



investing in children

**OFSTED INSPECTION EVENT
REPORT**

18TH SEPTEMBER 2004

This report was compiled with the assistance of the Investing in Children Ofsted Event Planning Group:

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OFSTED INSPECTION EVENT GALA THEATRE, DURHAM CITY

SATURDAY 18TH SEPTEMBER 2004

Introduction

When Investing in Children were approached to run an event as part of the Ofsted series of events aimed at finding out from children and young people how they should best hear and respond to their views, it seemed sensible to involve a group of young people who had already done some work in this area, in shaping, planning and running the event.

As part of the Hear by Right initiative young people drawn from across County Durham had formed a School Inspection Team which had started work with Investing In Children on carrying out inspections in schools in the county. They had met with a head teacher and planned, carried out and evaluated an inspection in a secondary school. Although they were aware that the events were looking at inspections of all services provided for young people, not just schools, with the knowledge and experience they gained from this work they seemed the ideal people to draw on to ask how we should best run an event for young people aimed at informing Ofsted how inspections can work better for young people.

The planning group started meeting in August and decided they wanted the day to run along the lines of an Investing in Children Agenda Day. This is a model that the group had experience of working with and they felt comfortable using. It enables them to make the day as adult free as possible and allows the children and young people attending the event the space and time to talk about the issues that are important to them within the context of inspections, rather than having the issues decided by the adults.

The programme the group came up with consisted of an initial session called 'Get Real' where young people attending the event talked to each other about life where they live and their experiences of services provided for them. This was followed by a session focusing on the five questions that inspectors felt were the most important to get answers. The third main session was called the 'The Hot Seat' which is a form of discussion and debate that the young people running the event had developed themselves for previous projects. This involves adults attending the event being open to answer questions and hear the views directly from the young people present. The

day was managed by the planning group who also facilitated and recorded all the sessions using video and tape recording as well as written records.

The event was held at the Gala theatre in Durham and was attended by 26 young people.

Get Real

The young people were asked in groups to spend 40 minutes talking about their lives and the issues that are important to them. Their responses follow:

Transport

Reduce bus prices

You should be able to get to Durham City cheaply

Buses are too expensive – we have to sneak on to buses for other areas

Buses are too expensive (teenagers can't afford it)

Bus drivers are not helpful and can be nasty

Fares too expensive for teens

Bus drivers are nasty and are not very helpful.

The bus fares are far too expensive and can be very unreliable

In some areas the buses come on the hour

Have free bus passes to get to college

The iC bus card should not stop at the age of 16

Some buses miss out some areas so you have to go to the next village

Quite difficult to get to some places when using the bus service

Bus driver's attitudes can be quite bad

Buses, too high prices

Bus driver's attitudes

Leisure

Leisure should outreach to young people

Leisure services are too expensive

Leisure services should offer more choice with a wider range of sports available

Better leisure facilities, tidy it up, facilities are poor

Youth clubs – don't fit in not allowed to go

We would like more activities (go on trips)

Trips away with mates

There should be more leisure choices, more sports to be promoted by the county council

If they had more facilities like tennis courts, but the council would have to put security up so that these facilities do not get abused.

Wheatly Hill swimming pool always closed, when open it's full of children

Boring youth clubs-no one dares go to them.

People get drunk and take drugs because it's so rubbish there's nothing else to do

Health

Health service staff are rude

Doctors and staff should show a bit more consideration for young people.

Some posters in windows can be quite revealing, say if it were sexual health you don't want to stop at a window and read them, for the public might judge you

At some doctors they look down at you
In chemists they talk down to you
The hospital staff can be very judgemental and too opinionated
Doctors should be trained on how to act around clients

Education

School dinners are expensive
More support for GSCE's
Some pupils are paying up to £20 a week just to get to school
School dinners are too expensive
Hairs have been found in the burgers
Can't afford them
Free meals.
£1.45 can't get much of a full meal
Quality poor
Burgers are out on heat rack from 8.00 in the morning
School dinners are not healthy.
Not many vegetarian meals
We get fruit but no veg
Tinned not fresh
Dinners are cold

Inspections

School inspections false image
 Changes the rules to look good
 Fake
 Everyone out of isolation to show there is nobody bad in the
 school
Expels people to show there is nobody bad in the school.
False inspection of school
Get lines for being late one week before the inspectors come
Inspectors should just turn up on the day
Prepare before they come so it is a false image

Bullying

Blamed for bullying when bullied
Stand up for yourself and you get blamed.
Some of the young persons anti-bullying telephone help lines, it seems like the person on the other end of the phone, can seem uninterested and sometimes quite patronising.

Other comments

Adults are suspicious towards young people
Confidential services are all right – sometimes seem intimidating to phone
Feel it's not good to be forced to talk about drugs but good to have a leader there to have a chance to talk to
Connexions: Problems getting an appointment
 Open wrong times (not Saturday)
 They are patronising
School Councils: Don't know about them
 Not helping voters but helping young people

When do you become a fully-fledged adult?

The Five Questions

The second session of the day was spent looking at the five questions that the inspectors felt they needed answers to get inspections right. These were:

1. How can the inspectors best find out from children and young people what its like to live in your area?
2. How can the inspectors best find out from children and young people what specific services are like that you use in your area?
3. What are the most important questions the inspectors need to ask children and young people to understand whether the five outcomes are being achieved? What are your own answers to these?
4. How should the inspectors best involve children and young people in the inspections?
5. How should the inspectors tell children and young people what they have found out about services in your area?

