> . . . The feelings you still get when they're coming are still as terrible (*laughing*) because you know, you want to put your best across and show what these kids can do and what we do . . . so to have them come in you're always on a bit of a knife edge, thinking, well, I want to show everybody at their best. Obviously.

The sense of being 'always on a bit of a knife edge' due to a strong sense of wanting 'to show everybody at their best' indicates the effectiveness of the technologies of surveillance and its concomitant, performativity. A more authentic response, i.e. working with wherever the pupils might be on any given day when under Ofsted surveillance, is instead replaced by anticipation of whether the children will be viewed favourably. This thereby produces a continued pressure to perform well. This is expanded in the next section where leaders indicate how they respond to the effects of school inspection in their daily practice.

The pressures of performing daily to shifting expectations: contrast and comparisons between inspection outcomes

In the two schools, the disciplinary gaze of school inspection is intensified beyond the visits themselves, in anticipation of future visits. To prepare for these, a 'learning walk', 'climate walk', peer or other lesson observation, or simulated school inspection visit is undertaken. This maintains a heightened sense of visibility for staff and importantly here, can produce in the subject/school leader a particular, preferred set of behaviours thought to be privileged by school inspection and its concomitants, as the panopticon did in the inmates. In the case study, both schools were used to experiencing a combination of these activities. This section examines the different perceptions of leaders who performed to the shifting expectations. Juliet, an Achievement Director at Sandside Secondary Academy, demonstrated the impact of this:

> There was a time when, um, I felt the senior team above got quite big and understandably they all have their roles and responsibilities and everybody wants to do that as well as they possibly can but unfortunately, some of the

> time, that could be quite overpowering and that could make you almost feel like you're still in that zone. But I think that was more so because it had come so soon after (*Ofsted)*and I understand, everyone has a job to do and I get that and I think I understand that they want to do that well, but actually on the scale of what it was it did … it still feels ... like you were continuously being judged.

While initially retaining the pressure of the disciplinary gaze, as if from Ofsted, Juliet went on to describe how Sandside Secondary Academy, following their more recent judgment of *good* from Ofsted, enabled a more assured approach to doing what they feel is right for the school:

> But it's not so much now because that team has scaled back. They've listened to staff voice and said 'actually this is too much. We need to, on top of dealing with what we need to with everyday … You don't need that piling pressure from top'.

This perceived freedom was captured by Teresa, the outgoing Principal. Teresa has led the school in both recent inspections. The first had been an outcome of *requires improvement* which was swiftly followed by a *good* outcome. Teresa was about to move to another school within the academy chain. In the interview, Teresa was concerned that the school had not significantly changed between inspections despite the very different outcomes: 'It makes you feel bloody minded and you think, right, sod it, we're gonna do what's right for the kids'.

By contrast, at Shoreside Primary Academy, however, there still remained a foreboding presence of Ofsted demonstrated by Bea's leadership approach following the school's experience of their recent *requires improvement* inspection outcome. Bea is a Subject Co-ordinator:

> I know that in the planning meetings with my team last year I was like 'Right, if an Ofsted inspector was to turn up next week, are we happy with this plan?' And it did adapt the way that perhaps we were thinking about lessons … Whether it was in a negative way … I don't know. But it was a thought we did have … it felt like there was more pressure to make sure the books were all completely marked up to date all of the time and that the children were responding to all of their comments all the time, and I know that some teachers in my own year team were staying up ridiculous hours at night to make sure those books are completely up to date all the time after that no notice, just in case they appeared to do a full on inspection …

The impact of the threat of an inspection visit appeared to weigh heavily on Bea. ' … and I think after the no notice there was a feeling of anxiety I would say across the school. Just in case, because we definitely couldn't afford to get anything less than good'. Bea evidenced that there was enhanced pressure to ensure that the school was ready to be judged by Ofsted, and indeed, any other type of inspection with which the school might experience as preparation for a full inspection. Her references to 'staying up ridiculous hours at night', 'a feeling of anxiety' and the threat that a less than *good* judgment from Ofsted would have 'absolutely destroyed everybody', indicated the pressures that the short notice inspection places on leaders and their teams. It was important that

'you're not the person who's going to be delivering something terrible for everybody else'. Bea went on to explain how she had felt as a leader and teacher when faced with inspection:

> It was horrible. That sinking feeling in the morning when you think, oh God. And you suddenly start questioning everything you were about to do that day, that normally, you would just go with it. But across the whole school I think everyone was like 'I'd better change this', 'go and print this off', 'do this differently' which was bizarre because we're all normally quite happy with what we do.

