

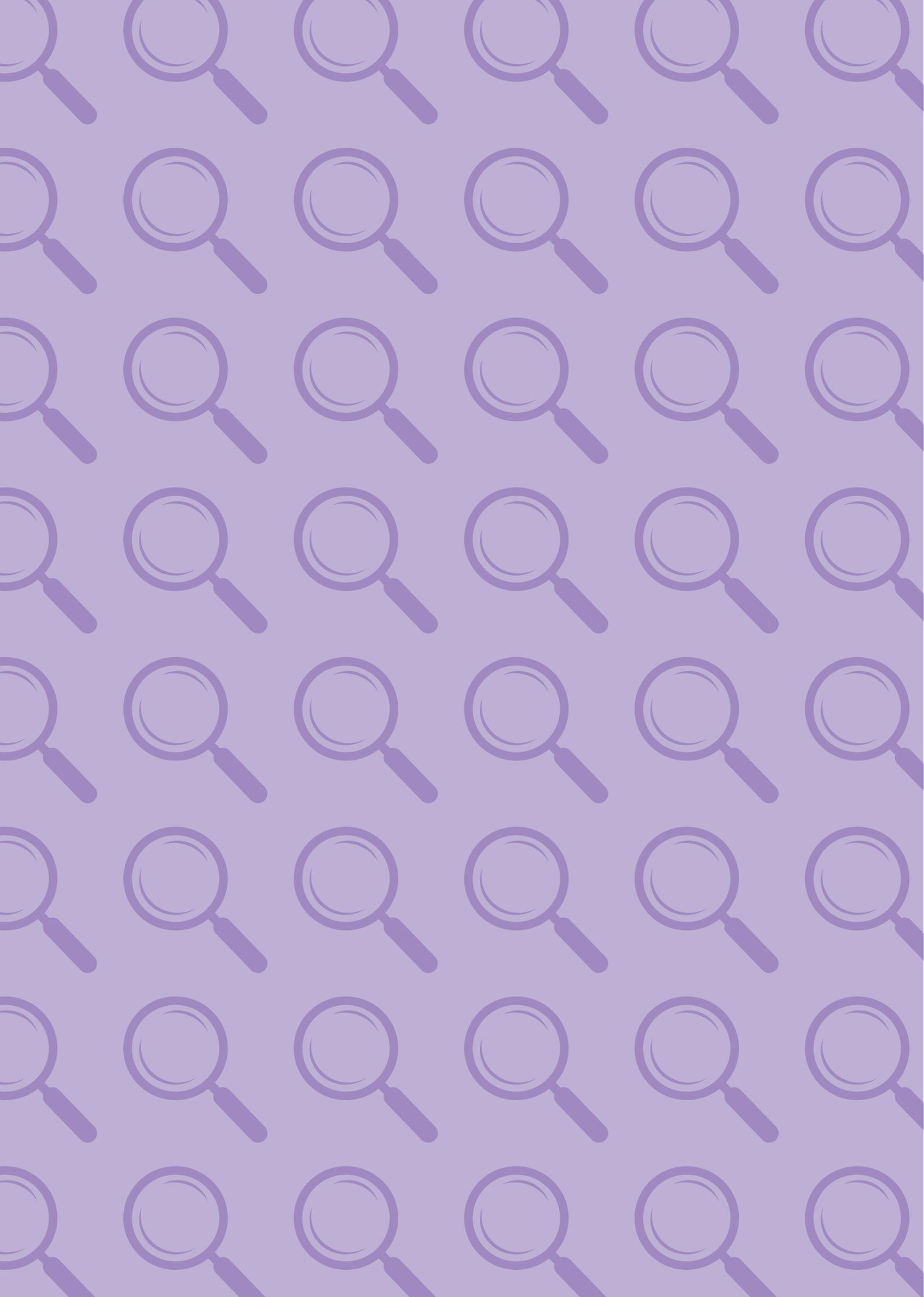


A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER?

FEBRUARY 2020

Ofsted's new inspection framework





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About NAHT

We represent more than 30,500 school leaders in early years, primary, secondary and special schools, making us the largest association for school leaders in the UK. With school leaders in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, we use our voice at the highest levels of government to influence policy for the benefit of leaders and learners everywhere. Our NAHT Edge membership supports, develops and represents middle leaders in schools.

NAHT represents over 30,500 school leaders across all school phases. Our response to the consultation regarding the 2019 inspection framework was a result of collecting our members' views.

This report summarises the emerging views of NAHT members (who lead England's schools) on inspections conducted under Ofsted's new inspection framework between September and December 2019.

