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Inspiring teachers: perspectives and practices

Summary report

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Edited by Anna Riggall

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1. Introduction

This study investigates the notion of ‘inspiring’ teaching. The research was commissioned by CfBT as part of a collaborative professional development initiative involving its schools. It arose from headteachers’ suggestions that schools nominate a number of ‘inspiring’ teachers so that their practice could be studied and the results shared across the participating schools to promote the professional development of staff, and spread good practice through encouraging greater collaboration and learning across the CfBT family of schools.

The main aim of the research was to provide robust new evidence about both inspiring teachers and inspiring teaching from different perspectives to increase understanding of these widely used but elusive and often poorly defined concepts.

The words ‘inspiring’ and ‘inspirational’ are not new to the field of education, but have come into more frequent use in recent UK education policy. The language of the Teachers’ Standards published by the Department for Education (DfE) reflects this, stating that teachers must, among other things, “inspire, motivate, and challenge pupils” (DfE, 2013, p.7) as part of the “minimal level of practice expected of trainees and teachers” (p.3). In addition, Ofsted inspection reports use the words ‘inspiring’ or ‘inspirational’ to describe teaching, environment and leadership in schools (e.g. Ofsted, 2011).

The same terminology has also come into vogue in literature aimed at an audience of practitioners. Handbooks or study texts for practitioners offering ‘recipes’ for inspiring teaching are numerous, though they do not always take the same view of what inspiring teaching means or what inspiring teachers do. A growing number of newspaper, magazine and journal articles also aim to either describe or prescribe inspiring teaching practices. These range from opinion pieces in daily newspapers (e.g. Furnham, 2001, 2010) to peer-reviewed non-empirical articles. The bulk of these include profiles of teachers identified as inspiring, often drawing on the practice of one or several teachers, or on personal experience, to suggest criteria for cultivating inspiring practice (e.g. Collins, 2006; Richards, 2004). Many are subject-specific, particularly those aimed at the secondary level (e.g. Blake, 2006), offering tips for teachers to use in their own classrooms.

A few prevalent themes are apparent:

- inspiring teaching is frequently described as exciting, innovative and/or creative
- evidence of inspiration is framed in various ways, usually in one or more of the following: immediate student engagement in the classroom, a lasting effect on students’ aspirations and self-concepts, or interest in a particular subject
- specific practices are described that might be more usually linked to notions of ‘effective’ practice.

It has been well established that teachers and teaching matter, in the sense that they are influential in promoting student achievement (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Day et al., 2007). Establishing how to measure teacher effectiveness and defining what effective teaching means, however, are complex endeavours with inherent challenges, as stated in a review by Ko, Sammons and Bakkmum (2013). Educational effectiveness research in general, and teacher effectiveness research (TER)



in particular, imply an emphasis on promoting positive student outcomes (especially academic progress but also socio-emotional and behavioural outcomes). Three fundamental questions summarise the embedded definitional challenge for this type of research (Sammons, 1996):

- Effective in promoting which outcomes?
- Effective over what time period?
- Effective for whom?

These questions shed light on a few central considerations: the priorities and goals of education for students, stability and change over time, and differential effectiveness (i.e. variations in outcomes for groups of students by ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, etc.).

To date, most studies of teacher effectiveness have prioritised cognitive outcomes, perhaps because this has consistently remained one of the key objectives of schooling even when other goals and outcomes are also deemed important and desirable (Creemers, 1999).

Some definitions of effectiveness have been expanded to include considerations of teacher behaviours and classroom processes, teacher characteristics, working environments, and a variety of other factors at the teacher, class and school levels (Campbell et al., 2004); a more complete presentation of various definitions can be found in the review by Ko et al. (2013).

Ultimately, one of the goals of many of these research endeavours is not just to compare which teachers are more or less effective, but to arrive at some characterisation of what constitutes effective teaching. The Effective Classroom Practice (ECP) study findings, which combined evidence from two systematic lesson observation schedules (ISTOF¹ and QoT²), teacher interviews, student surveys and qualitative field notes, provide one comprehensive view of effective teaching practice (Day, 2008). Teachers identified as more effective were seen to address these areas in “consistently more positive and more reflective, complex and contextually-responsive ways” (ibid. p.15).

Many of these themes resonate with the findings from the study of inspiring teachers presented in this report, suggesting that there may be links between characteristics of inspiring and effective practice. There is an important distinction between inspiring and effective teaching, however, from the perspective of measurement and evaluation. While there is a strong tradition for judgements of effective teaching to be based on student outcomes, as discussed above, the word ‘inspiring’ casts a wider net, raising a fundamental question: What does it mean for a student to be inspired, and how can this be observed or measured?

Authors’ approaches to defining and measuring inspiration and inspiring teaching vary widely. One operational definition implicitly links inspiration to outcomes of student engagement (e.g. Bryson & Hand, 2007) and motivation (e.g. Bowman, 2007). Another approach to a theoretical framework for inspiring teaching is more concerned with longer-term effects. Only a few studies have proceeded with a more grounded approach, allowing understandings of what it means to inspire and to be inspired to emerge from the data in line with the approach adopted in this project. While some of the studies in each of these areas overlap in their definitions of inspiring teaching and its outcomes, there remains an overall lack of clarity and agreement. Drawing together the definitions and outcomes

¹ International System for Teacher Observation and Feedback; see Teddlie et al. (2006)

² Lesson Observation Form for Evaluating the Quality of Teaching; see van de Grift (2007)



used explicitly and implicitly in the existing literature, however, it appears that a framework for understanding inspiring teaching might hinge on the following dimensions:

- positive student outcomes (e.g. motivation, self-efficacy, aspiration, achievement), timeframe (both long- and short-term effects)
- particular teacher behaviours and practices
- teacher characteristics (e.g. personality traits, knowledge, and motivation) and relationships (heavily emphasised in the non-empirical literature).

If the concept of inspirational practice has shifted from a popular notion of good teaching and learning to a standard that must be met by schools and teachers, the importance of arriving at a common understanding of what this means cannot be overstated.

The findings reported in this document provide new evidence and insights about what inspiring teachers do (through observations), what they think (through interviews), and how their students think about their teachers and lessons (through questionnaires).

1.1 The approach

The research had two complementary components – an investigation led by practitioners and another led by a team of academics from the Department of Education at the University of Oxford and the Institute of Education at the University of Worcester. Each study adopted different methods and a different approach to investigating what it is to be an inspiring teacher. This report presents a description of inspiring teachers that draws on the findings from both of these studies.

A complementary fuller report, based predominantly on the academic study, is also available. This report is a shorter account of the findings from both studies.

The practitioner-led research

The practitioner-led phase was based on visits to schools by experienced educators to observe and talk with the nominated teachers (this fieldwork was conducted in autumn/spring 2012–13).

In this first phase, highly experienced educators used their skills of observation, evaluative judgement, hypothesis generation and synthesis of evidence to explore the practice of 36 teachers. Headteachers and principals in nine CfBT Schools Trust schools identified these teachers as ‘inspiring’ during a preliminary set-up phase.

The research in this phase sought to tackle three questions:

1. Can we define the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are associated with inspiring teaching and that are common across the group of identified teachers?
2. What evidence could be used as a map for professional development activities and training, beneficial to the development of all CfBT Schools Trust teaching staff?³
3. What smaller group should be looked at in the second strand of research, in order to provide as wide a range of context, background and critical learning experience as possible?

³ At the time of publication the development of these professional development activities was under way.



The academic-led research

The academic study was a mixed-methods research project conducted by a team from the University of Oxford and the University of Worcester in the summer term 2013. This phase was guided by three research questions:

1. What do inspiring teachers say about their practice?
2. What do inspiring teachers do in their classrooms?
3. What are their students' views and experiences?