The self-doubt and sense of panic provided in Bea's account are derived from the power maintained by Ofsted. While these feelings are shared by staff at Sandside Secondary Academy too, the current Principal, Suzanne, expressed something of the freedom that moving from *requires improvement* to *good* had offered:

> I think that's where, when we talked about where is the freedom of it that ... that, actually I can say 'well we're a good school, so we're making this decision and it's not exactly the decision that you might want to hear us make but we're making this for very good reasons that we can describe to you'. When you're an RI school, you probably don't feel like you've got that flexibility to do that ...

The distinction between requires improvement or good inspection outcomes is significant. Suzanne described a confident and assured approach aligning to several of the staff interviewed in her school that Sandside Secondary Academy was now 'winning'. Paul, a Curriculum Director at Sandside Secondary Academy, demonstrated confidence when describing how he felt about the possibility of a visit from Ofsted:

> Yeah. I think ... the school is close ... if not, is almost on point and doing more than what Ofsted would expect. So yes, it's stressful in the fact that someone's going to come in a bit like a health inspector to a restaurant and inspect but really, it isn't, because it's what you do every day .... .

This echoes the teachers in Clapham's (2015) study and reflects the constant visibility and pressure to perform defined both by panopticism and post-panopticism. That the school had taken Ofsted expectations into its daily practice, rather than reserving this for *putting on a show* for an inspection visit as might have been possible prior to 2012, supports the case for post-fabrication and post-panopticism. In stark contrast, within the same school, Robert, speaking from his position as Vice-Principal, appeared to reconcile the demands of Ofsted in a more pragmatic approach. Having spoken to an inspector, he suggested the demands of being *outstanding* all of the time were simply unachievable:

> It's the peaks and troughs that come with the kind of Ofsted framework from jumping from ... You know, trying to continually chase outstanding. But it's this unachievable

kind of goal to sustain. You know, you are talking about an athlete peaking for 195 days of the year. It's impossible. Well it's not even 195 days. Let's say on average, maybe, an average classroom teacher teaches four periods a day. And actual, probably they'll teach more than that. That's them performing at their absolute optimum - the 100m final at the Olympics, four periods a day five days a week over ... It's impossible [*laughs*]. You know, what you would get is burn out and you'd get a huge, hugely high kind of absence rate because the staff just can't sustain it. So that's why good is a realistic achievable goal and a realistic achievable standard to try and strive towards. So, you know, very much now it's about maintaining that level of good. And if we can get there, I'll feel morally, I'll be able to rest easy ...

This aligns with James and Oplatka's notion of 'the good enough school' (2015) while deviating from the daily practice of producing standards 'more exacting' (Clapham, 2015) than Ofsted's. Suzanne, the current Principal of Sandside Secondary Academy also told of her approach to finding a place between the demands of school inspection and data management through a form of dual reporting:

So, I think you have to be very careful to suggest ... it's not that you don't tell the truth, it's just that the perception of what you're describing has to be different.

Suzanne, Robert and Paul spoke with a clarity about Ofsted demands. There is a contrast between these voices and those from Shoreside Primary Academy. Bea, one of the Subject Co-ordinators captures the lack of clarity about expectations by stating:

I think it's just in your head. You kind of picture what you think an Ofsted inspector would want to see and to be fair I don't even know really where that comes from. It's just, and, while I was training it was just the constant 'Ofsted might come along. This is what Ofsted need to see. They need ... you need to be good or outstanding' ... and it's just that constant, I don't know. You don't even really know what outstanding is going to look like ... but you somehow want to be there. It's a very odd set-up I think.