Introduction

In September 2019, Ofsted launched its new inspection framework, shifting inspectors' principal focus away from pupil performance data and outcomes towards the quality of a school's curriculum. NAHT welcomed this overarching vision but raised significant concerns about the design, manageability and reliability of the way in which the inspectorate proposed to judge curriculum design and delivery.

Following consultation and engagement with members, NAHT raised concerns that the new approach did not address the widely-held belief of members that high-stakes inspection carries with it significant negative impact and that it risked driving new and unnecessary workload for teachers and leaders, undermining efforts to improve recruitment and retention to the teaching profession. Members were also concerned that the approach to judging the curriculum would prove particularly problematic in primary schools.

NAHT was pleased that through engagement with Ofsted, some of our members' concerns were addressed in the initial design.

At the end of the autumn term 2019, 1,360 schools had been inspected under the new framework. A large number of these schools are led by NAHT members. This report provides an overview of the feedback we have received from members who were inspected last term and helps to paint a picture of how the new framework is being received one term in.

We have alerted Ofsted to the concerns set out in this report. It is clear that our views differ on how well the inspection framework has performed within the first term. Despite differences of opinion, NAHT is pleased that the inspectorate continues its open dialogue with us.



Key findings

NAHT members say:

The new framework tries to do too much; inspectors cannot hope to fulfil its demands. Too often judgements are formed on a scant evidence base.

Ofsted has adopted a secondary lens through which to judge the primary curriculum which is proving to be deeply problematic in primary schools.

Ofsted's curriculum methodology is driving new workload and demanding a model of curriculum management that schools do not have the capacity or resource to implement.

The 90-minute phone call

- In most cases, school leaders report that inspectors have conducted the 90-minute phone call in a collegiate manner, which has offered an opportunity to discuss their school's context and strengths. Some members report a genuine two-way discussion about where 'deep dives' should be focused.
- However, a minority report that: school leaders had little say in the development of the inspection plan; inspectors insisted on seeing the delivery of curriculum areas that were not planned to be taught on the day of the inspection; inspectors made excessive demands for paperwork and calls significantly exceeded the 90-minute duration.

The experience of inspection is regularly described by some school leaders and their staff as 'brutal'

School leaders' experiences of inspection

- Some school leaders have reported that they found the experience of the inspection event to be less stressful and there have been better-focused discussions on the quality of the curriculum. However, they also report that the negative impact on teachers and subject leads has increased.
- The experience of inspection is regularly described by school leaders and their staff as **'brutal'**. Some school leaders have been barred from accompanying and supporting classroom teachers and subject co-ordinators in interviews with inspectors. Questioning during 'deep dives' is often very challenging (one described it as being like an interview with Andrew Neil) and teachers often lose break and lunchtimes, and stay after school, in order to satisfy the demands of inspectors conducting 'deep dives' and other activities. School leaders report that the confidence of recently qualified and experienced teachers who co-ordinate subjects has been shattered, necessitating the counselling of staff.
- Almost universally, school leaders describe inspection as **frenetic**. They say inspectors are rushed and struggle to get through the evaluation schedule. School leaders report conversations being curtailed in mid-sentence, evidence supplied by the school being refused or ignored and meetings being unduly hurried.
- Electronic recording of evidence can result in inspectors failing to **engage fully** in conversations with school leaders, subject leads and coordinators and teachers. Instead, they are focused on typing responses to a list of pre-prepared questions, rather than conducting a conversation. Leaders question whether inspectors are really listening.

Much of the confusion appears to be driven by the one-size-fits-all nature of the methodology for assessing a school's curriculum

- NAHT's consultation response warned that the framework attempted to cover far too much ground. School leaders' experiences of inspection thus far indicates that this concern is well-founded. Inspection impacts significantly on the well-being of individual teachers and leaders, the day-to-day operation of a school, and the delivery of the curriculum to pupils. It risks undermining the Department for Education's fledgling recruitment and retention strategy.

Inspection quality and conduct

- NAHT is disappointed at the number and range of conduct issues that have been reported to us. We suspect this is driven in part by the weight and number of tasks that inspectors are expected to complete, leading to high-handed, dismissive or over-bearing attitudes.
- School leaders report basic errors and misunderstandings arising from inspectors' lack of phase or subject experience. And in Special schools particularly, leaders report a lack of understanding of Special and Specialist provision. Much of the confusion appears to be driven by the one-size-fits-all nature of the methodology for assessing a school's curriculum. Again, NAHT provided detailed feedback warning of these shortcomings at the consultation stage.