This phase focused on 17 teachers (a sub-sample of the practitioner-led research group referred to above) and their classrooms, pupils and school leaders. Methods included:

- interviews with teachers and leaders
- classroom systematic observation (two observational instruments were used in the present study, namely the International System of Teacher Observation and Feedback (ISTOF) and the Lesson Observation Form for Evaluating the Quality of Teaching (QoT))
- classroom qualitative notes written by researchers
- ranking sheets that gave teachers and leaders an opportunity to list in order of importance the characteristics of inspiring teaching
- a student survey (in total, questionnaire responses from 203 students from 11 of the participating teachers' classes were collected).

It has also explored variations related to three teacher characteristics: gender, career phase (based on years of experience) and sector (primary or secondary).

1.2 The inspiring teachers

The group of 36 inspiring teachers that took part in this two-part study were nominated by their headteachers because they had already been identified within their school as talented and regularly delivered outstanding lessons (in Ofsted terms). The headteacher judgement was trusted but also scrutinised. Data from the quantitative observations carried out as part of the academic study confirmed that the teachers⁴ did perform well – all of the lessons observed were rated equal to or above the scale midpoints indicating high levels and frequencies of teacher behaviours considered effective or in line with high quality as defined by international literature. In addition, the academic study administered questionnaires to pupils in 11 of the teachers' classes and found that pupils overwhelmingly rated their teachers and learning experiences highly. More detail is provided in section 4 which reports on the findings from the pupil survey and section 5 which asks if inspiring teachers are also more effective.

⁴ More specifically the sub-group of 17 teachers that took part in the academic study

1.3 The basis and structure of this report

This report draws primarily on the academic study, with contributions from the practitioner study. There was remarkable consistency of message between the findings of the two phases of research with the academic study offering much deeper detail and explanation due to the nature of the smaller sample and in-depth mixed methodology that it applied. For this reason the findings from the academic study provide the structural framework and the majority of content for this report.

This report considers the views of a group of inspiring teachers on what it means to have this label – what is an inspiring teacher? The next section provides some examples of the features of inspiring practice drawn from a series of qualitative observations conducted in classes taught by the inspiring teachers that took part in the research. Section 3 investigates the pupils' perspectives and views about their teachers, based upon both qualitative observations and questionnaires. Finally the report considers whether inspiring teachers are also effective teachers, using two systematic observation schedules. The results clearly confirm that the sample of inspiring teachers studied here do indeed show very strongly the features of effective practice identified in the literature and captured by both the quantitative instruments. The results take us further forward by triangulating different sources of evidence to show also what helps to distinguish the notion of 'inspiring teaching'.



2. What is it to be an ‘inspiring teacher’?

Both studies considered how the sample of inspiring teachers defined ‘inspiring teachers’ and agreed on the fundamental characteristics – enthusiasm and positive relationships with students. The interviews conducted with the sub-sample allowed the in-depth probing of issues relating to the teachers’ understanding and definition of inspiring teaching, and provided teachers with an opportunity to reflect on their work and their schools. Teachers showed the ability to reflect on their practice and their roles in school, suggesting that being a reflective practitioner was associated with both highly effective and inspiring practice.

2.1 What do teachers see as essential to being an inspiring teacher?

The interviews revealed some distinctive features of the sub-sample’s understanding of what it means to be an inspiring teacher – see Figure 2.1 below.

The two characteristics most frequently mentioned were *Enthusiasm for teaching* and *Positive relationships with students*. Both these two main features reflect the nature of teaching as an interactive and social activity that engages the emotions. They are followed by less commonly identified characteristics such as *Flexibility*, *Relevant teaching*, *Safe and stimulating classroom climate*, *Positive classroom management*, *Reflectiveness* and *Innovative teaching*.

Figure 2.1: Characteristics of inspiring teachers





Enthusiasm for teaching

According to the interviewees, perhaps the key aspect of being an inspiring teacher is having a passion for the profession and being able to transmit that enthusiasm, either for learning or for a particular subject, to their students. This, teachers stressed, is closely associated with creating a stimulating learning climate and making lessons enjoyable.

Teachers linked this sense of enthusiasm and passion for the profession with constantly looking for opportunities for professional development and improvement:

"I put enthusiasm as one of the top [factors], because I do genuinely think if you're enthusiastic about your job, that means that your whole profession will become better (...) You've got to love what you do, and if you don't like what you do, you're probably not going to be good at it, it's that type of thing. So yeah, if you've got real enthusiasm to do a bit of research, to go out there and sort of see how other people do stuff, and then take things on board, and be available to, you know, hear feedback, then yeah, that's going to do it, I think, so I'm going to say enthusiasm." (Male, Secondary school, 6–10 years of experience)

This trait was considered equally important by practitioners across school sectors (primary and secondary), gender and career phase. In relation to their own teaching, interviewees felt very positively about this aspect. The majority of them believed they were very enthusiastic and able to motivate students.

Positive relationships with students

Participants also strongly indicated that inspiring teachers prioritise building and maintaining positive relationships with all students. This aspect seems to go hand-in-hand with getting to know individual students as learners and as people too, as well as being aware of their family situation and social context:

"The getting to know the children and getting to know them individually, and actually knowing where they are coming from but also where they need to go next, it's about that because you can inspire them in lots of different ways but you need to know where they need to go. And I suppose just kind of saying: "What do the children actually want to get out of this?" (Female, Primary school, 6–10 years of experience)

They also stressed that their relationships with students are dynamic and that building up this relationship requires effort and an important period of adaptation through which teachers get to know the students and vice versa. Other aspects identified as crucial for developing good relationships were promoting mutual respect among teachers and students, and consistency. The ability to develop good relationships was also something that the participants had recognised in the examples of teachers or others who had inspired them in the past.

Most of the teachers in the sample reported having positive relationships with their students and also liking children and young people, and this did not differ by their gender, school sector or career phase. In general, these teachers felt they were able to develop and maintain positive relationships with their students and this was a priority in their practice. Creating positive relationships with students seem to be central to these teachers' sense of self-efficacy and ability to teach well:



"I think I do develop good relationships one-to-one with pupils and I do try to really understand each individual's needs and what they need from me in order to be the best they can be. (...) I do try to have a good relationship with pupils because if they can't be honest with me then I'm not going to be able to do the best for them." (Female, Secondary school, 11–15 years of experience)

Nonetheless, some teachers made explicit the need to be very careful about boundaries, especially with respect to contact outside school and avoiding links via social media such as Facebook.

Positive classroom management

Linked to the theme of positive relationships but distinct in its own right, most teachers referred to positive classroom management as an aspect that enabled inspiring teaching. Having good control of the class and being fair, firm and consistent were stressed as prerequisites for successful teaching and learning:

"[...] You need to have control of your class. If you haven't got control, then you'll never be an inspiring teacher. You need to be there, in control of it. Unless you've got that, then you can't teach anything." (Male, Secondary school, 6–10 years of experience)

Teachers also argued that good classroom management was linked with their clear academic and behavioural expectations, as well as consistency across the school and fairness across students. They strongly emphasised the need for a positive approach in behaviour management.

Flexibility

Around a third of the 17 teachers in the sub-sample suggested that a characteristic feature of inspiring teachers is that they are flexible and adapt their teaching according to their learners' needs. Secondary school teachers in the sample spoke more explicitly than primary teachers about the need to adapt instruction to individual students' needs. Indeed, these teachers said that adaptability was vital and that often plans could change throughout a lesson depending on the needs or interests of the class. These teachers also commented on their confidence in being able to adapt lesson plans to respond appropriately to broader learning needs as they arose and felt this had a positive effect on student engagement and learning.

