


Half of school leaders think Ofsted does not have the expertise for Multi-Academy Trust inspections, according to new survey

 30 November 2023

Persistent dissatisfaction with current government policies revealed in results of the School Leaders survey, launched today by UK and Ireland law firm Browne Jacobson. The findings reveal the highest frustration with funding for Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) for the second term running with 91% of respondents dissatisfied with government policy.

The key findings fell into four areas:

1. **The policy landscape:** 84% of respondents expressed discontent on capital funding and school estates and 91% of respondents expressed being dissatisfied with current SEND funding and policy.
2. **Inspection processes:** 49% of respondents identified a lack of necessary expertise within Ofsted as the main barrier to Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) being inspected in their group. Stress invoked by "label culture" was also highlighted with 38% noting that the removal of single word judgements would have the most impact in making inspection less stressful.
3. **Technology:** 82% of respondents felt there was insufficient expertise in Artificial Intelligence (AI) in their organizations.
4. **Strategic and operational priorities:** 45% of respondents identified behaviour and attendance as a top three operational strategy for the upcoming year.

Government policy on capital funding and estate also emerged as a major concern for school leaders, with 84% of respondents expressing discontent in this regard. The heightened attention on the school estate is underscored by the recent challenges associated with Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC), with the results finding the Government is not doing enough to prioritise policy on estate maintenance.

The results reveal pressing issues facing school leaders and concludes that the Government is not doing enough to prioritise policy levers, particularly in relation to school estates and SEND funding.

The survey was completed by 204 school leaders in England for four weeks during October 2023. 25% of the leaders are CEOs and Deputy CEOs, 11% are COOs and CFOs, 15% are trustees and 29% are Headteachers, Deputy Headteachers and Assistant Heads. Responses for the remaining 20% included Business Managers/Partners, HR professionals, local governors and central team members.

The school Leader's survey invites the leaders of the nation's schools and academies to share their views on the school system. 74% respondents work or govern in a multi-academy trust, 14% in standalone academies and 12% in maintained schools.

Katie Michelin, Partner in the education team at Browne Jacobson, comments: "The last 12 months of headlines around inspection have cut deep. There have been recent adjustments to the inspection system but most leaders still appear to support more meaningful change.

Debate around the specifics of the current grading system has been cracked open by the turmoil, but it too has prompted bigger questions, for example, about what Ofsted's role should be, the purpose of the written inspection report and the relationship between Ofsted grades and formal intervention.

With a new chief inspector and a general election, the next calendar year should bring opportunities for some answers.”

Peter Jackson, Senior Associate in the education team at Browne Jacobson, comments: “These results reflect widespread concerns regarding the deteriorating condition of school buildings. It’s clear that RAAC is not an isolated issue, but rather just part of a bigger picture of underinvestment in school estates.

This issue is not going away any time soon. Significant spending is needed to avoid putting pupils, their learning and school staff at risk.

Until that investment comes, leaders should take a proactive approach to monitoring the condition of their sites.”

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