- Worrying inconsistency exists too. For example, a number of leaders have reported inspectors' refusal to allow them to sit in with, and contribute to, interviews with subject coordinators, particularly in primary schools. Some inspectors have refused to consider statutory data; one even argued that a single fixed-term exclusion precludes a judgement of 'outstanding'.
- There are reports of inspection activity continuing well-beyond 6pm and as late as 9pm. School leaders also report final feedback taking place long after 6pm.
- The lack of an effective and independent complaints policy probably means that much inconsistency, poor conduct or poor practice remains unaddressed. Due to the nature of high-stakes inspection, school leaders struggle to gauge whether to address conduct and consistency issues during an inspection, yet know that complaints made after final feedback are rarely effective. Many school leaders worry about the effect that a complaint might have on the inspection overall.

Data

- School leaders report that the reduced focus on data, flight paths and statistical indicators is welcome, but we have received repeated feedback that some inspectors are **refusing** to consider a school's statutory data at all, particularly in relation to evidence gathered in 'deep dives'.

Many school leaders worry about the effect that a complaint might have on the inspection overall

The quality of education judgement

- School leaders in the primary phase are consistent in their criticism that Ofsted has adopted an inspection methodology which applies a secondary lens through which to evaluate and judge the primary curriculum. This fails to understand the primary context driving a “preferred” method through inspection.
- As an example, the inspectorate’s approach to the sequencing and retention of knowledge does not reflect current practice in schools. Instead of inspecting and evaluating the work of schools, the inspectorate is driving compliance by requiring schools to accept the approach set out in its framework. NAHT believes this approach exceeds Ofsted’s remit.
- School leaders report this is driving huge **workload pressures**, as schools feel compelled to generate new curriculum plans that map the sequencing of knowledge in order to evidence so-called curriculum ‘intent, implementation and impact’.
- The evaluation criteria fails to take account of the fundamental structural difference between the phases. In primary schools, subject areas are typically **coordinated** by class teachers rather than being led by qualified curriculum specialists, as is usual in secondary schools where subject leadership is supported with timetabled management time underpinned with a teaching and learning responsibility (TLR) and overseen by a school leader with responsibility for a school’s curriculum offer.
- By contrast, most primary schools are unable to provide management time or additional payment to subject coordinators. While many classroom teachers are willing to coordinate the work of a subject, they do not have the capacity, training or time to lead it. Furthermore, in some circumstances, a teaching assistant with appropriate experience might be asked to coordinate a particular curriculum area.

- The demands of inspectors made under the new framework effectively impose new curriculum management requirements on primary schools which they have insufficient resource and capacity to deliver.
- School leaders report serious concerns that so-called ‘deep dives’ are producing judgements based on very limited evidence, particularly in foundation subjects. A common complaint is that judgements are snapshot impressions based on a single part lesson observation, a high-stakes discussion with a classroom teacher who coordinates a subject, a cursory review of pupils’ books and a handful of questions put to a very small and unrepresentative number of pupils.

Reports and feedback

- School leaders are disappointed by the new reporting style adopted by Ofsted. Brief and overly simplistic, reports provide little insight and contain flowery unevidenced statements. Their broad-brush nature delivers vague recommendations, with limited reference to leadership. School leaders questioned their utility for schools or parents.
- The feedback meeting provides the only opportunity for school leaders to understand the evidence on which inspectors have based their judgements and identify areas for improvement. Some school leaders observed that this feedback provides very little new information or insight about their school.

Brief and overly simplistic, reports provide little insight and contain flowery unevidenced statements

Conclusion

The emerging evidence from our members (particularly in the primary sector) raises serious concerns about some aspects of the new inspection arrangements – the most pressing of which are centred on the way in which the curriculum is inspected and judged.

NAHT believes the inspection methodology for evaluating the quality of a school's curriculum in the primary phase should be amended as a matter of urgency, to reflect the reality of the way in which curriculum subjects are delivered in the majority of primary schools in England.

NAHT's support for a broad and balanced curriculum is long-standing. It is predicated on the professional views of the more than 30,000 school leaders we represent. Many have struggled to maintain curriculum breadth during a period when inspection was relentlessly focused on the evaluation of ever-smaller tranches of pupil performance data.

We supported Ofsted's move away from this narrow focus. But the inspectorate's attempt to reset the dial has inadvertently created new problems and new workload. The heart of the issue is that primary subject leadership simply does not work in the way that Ofsted appears to feel would best fit its revised inspection methodology. This is not simply an issue for very small schools; it affects most, if not all primary schools.