Safe and stimulating classroom climate

Some teachers also argued that inspiring teachers create positive learning climates for students, encouraging an open and trusting environment where students can feel happy, calm, relaxed and safe. This again emphasises the socio-emotional component of inspiring teaching combined with the more practical aspects of activities and planning.

Researcher notes added to this the importance of school climate in creating the conditions in which teachers can be inspiring. This they described as nurturing and open to innovation and risk-taking:

"The climate in which a teacher finds themselves either amplifies or attenuates their potential – the teacher valued working in a context where the school did not expect that everyone would teach in the same way. A key feature appears to be the encouragement of risk-taking to enable innovation, high expectations in relation to progress and attainment but a mindset that accepts flexibility in relation to how the school gets there. The presence of an inspirational teacher can act as a catalyst for change if there is a spirit of enquiry and shared practice."

Purposeful and relevant teaching

Several teachers stressed the connection between inspiring teaching and linking learning experiences to students' own lives, and making learning purposeful. Teachers generally felt confident that they could make their teaching relevant to students' lives, although this was perceived as being more difficult in certain subjects.

Reflectiveness and collaboration

A number of the interviewees made clear they felt inspiring teachers are consciously reflective about their practice and constantly look for ways to develop their practice further. Participants also stressed that an important aspect of inspiring teachers' ability to reflect on their practice was to be able to do it collaboratively and thus contribute to the professional development of colleagues in their teams. Quite a number were in various leadership roles such as head of department that may have shaped their emphasis.

Innovative teaching

A number also suggested that inspiring teachers, as well as being knowledgeable, also bring innovation into their practice and use new, modern approaches to teaching. They exploit their creativity and are willing to take some risks. This approach is associated with using a rich variety of instructional activities to create stimulating lessons.

These findings were to a great extent in line with the results obtained from the application of the ranking sheet that showed that inspiring teachers, despite their school sector, gender and years of teaching experience, regarded the following aspects as the most important for their practice:

- enthusiasm for teaching
- positive relationships with children
- high levels of motivation and commitment
- confidence in the classroom.

2.2 Career aspirations

Teachers were asked about their plans for the future and whether they would like to take on other responsibilities within the school. Many already had additional roles, some in middle and a few in senior leadership positions. Nonetheless, a large number of interviewees (12 out of 17) said they preferred to continue with their prime role as classroom teachers, a position in which they felt comfortable and had developed a strong sense of efficacy. These teachers stressed that they wanted to remain working inside the classroom with students, or in areas closely related to teaching and learning. Some of the interviewees had reduced contact hours with students in the classroom due to their other roles in school, but while valuing their leadership roles they also felt they missed the full-time teaching role. However, a few saw leadership positions as offering an attractive opportunity to have a greater impact on their schools in the future. A tension was identified between their desire to remain in the classroom and career development to achieve better working conditions, especially by male teachers. Finally, despite general satisfaction with their current schools, a few teachers were considering changing schools in the future, in order to experience and influence other settings.



2.3 Job satisfaction, motivation and commitment

Job satisfaction, motivation and commitment were also explored during the interviews. These aspects have particular relevance in the context of this study, as they tend to influence one of the most important aspects these teachers commented on in defining inspiring teaching: enthusiasm.

The vast majority of teachers in the study indicated that their current motivation as a teacher was high and they were generally sustaining their commitment and engagement. Phrases such as “it’s a vocation for some”, “I love my job” and “I’m dedicated” were used. Primary school teachers typically expressed higher levels of motivation than the secondary teachers in our sample. Teachers were particularly satisfied with the aspects of their jobs that involved being in contact with students.

Only one of the teachers was becoming disillusioned with work, reflecting disquiet at current education reforms (interviewed in 2013) that were seen as greatly reducing teacher autonomy and working conditions, increasing workloads and distracting from classroom work. However, many teachers drew attention to their worries in this area and expressed concern and disagreement with what they saw as external interference by central government. The majority had strong and negative views about recent changes in the national curriculum, national assessments and examinations. They saw these changes as highly political, and felt they produced great confusion and work overload and lacked clarity. The changes were seen to have shifted the focus from engaging students and innovating in teaching to managing change and achieving targets with too much focus on tests and examination results. Teachers felt they had to put in more time and that their past efforts in developing their resources and planning were being wasted, including having to replace expensive texts and materials because of the changes to the curriculum and examinations.

Teachers’ well-being and motivation at work were affected by several personal, professional and work-based circumstances. Some of the most commonly emerging factors were workload negatively affecting work-life balance, adapting to new roles within their school, external pressures related to student and teacher assessment, student behaviour and interest and the benefits of school support, as well as personal and health factors. In general, participants believed teaching was an extremely demanding profession in terms of time. The issues of excessive workload and difficulties in achieving and sustaining a satisfactory work/life balance appeared very frequently in the interviews and were more commonly referred to by female teachers. Teachers also suggested that the issue of work-life balance impacts differently at particular points in teachers’ lives.

Starting to teach for the first time and adapting to the demands of a new position were often cited as challenging events that affected teachers’ sense of efficacy and levels of satisfaction. Being successful and obtaining recognition and respect from colleagues and school leaders were also noted as important positives. A supportive school culture was noted as a key factor in sustaining teachers’ job satisfaction, motivation and commitment. In particular, aspects such as the quality of leadership, relationships with colleagues, relevant opportunities for continuing professional development and shared behaviour management policy are, according to teachers, important factors that enhance their daily practice and self-efficacy.

The most frequently mentioned school factor affecting teacher practice was the support coming from the school leadership. Over half of the teachers explicitly drew attention to this factor and most of them valued leadership that was approachable and participative. They also preferred school leaders who set clear, aspirational and realistic expectations for teachers and provided them with relevant and constructive feedback. The evidence strongly suggests that being effective and



inspirational is at least in part shaped by features of the schools in which teachers work. Feeling supported was closely linked to motivation, satisfaction and morale.

2.4 Collaboration and CPD

The degree to which the school ethos is one that promotes positive and collaborative relationships among teachers was also considered a very important factor, noted by approximately half of the interviewees. The motivation from collaboration and the role of mentoring were also highlighted by some.

Most teachers reported that their school had some type of professional development programme in place, such as breakfast training sessions and INSET days. A number of teachers considered collaborative and personalised learning, with colleagues from within their school, their preferred form of professional development.

Teachers were asked about their professional development needs. The areas that they identified for further development were highly diverse but the three most common areas that teachers wanted to improve were:

- subject knowledge
- differentiation
- IT skills.

The inspiring teachers in our sample were typically highly proactive in managing their professional development, participating actively in teachers' communities and using social networks in order to find and share new ideas to improve their practice.



3. Features of inspiring practice

Both the practitioner-led and academic-led studies investigated to a greater or lesser extent the features of inspiring practice and provided short vignettes and examples of classroom practice that illustrate the sorts of practice that were identified as especially inspiring.

The practitioner-led study concluded that inspirational interaction was a key component of inspiring teaching. Such interaction was characterised by challenge, high expectations, trust and goal-focused activity and used a wide range of teaching strategies:

“Inspiring teaching fires the imagination through a combination of intellectual challenge, high expectations and mutual trust between teacher and learner that invites the learner to join the teacher on a journey of discovery.”

“Inspirational teachers are learning goal-focused although not route-specific in terms of pedagogy. Learning goals are, however, never simplistic; rather they aim to take children to their next level of understanding and metacognition.”

