**Press release**

**Inspection reports contain themes one might expect, but are not always aligned with judgements, academics say.**

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A new research paper published today by academics from the University of Southampton and UCL, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, has found that the content of inspection reports aligns with themes that might be expected, but that the sentiment is not always aligned with reports for the judgements Requires Improvement and Good.

Using the text of more than 60,000 school inspection reports for primary and secondary schools in England between 1997 and 2022, the authors used computational research methods, like ‘topic modelling’ to analyse the content of the reports.

The key analysis focussed on two cut-off moments in the inspection process in the last two decades: (1) a document dispelling myths about what inspectors in England are looking for in 2014, and (2) the introduction of the 2019 Education Inspection Framework (EIF).

The document that aimed to clarify ‘myths’ in 2014 did not seem to lead to large changes in the topics included in inspection reports. After the introduction of the Education Inspection Framework (EIF) in 2019, inspection reports were more focussed on curriculum, leadership, and subject specialism, reflecting the language of the EIF.

An additional analysis of the language in the most recent inspection reports of schools shows that even when reports became much shorter in 2020, only the reports for Outstanding and Inadequate schools demonstrate ‘sentiments’ commensurate with the judgement, respectively very positive and very negative.

However, reports for schools deemed Good and Requires Improvement show much more ambiguity in their language.

The project lead Professor Christian Bokhove noted: “This is the first time that a study has analysed the content of school inspection reports at scale with computational research methods. The project not only shows that it is a feasible approach that combines quantitative and qualitative interpretation, but also reassuringly shows that the reports do change on the basis of major framework changes.”

Co-author Dr Sam Sims added that it was “clear to see the increased importance of curriculum.”

Co-author Professor John Jerrim also suggested, “The government has made big claims about the increasing proportion of Good and Outstanding schools. While this is statistically true, it does not seem to be commensurate with what inspectors have been saying within their written reports. By that metric, schools seem little better now than when the Conservatives came to power in 2010.”

**Notes to editors**

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