

Short, sharp Ofsted – how was it for you?

School leaders turned the tables on the inspectors when they delivered their own reports on the new 'short, sharp' Ofsted assessments in a recent talk2learn discussion.

They agreed that the new format inspections which incorporate the school's own self-evaluation were 'more positive' and 'less stressful' affairs, and that thorough preparation and constructive challenging of verdicts paid great dividends.

Walter Boyle, whose school was inspected in September, said the key to success was ensuring you have the evidence to back up your assertions.

"Look at the pre-inspection brief they send just before they arrive and make sure you can address their concerns," he said. "There was only one area of my role they weren't happy with but when I showed them it was already on our development plan and that we knew where we were going, they were satisfied."

Dave Vero, now a head in Northumberland, said his school's inspection under the old system in 2005 was 'not that good an experience' in contrast to the new short-notice approach.

"There were 10 weeks to prepare and the paperwork developed was frightening," he said –

"We were inspected recently under the new system – and for the first time for me as a head – and it was over so quickly that there was no time to get stressed."

"I disagreed with some of the findings of the inspector and said so. I also made similar comments in my feedback on the draft report."

"As a result, I was rung by the Quality Assurance person from the inspecting company who said they agreed with me and were,



therefore, raising my grades in all areas. That was very satisfying for me and the school. If you don't agree with Ofsted, fight your corner. It may well be worthwhile," he added.

Not everyone was so happy with the new format. Some described how colleagues thought that the process was 'an anti-climax' and that they had felt 'left out' as they had not been seen at work in the classroom, had received little or no feedback and were not allowed to contribute to the final report.

Sheelagh Mosedale, a head of modern languages from Sheffield, said that interviews with middle leaders at her school were 'short and lacked real depth'.

"I think they had made their mind up really before they spoke to us. Feedback was vague, waffly and ungraded and mine was given in the corridor outside the men's toilets."

This was not assistant head Nicola Cleevely's experience, though. When the inspectors called at her school, they spoke to teaching staff, support staff and extensively to students.

"The vast majority of things in their report were what we had told them about ourselves," she said. "Remembering what it was like under the old regime and the sheer panic and concern for the six weeks prior to the inspection, I feel this is a much better system."

If you are not yet a member of talk2learn and would like to join, more information is available at www.ncsl.org.uk/onlinecommunities