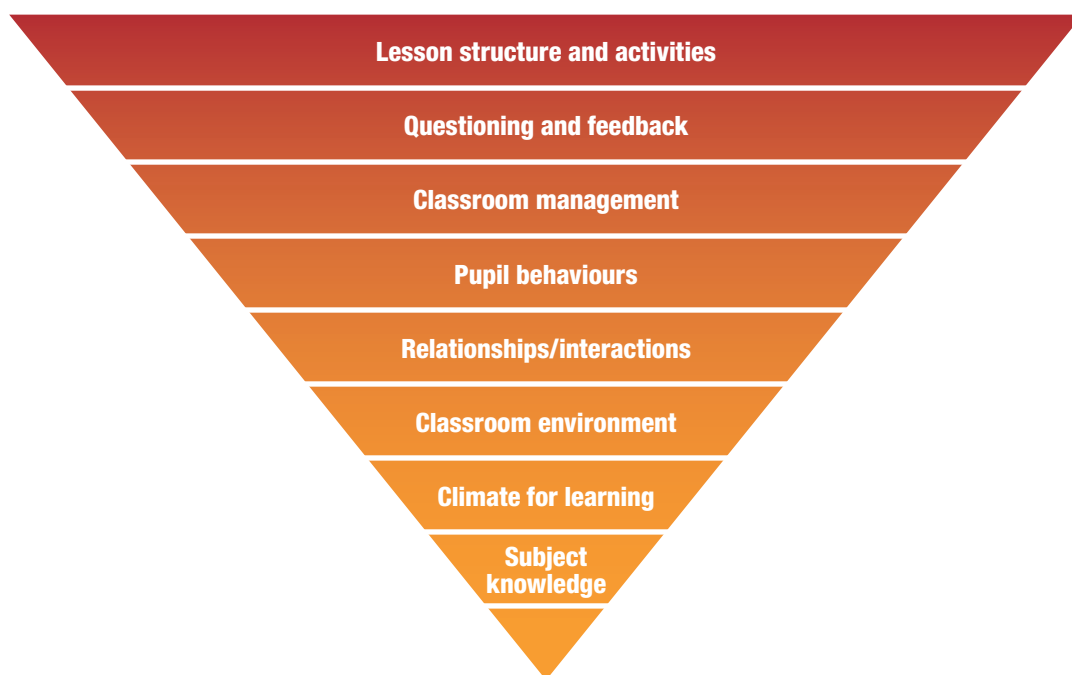
“Their choice from a wide range of teaching strategies and approaches, sometimes moment-by-moment, is astute as they diagnose needs and fine-tune their responses in order to deepen understanding and promote independent thought. However, whatever strategy they select, they remain subject achievement and attainment orientated.”

(Practitioner researchers)

The academic study delved deep into the teachers’ classroom practice, and offered an opportunity to note specific aspects of lessons, dynamics, practices and behaviours, and provide greater detail about aspects related to the particularities of individual classroom contexts. From analysis of the qualitative observation data the team concluded that there were eight features of inspiring practice. These are shown in Figure 3.1, and described below (from most to least).



Figure 3.1: Major themes from qualitative observation data



3.1 Lesson structure and activities

Timing and transitions

All the field notes completed by the academic research team mentioned lesson timing, with reference to features linked to the lesson introduction, transitions between lesson components and lesson closure. Most lessons included a distinct introduction component – which often included engaging, exciting or interactive warm-up activities – followed by an overview of the lesson objectives and tasks. Many teachers explicitly communicated and enforced specific timeframes for lesson activities. Most of the observed lessons included smooth transitions between activities or parts of the lesson.



Students are asked to gather on the carpet, with the teacher seated in front of them. Showing them a small handbag with a seashell image on it, the teacher explains that she has found the bag but doesn't know who it belongs to.

She asks the students to get into 'talking triads' to discuss whether they think she should open the bag or not, and why. They take turns expressing their opinions in small groups, and then volunteer to share their ideas with the class. Some claim it shouldn't be opened, as "it's private", while others disagree ("What if there's something important in it?").

The class comes to the consensus that the bag must be opened in order to identify its owner, and the teacher calls on volunteers to pull items out of the bag as clues. Small bottles labelled as 'seaweed-scented conditioner' and 'leg-growing potion' provoke eager guesses: "It's a mermaid!" Students are animated and excited, and all appear extremely engaged.

This is followed by the main content of the lesson, which involves creating and describing a character (using images as well as words).

Female teacher, 16–20 years' experience. Age group/subject: Key Stage 1 (Primary)

Lesson closures were more variable than introductions. Most dismissals were calm and orderly. Many teachers ended with a whole-class discussion; many also used structured debriefing to engage students actively in the lesson closure. Some used formal written assessments to check for understanding. In several classes, often because of an ongoing assignment to be continued in the following lesson, the lesson closure consisted of tidying-up routines and announcements (e.g. homework) instead of assessment. Regardless of the specific strategies adopted by teachers to facilitate lesson closure, most sought to prompt students to reflect on their learning (either aloud or on paper).

Differentiation

Formal types of differentiation (explicitly different activities or versions of a task) were not very common in most of the observed lessons. Nonetheless, teachers did make frequent use of informal approaches to meet students' individual needs, such as circulating to provide individual support during independent or small-group work, or using additional adults in the room to support struggling individuals or groups.

Students are seated at several large tables, working on their mathematics investigation packets.

After checking that everyone seems to be on track with locating appropriate resources and getting started, the teacher seats herself at the table on the far right of the room, and discusses the activity with two girls.

She looks around frequently to monitor the class, and occasionally gets up to respond and to check the progress of other students, but repeatedly returns to work more closely with the students at that far right table.

She can be heard asking them to explain their reasoning out loud to her before writing it down, and then to read out their responses once written.

Female teacher, 0–5 years' experience. Age group/subject: Key Stage 2 (Primary)

Making connections

All of the teachers incorporated links between lesson content and examination standards and performance, students' daily lives beyond the classroom, popular culture, or exciting events likely to engage students' interest and attention. It was quite common for the teachers to engage students actively in the process of making these connections.

Synoptic thinking, the teacher explains, is "seeing everything together". "This is how to get the top marks", he says, referring to A levels.

He elicits students' ideas about social networking sites and how they have changed over time, comparing some of the different sites and what has made them successes or failures.

"This was synoptic thinking," he informs the students, "you've just done it!"

A Powerpoint slide is projected, entitled 'The Marks Scheme', with three levels and explanations of what it takes to do well at each level. "We're going to work on these level 3 approaches," the teacher announces, before handing out resources for the main lesson activity.

Male teacher, 6–10 years' experience. Age group/subject: Key Stage 5 (History)

Clarification

In many of the lessons observed, teachers engaged in frequent clarification of task instructions and lesson objectives, eliciting explanations, questions and reworded instructions from the students themselves, and checking one-to-one to make sure students were on track and understanding.

Student input and choice

Student input was actively sought and valued, although this was done in a wide variety of ways and with respect to different aspects of the lessons. Teachers allowed students to choose between activities, to select their own partners or groups, or (particularly at Key Stage 2 and above) to select from levels of difficulty or define their own targets.

The lesson objective is written on the board at the beginning of the lesson: 'Continue working on my [art project] using my imagination. I must...'

The teacher uses this unfinished sentence as a prompt, and asks students to set their own targets which they will use to self-evaluate later.

She provides a set of helpful words as guidance, and writes these on the board as well. Some are technical ('markmaking', 'texture', 'background' and 'colour') and others are behavioural ('focus', 'concentrate' and 'explore').

Female teacher, 11–15 years' experience. Age group/subject: Key Stage 3 (Art)

Variety

Activities were varied in almost all of the lessons observed, except in instances where students were continuing with an ongoing assignment or activity. This variety was especially striking in primary classrooms, where students often physically changed configurations or groupings to transition between activities involving different materials and modes of instruction.

In secondary classes it was more common for this variety to involve working with different partners during the lesson, switching from whole-class discussion to group or individual activities or vice



versa, and alternating between spoken and written tasks. Some teachers also provided variety by introducing novel activities or materials into their lessons.

