

HEADSUP4HTS: OFSTED EXPERIENCES SURVEY 2024

REPORT CONDUCTED & ANALYSED BY JAMES POPE, DR KAREN EDGE
& KATE SMITH



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HeadsUp4HTs has been supporting school leaders' well-being since 2019, with a network of over 10,000 Headteachers, school leaders, and organisations. Our initiatives focus on enhancing mental health support by equipping leaders with strategies for maintaining well-being, providing specific interventions for those facing mental health challenges, nurturing peer support networks, and fostering intentional well-being and emotional well-being practices for Headteachers and school leaders.

Our mission is to celebrate and support school leaders while advocating for intentional well-being support for those leading in schools.

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OUR OFSTED EXPERIENCES SURVEY

Through our work, we gain insights into the unique pressures faced by Headteachers and leaders, particularly during OFSTED inspections, which consistently impact their well-being and leadership. These inspections not only negatively affect individual Headteachers but also have repercussions on the communities they serve.

Our survey, conducted shortly after the tragic death of Ruth Perry in 2023, harnessed the scale of our network, and aimed to understand the impact of OFSTED inspections on mental health and well-being of leaders in the lead up to, during and following their OFSTED inspection.

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OUR OFSTED EXPERIENCES SURVEY

HeadsUp4HTs designed then ran the survey. Dr Karen Edge and colleagues at the UCL IOE analysed the data to capture Headteachers' experiences and their reflections on the process of leading through inspections.

- 321 Headteachers participated in the survey to date, our report analyses 287 of these responses
- Headteachers were asked to provide three words to describe their experience: *leading up to, during, and following on* from their inspections
- Headteachers were asked to describe if their most recent inspection was done with/done to their schools
- Headteachers were asked to comment on what needed to change with regards to the OFSTED inspection process

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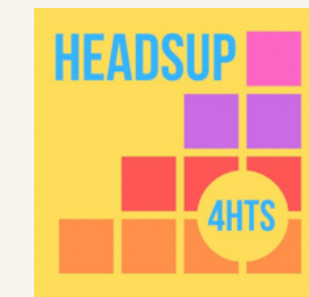
LEADING THROUGH INSPECTION

A WORD COUNT & WORD CLOUD ANALYSIS



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WHAT WORDS WOULD YOU USE TO DESCRIBE YOUR FEELINGS LEADING UP TO YOUR INSPECTION?*



FREQUENCY	WORD	FREQUENCY	WORD	FREQUENCY	WORD	FREQUENCY	WORD
142	ANXIOUS	19	SICK	11	TERRIFIED	8	TIRED
64	STRESSED	18	STRESS	11	PRESSURED	7	READY
49	WORRIED	18	STRESSFUL	11	CONCERNED	6	CONFIDENT
45	ANXIETY	17	SCARED	10	EXHAUSTED	6	TREPIDATION
42	FEAR	16	PRESSURE	9	DETERMINED	6	EXCITED
35	DREAD	15	WORRY	9	APPREHENSIVE	6	SLEEPLESS
32	NERVOUS	13	FEARFUL	8	HOPEFUL	6	TERROR
29	OVERWHELMED	12	PANIC	8	TENSE	6	RESPONSIBLE

*321 Headteachers surveyed. Table includes words used 6 times or more. **Suicide/suicidal mentioned once**

WHAT WORDS WOULD YOU USE TO DESCRIBE YOUR FEELINGS DURING YOUR INSPECTION*



FREQUENCY	WORD	FREQUENCY	WORD	FREQUENCY	WORD	FREQUENCY	WORD	FREQUENCY	WORD
37	ANXIOUS	14	NERVOUS	9	FAIR	7	ADRENALINE	6	TIRED
29	STRESSED	14	ANGRY	9	RELIEVED	7	EDGE	6	EXHAUSTION
23	STRESSFUL	13	WORRIED	9	ANGER	7	WORRY	6	BULLIED
19	EXHAUSTED	13	OVERWHELMED	8	TRAUMATIC	7	FEARFUL	5	SUICIDAL
19	INTENSE	11	FRUSTRATED	8	HELPLESS	7	FRUSTRATION		
18	FEAR	10	PRESSURE	8	UNHEARD	7	TENSE		
17	EXHAUSTING	9	BRUTAL	8	SCARED	6	CHALLENGING		
16	STRESS	9	FRUSTRATING	7	HONEST	6	CALM		

*321 Headteachers surveyed. Table includes words used 6 times or more. **Suicide/suicidal mentioned 5 times.**