The performative culture articulated in both schools demonstrates the 'inevitable failure to comply' (Courtney, 2016, p. 629) created through workload pressure and 'fuzzy norms' (Courtney, 2016, p. 631). While this was evidenced in both schools, some staff at Sandside Secondary Academy suggested some release from the pressure although this was largely identified amongst the most senior leaders and not by the wider team who participated in the research. These are both characteristics of Courtney's conceptualisation of post-panopticism. The next section demonstrates the impact of constant visibility and the pressure to perform. Instability within the schools' leadership team is evidenced having a direct impact on school leaders themselves.

Instability in Staffing: a Mass Exodus of Staff

Sylvia, a Vice-Principal at Sandside Secondary Academy described the direct effect of the school inspection she had experienced and the ways in which this created instability within the staff.

> A lot of worry, an awful lot of worry. Professional pride comes into it and that goes with the change really and I think it was different. With the academy, when that came in (*referring to the earlier academisation*) there was definitely fear ... fear of loss of job and there was also a fear that those people would've lost their jobs whether they were good or not, were you liked or were you not liked, did your face fit, did it not fit.

Sylvia's professional experience seemed to count for a little when changes were made to school and staffing structures following Ofsted. The sense of anxiety identified in the previous section is described as worry and fear here, by Sylvia.

 Both schools had periods of instability in terms of leadership and wider staffing structures as direct and indirect results of their encounters with Ofsted. Instability is a characteristic of post-panopticism. While Courtney referred to 'schools playing in a game with moving goal-posts' (2016, p632), here, to continue this analogy, the team captains and the team managers are in a state of constant flux. At a time when important decisions were required to address the observations made by Ofsted, and while simultaneously continuing to serve a community within a coastal area of disadvantage, instability amongst school leaders was prominent. This placed additional pressures on the existing staff, as well as parents and children, especially at Shoreside Primary Academy. When first approaching Shoreside Primary Academy to arrange the research, the then headteacher, Deborah, had met with me during the week that she had found her post as headteacher was untenable due to recent judgments from Ofsted. Earlier that day she had told the staff that she was leaving. In an emotional outpouring, Deborah had told me that the Seatown context was 'special' and made demands on her leadership that stood in the way of school improvement. She spoke of the ways that she had placed her community – children and parents, first. Placing the social context ahead of the school data provoked decisions from Ofsted and the governing body that were not only costly to Deborah but also to her staff, and potentially, to the children too. I have made reference to this meeting to provide a background to the discussions that follow. Kath, one of the Subject Co-ordinators at Shoreside Primary Academy, recognised the time dilemmas that Deborah had faced:

> She made some changes, but I think it takes more than eighteen months to get into place and see any of the effects it's going to have, before you make more changes. But of course, after that time, if you end up as a 'need to improve' again, you've had it. So it means that everybody here was up in the air, so then, you've got a mass exodus of staff!

Schools under intense scrutiny from Ofsted are afforded little time to make lasting improvements, with re-inspections occurring within twenty-four months. The period immediately following *requires improvement* inspections is likely to be destabilising in itself as several of the leaders indicated. Kath continued to show the impact on staffing:

> People need some sort of stability and to know what's going to happen. We didn't know who was taking over. We didn't know if we were even going to have a head. We didn't know anything. Um, so I think people thought, it happened when Brett *(an earlier Headteacher of Shoreside)* went because, of course, I think the staff really thought he had a vision and thought 'now he's gone where are we left?'. So, a few went when he went, and then when Deborah went, you know, another load left.

The impact of leadership change stemming from Ofsted is also captured by Violet, a year head at Shoreside Primary Academy:

> There was a lot of turnover of staff. I think obviously . . . Deborah . . . left. Erm . . . Whether people left just because of the Ofsted, because of Deborah leaving or just because of chance that they had to be leaving that year . . . I don't know but yeah, I think there was a lot of staff who had been here a long time and it was 'aw . . . we're not good again' and we've had a lot of heads . . . a lot of headteachers here . . . and I think that unsettles parents as well because they're not sure if someone puts in all these things and they're not sure they're going to be here for the rest of the time while their children are here... or if they've got a number of children they get used to one head and then another one comes and they've got to get used to another head . . .