Use of technology

Almost all of the classrooms contained smartboards. The vast majority of teachers presented parts of their lessons using this technology, but only in some cases did students interact with the board or with other technology tools. Some teachers used technology in creative or unusual ways, which seemed to be particularly popular with students. Nonetheless, using technology in unusual ways did not seem to be a major feature of inspiring teachers' practice.

3.2 Questioning and feedback

The inspiring teachers' classes were highly interactive. Teachers laid great emphasis on questioning and feedback to support learning.

Positive feedback

All of the teachers used positive feedback, in whole-class discussions as well as conversations with small groups and individual students. Many responded to every contribution with positivity, using phrases such as "Brilliant effort" (while still providing clear feedback) when students offered incorrect or partial answers. Interestingly, a lot of teachers frequently offered more general words of praise without making the reason explicit, although some gave explanations for their pleasure. This may have been to create a generally positive atmosphere, something stressed in the teacher interviews. In primary lessons, teachers were more likely to offer explicit positive feedback about students' behaviours as well as their academic efforts and progress. For example, comments such as "Lovely", "Brilliant", "Really, really good work", "Jolly good", "Spot on", "Excellent", "This pleases me" were common, but some were more specific:

"You counted in 9s, that's really interesting!"

(Female teacher, 11–15 years' experience, Primary, Key Stage 0)

"Well bowled, excellent!"

(Male teacher, 0–5 years' experience, Secondary Physical Education, Key Stage 3)

"There is no actual scientific evidence! I love that."

(Female teacher, 6–10 years' experience, Secondary English, Key Stage 3)

In primary lessons, teachers were more likely to offer explicit positive feedback about students' behaviours as well as their academic efforts and progress:

"Amazing sitting!"

(Female teacher, 16–20 years' experience, Primary, Key Stage 1)

"Lovely listening faces."

(Female teacher, 6–10 years' experience, Primary, Key Stage 0)

Circulation

In almost all of the lessons observed, teachers circulated while students were working. This looked different from classroom to classroom. Most teachers used probing questions while circulating to check for understanding and to support collaboration and communication between students.



The teacher circulates to each group as they continue working to find different ways to draw 2 metre x 10 metre paths using 1 metre x 2 metre rectangles.

She prompts students to reflect on their work and encourages them to communicate with each other:

“Is there any other way?”

“How many have you found?”

“Have you discussed this way with your group?”

“Are you sure that’s all?”

Female teacher, 6–10 years’ experience. Age group/subject: Key Stage 3 (Mathematics)

Open-ended questions

All of the teachers used at least some open-ended questions during their lessons and in many instances skilfully chose open-ended questions that proved a valuable way to engage students as more active participants in their own learning. When these questions were academically oriented, they often involved asking students to make their own connections to real-world situations, draw on prior knowledge, or explain how they found a solution or arrived at an answer. For example:

“What do you know about pirates?”

(Female teacher, 6–10 years’ experience, Primary, Key Stage 0)

“Are there connections without the date?”

(Male teacher, 6–10 years’ experience, Secondary History, Key Stage 5)

“How can you convince me that it’s 89?”

(Female teacher, 6–10 years’ experience, Secondary Mathematics, Key Stage 3)

A different type of open-ended question involved prompting students to reflect on their own learning or on the work and ideas of their peers. It was common for students to be asked to engage explicitly with these metacognitive types of questions in secondary lessons. Primary teachers also invited students to reflect and offer feedback, but usually in simpler terms.

All students encouraged to contribute

Nearly every observed teacher made some attempt to make lessons and interactions as inclusive as possible. The majority of teachers used ‘cold-calling’ and informal monitoring (i.e. attempting not to call on the same individuals too much, actively encouraging reluctant or shy students, and ignoring or redirecting students who spoke out of turn) to accomplish this.



The teacher asks a student by name to explain which food item he would bring with him if he knew he would be stranded, and why. The boy's body language shows embarrassment: shrugging, shrinking away from the teacher, smiling apologetically, and he says, "I don't know".

The teacher ignores another student who is attempting to interrupt, and encourages gently, "You know it, I'm certain of it. Tell us what you're thinking, we'd love to hear your ideas."

After this prompting, the student does give a rather quiet answer, though he still struggles to explain his reasoning.

Male teacher, 0–5 years' experience. Age group/subject: Key Stage 3 (English)

3.3 Classroom management

Evidence of routines

There was clear evidence of well-understood routines enabling classes to work smoothly. Students had internalised these; this fostered independence and self-regulation, and helped maximise learning time. The most commonly observed routines involved:

- students knowing what to do at the beginnings and endings of lessons without being reminded
- rules and consequences
- ways of communicating in the classroom (particularly knowing when and to whom it was appropriate to speak during the lesson)
- the handling of resources and materials.

Responding to disruptions

No major disruptions were seen in any of the lessons. Minor disruptions that did occur in some classrooms were swiftly and appropriately handled. Many teachers, especially in secondary schools, strategically ignored minor disruptions (such as occasional whispering out of turn) and only responded to more serious infractions like disrespectful language.

When responding to minor disruptions, most teachers avoided role-confirming remarks in favour of gentle reminders and quick comments with an emphasis on promoting the productive use of time.

Student responsibility for classroom space and resources

In almost all of the classrooms students were given responsibility and ownership for the classroom space and resources. Some teachers accomplished this by assigning specific temporary duties, others seemed to have established routines that encouraged students to voluntarily claim responsibility for resource distribution or tidying-up tasks.

Student leadership roles

In several classes, students were given a variety of leadership roles and responsibilities (not just related to classroom space and resources), which served as a classroom management tool in multiple ways. In some cases, students who exhibited challenging behaviours were chosen for leadership roles in order to occupy them and give them a reason to behave constructively. On the other hand, some teachers also selected students with exceptionally strong academic skills or exemplary behaviour to lead their peers by example.



One of the boys in the class appears to have particularly strong skills – he writes a great deal in response to each prompt, using complex sentence structure and advanced vocabulary. He finishes early, and the teacher encourages him to sit with struggling students and prompt them to assist with their writing. He models teacher behaviour, helping his peers to express their own ideas by asking them a lot of questions. It seems clear that he has been given this ‘teacher’s assistant’ role before.

Towards the end of the same lesson, the teacher announces that he will be distributing sweets as students leave the room. One of the boys is given the job of handing out exactly one sweet to each of his classmates. He was sometimes silly and spoke loudly and out of turn during the lesson, but appears to take this responsibility very seriously, smiles widely when the teacher selects him, and proceeds to behave perfectly during the lesson closure (listening to his peers when they speak, and packing up quickly to be ready for his special role).

Male teacher, 0–5 years’ experience. Age group/subject: Key Stage 3 (English)

Expectation to help each other

Based on student behaviour, and in some cases explicit teacher feedback (e.g. “Help each other out!”), there was an expectation in many of the observed classrooms that students should help one another with assignments and tasks. This was sometimes facilitated by teachers, but quite frequently students helped each other spontaneously without having been directed to do so. It shows that teachers had a commitment to fostering collaboration and teamwork as well as promoting individual learning.

As students work through a problem set, the teacher requires them to ask the other people at their tables for help before asking him.

From time to time, when everyone at a particular table is stuck, the teacher suggests that one of them get up and go to another table to ask other students to explain a solution strategy. In these instances, he points out specific peers that they should approach for help.

Male teacher, 6–10 years’ experience. Age group/subject: Key Stage 3 (Mathematics)

3.4 Student behaviours

Engagement

Either all or very nearly all students were engaged during all of the lessons observed, though in a few cases this engagement fluctuated depending on the specific activity over the course of the lesson. This observation, combined with the interview evidence, suggests that inspiring teachers place a strong emphasis on promoting engagement and see it as a key component in promoting learning. This was also linked to task-focused communication.