The outcomes referred to in question three are the five outcomes the Government has decided it wants most for children and young people:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a positive contribution to society
- Economic well being – achieving your full potential

The responses to these questions were:

Question 1. Send out surveys
Interviews
Trouble stopped so that it is safe for people to go out at night
Go in to schools and asked the children what it is like
Questionnaires
Surveys to people's homes
Patrols should be out taking care and watching villages for safety

Question 2. Questionnaire
Don't tell when the OFSTED inspectors are coming in
Youth inspectors
Ask young people
Have a look at services themselves e.g. the toilets
Don't stray from the point
Get a smoking inspector to try out no smoking in school rule
Make inspectors eat the food and pay the prices
Randomly ask young people

- Question 3. Anti-bullying
 Careers advice
 Food
 Grades
 Facilities
 How does the Anti Bullying Service operate? Not informed
 Do you know enough about what you want to do as a career?
 Do you eat in? If no, why?
 Do you think you are achieving the grades you want? If not why not?
 What support is there to achieve grades?
 Are the facilities in your school reliable and adequate?
- Question 4. Ask the opinion of children
 Send out questionnaires
 Do unit evaluations
 Group discussions
 Individually talk with the children
 Produce criteria
- Question 5. Power point presentation in assemblies
 Post results on radio, Internet and in the paper
 Letter or newsletters to pupils

The Hot Seat

This was an opportunity for the young people present to ask questions and put forward their views to Viv Shipley from OFSTED and Bill Badham from the National Youth Agency.

Q – How can inspections of Children’s Services be improved?

A widely held feeling that schools get too much notice about when inspections are to take place. This may give the inspectors the wrong impression as the school may ‘put on a show’ to look good

There has to be a way of comparing how schools operate on a day-to-day basis with how they ‘seem’ during an inspection!

Pupils have nothing to gain from schools ‘glossing over’ problems.

Young People need to feel the inspection team is working for them and they feel part of the process.

Issue of school rules – many seem to be there for no reason – why do we need a school uniform when so many young people are opposed to it. Why don’t we have address code for teachers?

Sometimes the school council gets involved with the inspectors. This is wrong because they are usually 'selected' young people who will only say good things about the school. School councils allow schools to 'tick the box' and claim they are listening to young people.

Some young people feel pressure to give a good picture of the school.

We know of young people who are 'hidden away in the pupil improvement room' while the inspectors are in the school.

Purpose of inspections should be to improve schools and this is not happening

Clear that young people do not feel that OFSTED is there for them

They should be less stressful for teachers

Solutions

Inspections should lead to improvement otherwise don't do them.

Young people should be part of the inspection process. Young people could inspect other schools in their area.

The idea of a 'mystery shopper' might work.

Conclusion

The stated purpose of holding events like these was that listening to young peoples ideas "would help make sure that inspections are as useful as possible to get a better deal for you (young people) from many of the services you may use, like schools, the GP and Connexions"

It seems clear from many of the views expressed and the examples given that young people do not see inspections as a tool that is there to improve services for them. They have very little connection with inspections other than as observers in schools and many did not realise that other services were actually inspected. Inspections in school appear to be a conversation between two sets of adults, the service provider and the inspectors, to come to an agreement on how well the school is performing in relation to a set of standards and priorities drawn up by another set of adults.

The immediate response from the young people who planned the event when asked if they would be interested in being involved was that inspections are false. Young people backed up this view on the day. The second response when we started talking about how inspectors can best involve young people in improving the quality of inspections was simply "come and talk to us". The idea of inspections being false was one that the young people said they had got used to. They expected the school to start to make changes to how it operates in the run up to an Ofsted inspection. There were examples given of students who might give a bad impression of the school being kept

away from inspectors, of classroom displays being improved, discipline being tightened up in the weeks leading up to an inspection and relaxed again afterwards.

As well as appearing false young people felt that inspectors are not really interested in them as they do not talk to them other than through elected school council members who are not representative of the views of everyone in the school. It was felt that it would not be difficult to organise a mechanism for inspectors to hear the views of young people in the school but there was a suspicion that if there was not a will on the part of the teaching staff for this to happen. This view stemmed from a feeling that teachers and head teachers are fearful of inspections rather than welcoming of them.

When talking about inspections of other services the young people were largely unaware that these took place. They did not feel that their views were valued as they had very little experience of making successful complaints or of trying to complain at all. This was most clearly observed in comments made about transport services, particularly the bus service. Buses are a major issue for young people in County Durham as they are dependent on them to get around a mainly rural county. Far from being valued customers young people gave us many instances of being subject to verbal abuse from bus drivers, buses choosing not to stop and generally poor service. There were few examples however of young people complaining and none of them complaining successfully which would indicate that they feel that they are of no importance to the service.

To summarise, young people are telling us that inspections;

- Should belong to young people
- Should be open honest and genuine
- Need to involve a wide cross section of the population
- Should be welcomed, not feared
- Should have a higher profile in the case of transport, health and other non school services
- Will lead to change

Finally the idea of being involved in the work of inspectors was an attractive one to the young people who attended the event. They felt that they have no forum other than unrepresentative school councils to put their views across and even then, any ideas for change, no matter how unanimously held by the students are subject to veto by the head teacher who is seen as all powerful and someone who can make decisions based on personal opinion. If they are to become involved in inspecting services provided for them it can only be on the basis that this involvement will lead to changes in those services otherwise young people will go back to the position they hold now where they feel that things are done to them and not for them. A positive move in this direction would be to see the views spoken by those young people that voluntarily came to the Gala Theatre on a sunny Saturday morning in September reflected directly in changes to the way things are done in the new framework for inspection.

Graham Bristow
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