



# How useful are Ofsted ratings for predicting educational outcomes and wellbeing at secondary school?

By Dr. Jessica Edwards

“The factors parents care about most when selecting a school – their child’s educational achievement and wellbeing – are negligibly predicted by Ofsted ratings”, says Sophie von Stumm, lead researcher of a new study published in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*.

von Stumm and colleagues came to this conclusion after assessing whether secondary school quality – as determined by inspection ratings made by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) – is associated with a student’s educational achievement, well-being and school engagement. They accessed academic performance data at age 11 and GCSE grades at age 16 from >4,300 English students who completed measures of well-being and school engagement at age 16. They found that Ofsted ratings accounted for 4% of the variance in students’ educational achievement at age 16. This percentage dropped to just 1% after accounting for performance at age 11 and family socioeconomic status. Ofsted ratings were also only weak predictors of wellbeing and school engagement.

“If Ofsted ratings don’t predict students’ achievement and wellbeing, we need to reconsider just how helpful they are in general”, says von Stumm. “What’s more, parents often go to great lengths to secure a place at an ‘outstanding’ school for their children – either by moving to a new house or commuting long distances. Our research suggests these investments don’t really achieve what they are aimed at – good grades and well-being for children.”

Going forward, von Stumm *et al.* query how useful Ofsted ratings are as a guide for parents and students. In addition, they note that the Ofsted inspection itself confers a high level of stress to teachers and other school staff. Ultimately, they propose that parents would be ill-advised to draw conclusions about individual student outcomes based on these inspection reports.

## Referring to:

von Stumm, S., Smith-Woolley, E., Cheesman, R., Pingault, J-P., Asbury, K., Dale, P.S., Allen R., Kovas, Y. & Plomin, R. (2020), *School quality ratings are weak predictors of students’ achievement and well-being*. *J. Child Psychol. Psychiatr.* doi: 10.1111/jcpp.13276.