Task-focused communication

Students communicated frequently with their peers about the activity or task at hand. Classes were highly interactive, providing opportunities for students to work together collaboratively. Sometimes this was formalised and built into the instructions for a particular activity, but often it appeared to be an expectation that required little prompting, forming part of the classroom norms established by the teacher.



Students work on their calculations at their tables, discussing and comparing with their neighbours. Several are arguing (academically) about how they arrived at particular solutions. One of the students can be heard reminding another to check the units he has used for his calculations.

Female teacher, 16–20 years' experience. Age group/subject: Key Stage 2 (Primary)

Enthusiasm

Students showed enthusiasm in many of the observed lessons. This was often prompted by a particularly stimulating activity or the prospect of some small reward, but sometimes there appeared to be a pervasive student enthusiasm for the class or subject in general. The lessons where student enthusiasm was most overt were often those which were observed to be particularly interactive and lively.

The teacher forms small groups of students. She announces, “What we’re going to do is, I want you to run around like we’re in a newsroom,” going on to explain that they will be gathering information about hurricanes.

Students take turns as runners, dashing to opposite ends of the room to pick up and read laminated fact cards before returning to their groups to relay what they remember from what they have read.

There is a lot of chatter (which sounds on-task) while students are running around and gathering facts. Students cheer on their runners excitedly and urge each other to collect more facts as quickly as possible. Some groups argue about the facts being brought to them, concerned with making sure they’re getting only new information.

Following the activity, the teacher invites students to share out. One particularly eager volunteer reads his group’s facts while imitating a news announcer’s voice.

Female teacher, 0–5 years' experience. Age group/subject: Key Stage 3 (Geography)

Groupwork and communication skills

In almost all of the lessons students demonstrated productive group work or communication skills. Even when teachers did not seem to be directly initiating or facilitating this, the observations hinted at the strong possibility that teachers had previously established guidelines or best practices for collaborative work and constructive communication skills. Again the interview data supported this interpretation.

Independence

Similarly, many of the activities observed required students (sometimes pairs or groups of students) to work quite independently, with minimal guidance from their teachers. The independent behaviours exhibited by students suggested teachers had encouraged this over time, and designed lessons to provide opportunities for student independence.

Peer feedback

In quite a few classes, students were encouraged to give feedback to one another as a formal or informal part of the lesson, essentially marking one another’s work or providing constructive criticism for a peer’s verbal contribution. Many of the teachers guided students in this process when it was



done in a whole-class format, and circulated to listen to students' conversation when feedback was exchanged in pairs or small groups. Most teachers were thus actively engaged in the process.

3.5 Relationships and interactions

Relationships between teachers and students were characterised most often as “relaxed”, “warm”, “friendly”, and (in a few cases) “businesslike”. As noted in the interviews, teachers said they laid a strong emphasis on positive relationships with students, and the observation data strongly support these claims.

High expectations

Teachers expressed high expectations for their students. This was usually observed through a combination of formative feedback that provided encouragement to individual students, clearly-expressed expectations that students would be able to complete challenging tasks, and setting targets expressly designed to move each student to the next level. Most teachers did not allow students to take breaks if they finished a task early; instead, they used further questioning to help students to extend their thinking.

Safe and supportive space to learn

Teachers were seen as creating safe spaces for students to contribute and also to make mistakes. This was reflected in the feedback given when students gave erroneous answers, and also in other students' positive and constructive responses in those instances. Below are some of the relevant notes written by the researchers during observations:

“Safe environment to make mistakes, teacher quashes laughing at peers immediately.”
(From a Key Stage 3 Mathematics lesson, male teacher, 6–10 years' experience)

“Students seem comfortable offering ideas even when they are not sure if they are correct.”
(From a Key Stage 1 lesson, female teacher, 16–20 years' experience)

Humour

Many teachers used humour at some point during the lesson. In most cases, this was not so much a matter of actually telling jokes as it was being willing to laugh with students or to say unexpected things to surprise them. This helped to create a positive climate, support classroom management and promote student engagement and enthusiasm.

As students write the objective, the teacher is playing spooky music to set the tone for the lesson text. As an aside, she says, “That is me snoring.”

Students scream with laughter at this.

Female teacher, 6–10 years' experience. Age group/subject: Key Stage 3 (English)

Treating students as individuals

In the interactions between teachers and students, it was clear that teachers made many efforts to know and refer to students as individuals. Some merely called on students by name, others greeted each student individually at the door before the lesson began, while still others made comments that showed awareness of students' lives and interests beyond the classroom.



Awareness of individual targets/needs

Closely related to the above, teachers demonstrated awareness of the students' individual learning needs and targets both explicitly (by directly discussing their targets) and implicitly (by offering extra support to a struggling student or extension opportunities to students with stronger skills).

Enthusiasm and mutual liking

Students were seen, in the majority of observed classes, as appearing to like their teachers, while teachers were generally seen to show enthusiasm and enjoyment in their dealings with students. These findings were also very evident in the teacher interviews and student survey.

Sense of authority

In some lessons, there was a more pointed sense of teacher authority. This may have been a feature of some teachers' individual style of lesson delivery, or a response to context in classes that had previously exhibited challenging behaviours. Whatever the reasons behind it, this sense of strong teacher authority was a prominent feature in some classrooms and not at all so in others.

3.6 Classroom environment

Every classroom had some academic reference material on display. The vast majority also included colourful and stimulating decor, many examples of students' work, and information about classroom and school norms or rules on display. Most primary classrooms also prominently featured behaviour or reward charts, suggesting that extrinsic reward and recognition systems were viewed as important. Some classrooms also featured furniture that was relatively easy to rearrange for different types of activities; this appeared to be of more importance for some lessons than others.

3.7 Climate for learning

Researchers made comments on the classroom climate for learning as they perceived it. In this context, the most commonly used term was 'relaxed'. There were also references to evident mutual respect, productivity, fun, energy, calm and sense of common purpose. There was much overlap of this theme with others in the observation notes. For example, in classes where the climate was described as relaxed or friendly, the teachers' relationship to and interactions with students were also often described in the same or similar terms. In other words, while climate for learning was included explicitly in the qualitative observation notes, it was also closely tied to and influenced by a combination of more specific features of the lessons observed, especially the relationships and interactions between teacher and students.

3.8 Teacher subject knowledge

Teacher subject knowledge was referred to in the majority of the field notes, but only very briefly. This is not to say that subject knowledge is unimportant or unrelated to inspirational teaching. On the contrary, in a sample of teachers who had all been nominated as inspiring, it is likely that strong subject knowledge was a prerequisite and did not stand out because there may have been little variation in this respect between individual teachers. Notably, hardly any subject knowledge errors were observed (only two very minor instances).

References to subject knowledge most commonly related to teachers' use of accessible language and explanations. In some cases, when students struggled to understand a concept based on an initial explanation, teachers demonstrated the depth of their subject knowledge by finding another way to explain the same concept so that students could better understand.



Teachers' subject knowledge was also evident in their awareness of common misconceptions, or of solution strategies and approaches that would work well for students to succeed at a particular task.



4. Students' views and experiences

In the practitioner study the views of learners were explored. The final conclusions from the team described how the pupils believed that teachers were not worried about error-making and allowed them (the learners) to try new things. The children believed the teachers understood how they learned and noted particularly how they use repetition, in different ways, to give what one learner described as 'aha' moments. From the students' perspective, the teachers always appeared 'super-organised' and they had complete faith that they would learn in the teacher's lessons because the teacher would not let anything stand in their way.

The academic team also investigated the students' view and perspectives. This was done in two ways – firstly, through classroom observations which provided rich evidence about students' classroom activities and responses to teaching, drawing particular attention to the inspiring teachers' skills in behaviour management and fostering a positive climate and relationships with and between students. Secondly, students in 11 of the classes completed a questionnaire. The questionnaires had four sections: *My school*, *My teacher*, *My classroom* and *About me in this class* – each section can be seen as an indicator of the school climate, teaching practices, classroom environment, and student attitudes and engagement respectively. A total of 203 pupils completed the questionnaire.