Following helpful discussions, NAHT welcomes the chief inspector's recent clarification that inspectors should:

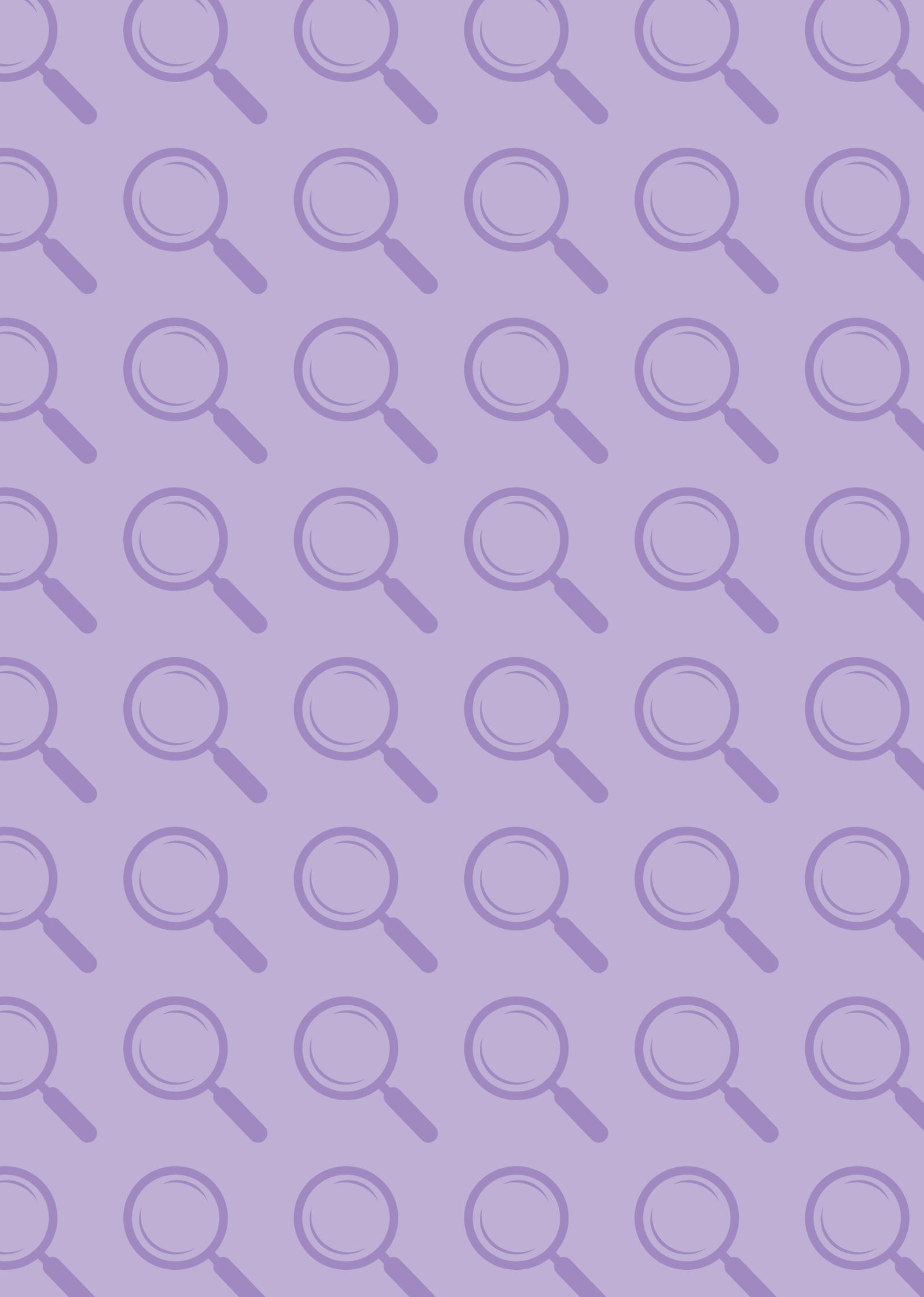
- avoid conducting 'deep dives' in subjects which are led by the same member of staff
- welcome any senior leader that wishes to support subject leaders in curriculum discussions
- be flexible and avoid causing undue disruption to the work of a school
- conclude their work in a school by 6pm.

Ofsted has also reaffirmed that inspection does not scrutinise or judge individual teachers or subject leaders. These are welcome steps forward.

Note on methodology

Throughout autumn term 2019, NAHT gathered the views of school leaders to gauge the quality and impact of Ofsted's new inspection framework on schools.

NAHT conducted a qualitative analysis drawing from members' written submissions, telephone and face-to-face discussions, and sessions at regional and branch meetings. The findings have informed the development of a permanent online survey that will allow every NAHT member to provide closed question and free-text feedback about their school's inspection. The survey will open to members in January 2020.





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