Violet here refers to the succession of four heads during a five year period necessitating inevitable uncertainty for staff, as well as for pupils and parents. Within Shoreside Primary Academy there were many accompanying challenges due to the social context within which it is placed. Ofsted has found the school to be *requires improvement* over the last ten years and this has resulted in the continuation of new school leaders arriving at the school to take on the responsibility to move the school to the judgment of *good* or better. This places greater responsibility on the middle leaders who have sought to offer the children some stability through this period of change. Kath, one of the Subject Co-ordinators at Shoreside Primary Academy identified this need for stability, this time for the children:

> Our children, again, I'm saying it as if it's all the kids here, and it is not, but there is a percentage who need the stability. They need the same old face in the classroom and they need to know what's going to happen and they need to know that they can come to you if there's a problem or whatever that might be whether it's school or home, Whatever. So as soon as you have got stuff up in the air, you've then got this sort of unsettling bubbling from some of the children. So that's not particularly fantastic.

The ways in which the staff were trying to offer stability for the children resulted in particular demands being put on their daily practices by both internal and external policy, and internal leadership factors. This was in an attempt to remove the 'unsettling bubbling' that Kath referred to. If this is undertaken daily because of the intense pressure felt by staff, this places further demands on staff if they feel a sense of even greater responsibility to address policy and its various iterations. A change of leadership through 'restructuring' might be seen to be synonymous with improvement, yet both Kath and Violet referred to the challenges that the school faced when a leadership approach that attempted to embrace the context of Seatown was rejected.

At Sandside Secondary Academy, Teresa, the outgoing Principal, indicated the process of gradual, rather than immediate change:

> Well it was just becoming apparent that there were more and more staff that seemed to be on the positive side so when I did briefings in the morning, it first started off and it was, you didn't always get the nods, you didn't always get the 'mm, okay' or the laughs or anything like that. What you did get was, um ... a little bit of ... a little bit of standoffish - only a little bit you know, erm, but ... Yeah, it sort of started to turn around and you saw just less sense of moaning. I'm quite intuitive and you can tell when people haven't bought in, and you could just see that there were less and less of those types of people and they were gone. I mean a lot of them had gone, erm, and you know it was a realisation that actually, this is the regime. This is how it's going to be and it's actually, buy in or bye-bye.

Concluding Remarks

School inspection produces an effect of constant visibility and pressure to perform for leaders and teachers in these two case study schools. These are features of both panopticism and post-panopticism. Instability amongst staffing teams was also evidenced. The data show there is some distinction between inspection outcomes regarding the effects produced and yet even in Sandside Secondary Academy which was judged to be good ahead of the fieldwork, the confidence felt by some senior leaders was not experienced by all. Within the challenges of a coastal area of deprivation as identified by Ovenden-Hope and Passy (2015) cited on page 1, unstable staffing structures exacerbate issues further. As Kath, one of the Subject Co-ordinators at Shoreside Primary Academy had inferred above, there are children within the school context that require stability in school – a stability that may not be present at home.

This paper has outlined the ways in which leaders in a coastal area of deprivation respond to being constantly visible due to recent changes in school inspection. The disciplinary gaze from Ofsted invokes in leaders feelings of anxiety and fear, amid relentless pressure to perform. While these features are in common with both panopticism and post-panopticism, the shifting definitions

about what is a good or outstanding school that in turn, destabilise under-standing, aligns with Courtney's conceptualisation of post-panopticism.

Tensions emerge between what leaders are required to do for Ofsted, and what they believe is right for the pupils in their schools and the wider community, impacting leadership strategies and decision-making. In Seatown, these might be inauthentic, or fabricated responses which relocate leaders' stance away from their context, towards Ofsted. At times, this interrupts school improvement. The neoliberal technology of performance – a product of governmentality, shapes behaviour amongst leaders in unhelpful ways.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

NOTE

1   Town, schools and staff have been given pseudonyms to protect identity.

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