Students' ratings of schools, classrooms, their own involvement, and particularly teachers, were generally very favourable overall, with girls giving significantly more positive ratings than boys.

Students' overall ratings indicated that they strongly believe their teachers:

- have high expectations for pupils, and positive relationships with them
- create a positive, supportive, and reassuring classroom climate
- have clear instructional goals and well-structured lessons
- are approachable, fair, and helpful
- transmit their enjoyment of learning to pupils
- promote positive learning experiences, attitudes, engagement and motivation.

Additionally, students' written comments were analysed and showed that they valued:

- group work and collaboration
- varied lesson activities, group arrangements, and topics
- a range of resources, from handouts to ICT
- a prompt start and appropriate lesson pace
- a strong focus on learning and progress
- lessons attuned to student interest and enjoyment
- clarity about what to do and how to improve their work

- interactive teaching approaches and individual support
- positive relationships with their teachers
- teachers who show consistent and effective classroom management, ensuring other students' positive behaviour
- lessons that are fun
- teachers who are kind, fair and have a sense of humour
- being known and valued as individuals.

A few representative quotes are presented below, with the students' original grammar and spelling:

"Group work helps keep me interested."

(Male, Key Stage 5, History)

"Working in groups and pairs sometimes, not working independently all the time."

(Female, Key Stage 3, Art)

"The teacher makes the lesson interesting. I don't usually find this lesson boring because she has many different ideas for what we can do in class."

(Female, Key Stage 3, English)

"... Class videos about the subject that is being taught helps me learn."

(Male, Key Stage 5, History)

"I enjoy fun lessons like solving the murder mystery in mathematics."

(Female, Key Stage 2, Primary)

"A lesson is enjoyable if there can be a bit of fun but work at the same time, so a bit of a laugh to start the day especially on Monday morning."

(Female, Key Stage 3, Geography)

"Activities and examples help me learning because it shows me what sort of work my teacher expects of me and what it's supposed to include."

(Female, Key Stage 3, English)

"Sometimes she stops half way through the lesson to see how we are doing."

Some days she gets us a piece of paper and we write down what we find difficult."

(Female, Key Stage 2, Primary)

The students' views obtained through surveys provide additional evidence about what inspiring teachers do and how they are successful at promoting student learning and engagement through skilful use of highly effective teaching practices, a strong commitment to and liking for their students, seeking to promote positive relationships, and making learning activities varied, fun and memorable.



5. Are inspiring teachers also more effective?

5.1 Effectiveness and inspiration

The results of the academic study reveal strong links between the features of more effective teaching and the practice of these inspirational teachers.

Both the quantitative and the qualitative observation findings identify much overlap between the features of effective teaching that have been found in past research and the practices observed in these teachers' classes. There is a strong tradition of judgements of effective teaching based on studies of student outcomes (for example student value-added progress) and wider research evidence has identified features of teaching and classroom practice that are associated with greater effectiveness in fostering better outcomes for students (Muijs & Reynolds, 2005; Ko et al., 2013). In this study we used two systematic observation schedules to study classroom practice and establish how far the inspiring teachers also demonstrated the key features of more effective practice. These were the International System of Teacher Observation and Feedback (ISTOF) and the Lesson Observation Form for Evaluating the Quality of Teaching (QoT). Although the term 'inspiring' is a looser concept with broader connotations and strong links with emotions, the research results indicate that the inspiring teachers in this study were first and foremost highly effective practitioners. It is notable that the sample scored highly overall and on average most teachers showed high scores on most aspects of the two international systematic classroom observation schedules we used, showing particularly high scores in certain components.

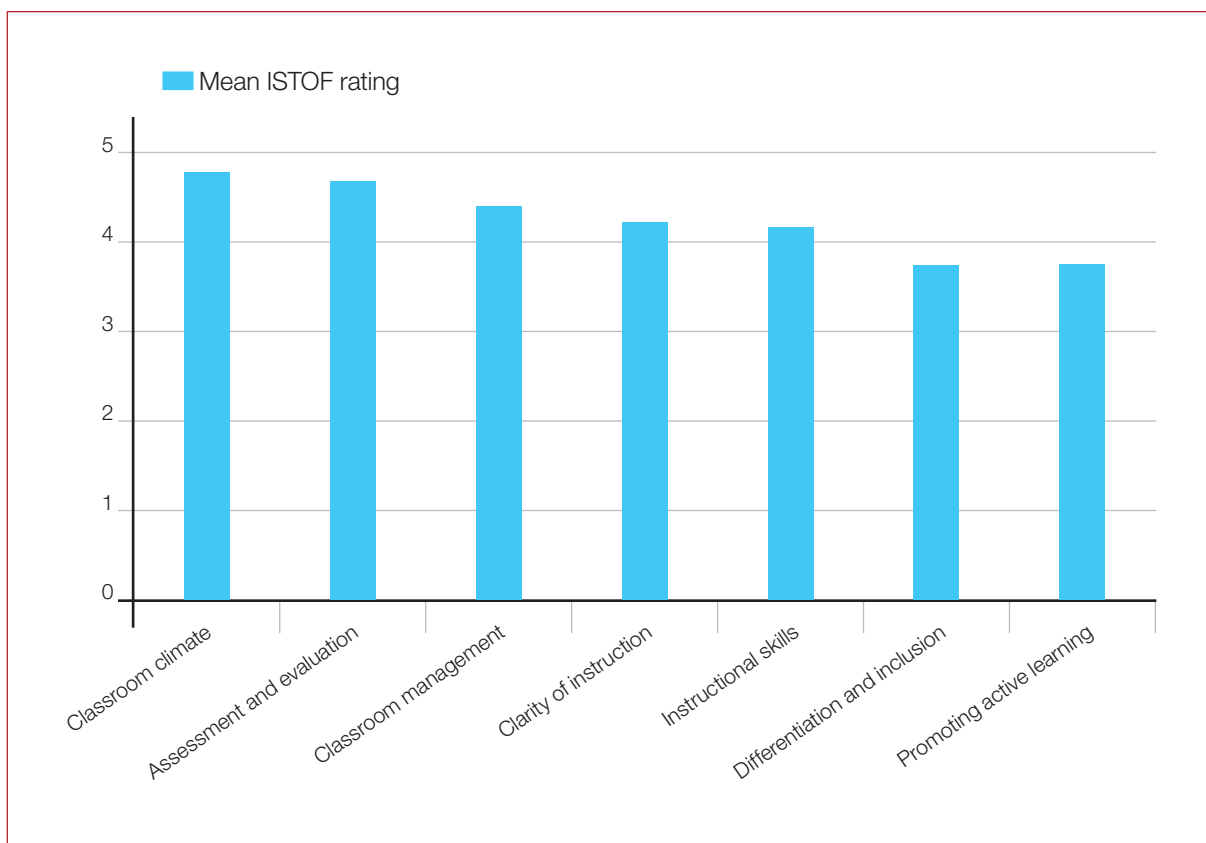
Moreover, the qualitative observation evidence also supported this conclusion. Interestingly, when defining inspiring teaching, these teachers also touched on the relationship of this concept to others that are more commonly used to describe teachers and their practice, such as effective and outstanding teaching. Indeed, several teachers strongly expressed the belief that being inspiring and being effective were two related and mutually dependent aspects of teaching. To use effective practices does not seem to constrain these teachers, or inhibit them from being inspiring. Indeed the evidence suggests that the two concepts are complementary though some additional and important distinctive features are also linked with inspirational practice.

5.2 Strengths of inspiring teachers' effective practice

Inspiring teachers scored highly in terms of all the various components and indicators in the ISTOF and QoT and there was relatively little variation in ratings among the 17 teachers that were observed, despite differences in sector and subject taught (overall the results showed high average scores with little difference across the range of scores given). Thus the teachers were relatively homogeneous in these key features of their observed behaviour. They also scored more highly than samples of teachers in other studies and evaluations, suggesting they were indeed exemplary in terms of these characteristics of effectiveness. Being effective may be an important and necessary prerequisite but not a sufficient condition for being identified as an inspiring practitioner.

The inspiring teachers were particularly strong in the ratings for the ISTOF schedule which is marked out of five, achieving high scores in particular for creating a positive *Classroom climate*, particularly in relation to *Assessment and evaluation* of pupils' learning, *Classroom management* and providing *Clarity of instruction*. See Figure 5.1.

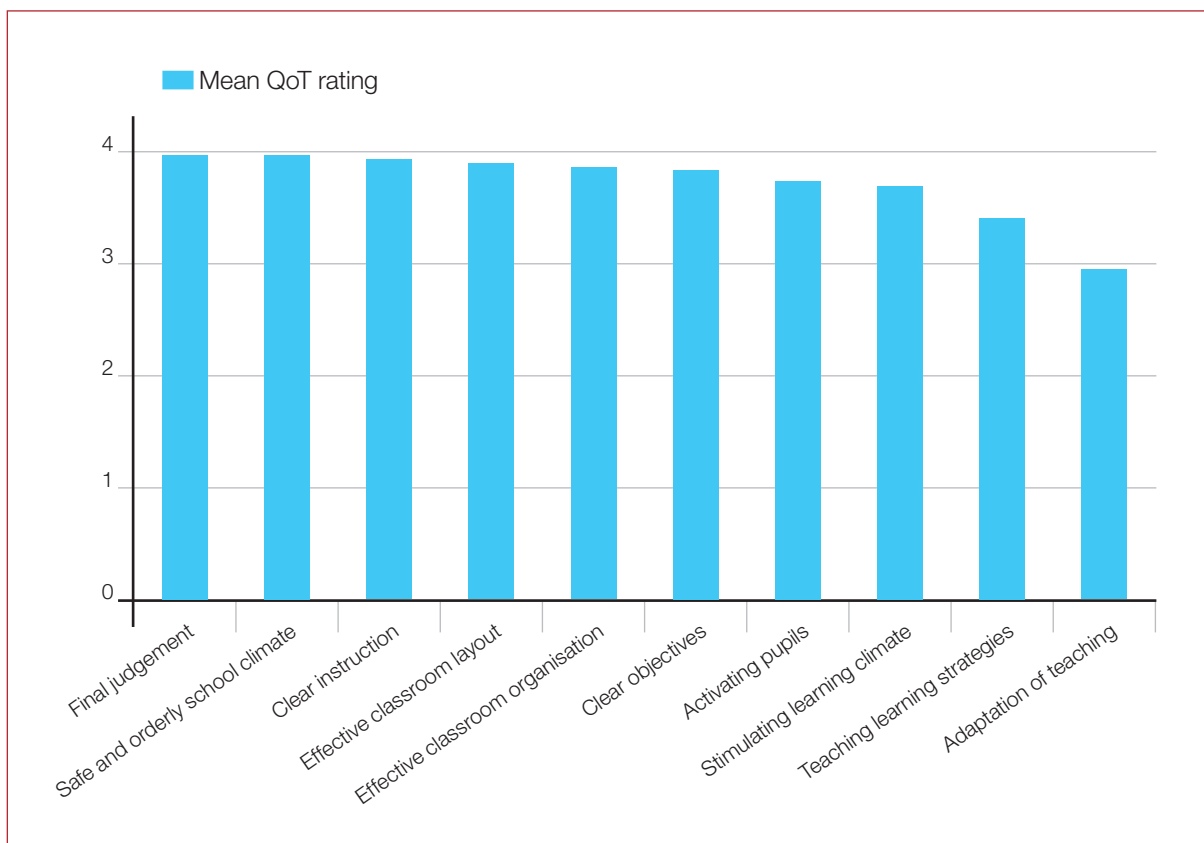
Figure 5.1: Ratings of teacher observations using the ISTOF observation schedule



In line with these results, the teachers were also rated consistently highly on the QoT components that measure *Safe and orderly school climate*, *Effective classroom layout*, *Clear instruction* and *Effective classroom organisation*. See Figure 5.2.



Figure 5.2: Ratings of teacher observation using the QoT observation schedule



There were also several strengths with regard to the *Instructional skills* dimension. Here the teachers nominated as inspiring showed high scores for providing *sufficient wait time and response strategies to involve learners*, giving *assignments that stimulate active involvement*, posing *questions which encourage thinking and elicit feedback* and using a *variety of instructional strategies*. In terms of *Promoting active learning* and *Developing metacognitive skills* the 17 teachers showed strengths in *encouraging students to ask one another questions*, giving them *opportunities to correct their own work* and asking them to *reflect on their own answers*.

Finally, when examining *Classroom management*, teachers also scored highly in aspects such as *clarifying how students could get help*, *correcting misbehaviour* and dealing with misbehaviour and disruptions by referring to the *established rules of the classroom*.



From a comparative point of view, the teachers who participated in this study showed several strengths in the different components measured by the observation instruments. As noted above, they were strong in the ISTOF component *Classroom climate*, in particular on:

- praising pupils for effort
- communicating high expectations
- demonstrating warmth and empathy
- showing respect for students
- creating purposeful and engaging activities.

They also were rated highly on *Assessment and evaluation*, specifically on:

- making clear why an answer is correct or not
- providing appropriate feedback and relating assignments to what students had previously learned.

With regard to the component *Differentiation and inclusion* these teachers' scores were stronger than those in other studies in relation to:

- how frequently learners communicated with one another on task-oriented issues
- the extent to which all were actively engaged in learning.

In the component *Clarity of instruction* these teachers outperformed those in others samples in terms of:

- checking regularly for pupils' understanding
- communicating in a clear and understandable manner
- clarifying the lesson objectives.



6. Summary and conclusion

This project has sought to understand what is meant by inspiring practice by drawing on different perspectives and sources of evidence. The main evidence is a triangulation based on teachers' voices expressed through interviews, what we saw in the classroom (from both quantitative observation schedules and qualitative field notes) and students' views (from a questionnaire survey). Each source offers rich information and some unique contributions. Nonetheless there are strong overlaps that add to the robustness of our conclusions. Figure 6.1, following, shows the overlap between these various sources and perspectives.

The teachers showed strongly the characteristics of more effective teaching. In terms of inspiring practice at the core we can highlight:

- positive relationships
- good classroom/behaviour management
- positive and supportive climate
- formative feedback
- high quality learning experiences
- enjoyment.

These teachers show a high degree of engagement with their students; they are effective, organised and knowledgeable practitioners who exhibit a continued passion for teaching and for promoting the well-being of students. They are highly professional, confident and reflective practitioners. Despite external challenges, nearly all want to continue in their teaching careers, they genuinely like students and enjoy teaching, and they show resilience in the stressful and fast-changing educational environment. In observing their classes there was a strong emphasis on making learning enjoyable and engaging, activating students' own motivation; classroom experiences were typically varied, imaginative and 'fun'. These inspiring teachers value the support they receive from leaders and colleagues in their schools. They are keen to work with and support colleagues, often through their particular leadership roles in their schools. Overall, they are committed professionals who continue to learn and improve their own practice and seek out opportunities and networks for professional development aligned to their needs and interests. This report has sought to highlight what we can learn from their inspiring practice.

Figure 6.1: Synthesis of common themes and emphases



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