WHAT WORDS WOULD YOU USE TO DESCRIBE YOUR FEELINGS FOLLOWING ON FROM YOUR INSPECTION*



FREQUENCY	WORD	FREQUENCY	WORD	FREQUENCY	WORD	FREQUENCY	WORD
92	EXHAUSTED	15	TIRED	11	TERRIFIED	7	DISILLUSIONED
86	RELIEF	15	FRUSTRATED	9	DEPRESSED	7	FAILURE
82	RELIEVED	14	PLEASED	8	EMPTY	7	HAPPY
26	DEFLATED	14	EMOTIONAL	8	ANXIETY	7	FLAT
25	ANGRY	12	BROKEN	8	NUMB	7	INADEQUATE
19	EXHAUSTION	10	ANXIOUS	8	ANGER	6	DISAPPOINTED
18	DRAINED	9	PRIDE	7	DEMOTIVATED	6	TRAUMATISED
17	PROUD	9	STRESSED	7	DEVASTATED	6	WORTHLESS

*321 Headteachers surveyed. Table includes words used 6 times or more. **Suicide/suicidal mentioned 5 times.**

**UCL IOE
ANALYSIS**

LEADING THROUGH INSPECTION

**EXPERIENCES, EMOTIONS & SUGGESTED
IMPROVEMENTS**

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THE ANALYSIS

In collaboration with HeadsUp4HTs, our team at UCL Institute of Education conducted a high-level, pro-bono analysis of the HeadsUp4HTs OFSTED Experiences Survey data. We became involved in the project after the survey had been designed and distributed, so our ability to comment on the findings is somewhat constrained.

Within this section of the deck, we report our analysis of 287 surveys completed between March 27 and April 15, 2024 in the following sections:

- 1** Our UCL IOE team
- 2** The survey participants
- 3** Leading through inspection since 2021 | Rationale
- 4** Leading through inspections since 2021 | Outstanding to outstanding
- 5** Leading through inspections since 2021 | Good to good
- 6** Leaders' insight into 'what needs to change' within the inspection system

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LEADING THROUGH INSPECTION

THE ANALYSIS TEAM

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UCL IOE ANALYSIS TEAM

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LEADING THROUGH INSPECTION

THE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

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BREAKING DOWN THE 287: LEADER EXPERIENCE

Leader experience

Our team conducted our analysis on the 287 leader responses collected between March 27 and April 15, 2024. To streamline our analysis, we created four categories of leader experience for those participating in the survey:

Rookie | 0-2 years | 40 participants | 14%

Novice | 3-5 years | 68 participants | 24%

Experienced | 6-15 years | 139 participants | 48%

Very experienced | 16+ years | 41 participants | 14%

BREAKING DOWN THE 287: TYPES OF SCHOOLS

Types of schools

The following represents the breakdown of the types of schools represented by leaders participating in the survey:

Alternate provision | 3 | 1%

All through | 5 | 2%

Infant/Nursery | 7 | 2%

Primary | 184 | 64%

Primary with less than 100 students | 24 | 8%

Primary with additional years | 8 | 3%

Secondary school | 31 | 11%

Special school | 21 | 7%

Multi-academy Trust | 4 | 1%

BREAKING DOWN THE 287: INSPECTION OUTCOME

Inspection outcomes: Before and after

To better understand the participating leaders, we looked at their experience within groups according to their school's rating before and after inspection. The following cohorts were identified and tagged with a three letter code:

First letter: U (Upgrade) or D (Downgrade) or S (Same)

Second letter: Pre-inspection grading

Third letter: Post-inspection grading

Participating leaders experienced the following pre and post inspection ratings

Upgrades (58) comprised of UGO(6) + UIG(6) + UIR(6) + URG(39)+ URO(1)

Downgrades (58) comprised of DOG(10) + DOR(5) + DOI(4) + DGR(26) + DGI(11)+DRI(2)

Same grade (171) comprised of **SOO(17)** + **SGG(139)** + SRR(14) + SII(1)

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LEADING THROUGH INSPECTION

**INSPECTIONS & EXPERIENCE SINCE 2021
RATIONALE**

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INSPECTION EXPERIENCE SINCE 2021: RATIONALE

Rationale for focusing on post-covid post - 2021 inspection experience

Acknowledging the influence of the pandemic on schools and shifts in the OFSTED inspection framework, our more detailed analysis focuses on the experience of those leaders who reported that their inspection took place since 2021.

185 participating leaders' schools were inspected post - 2021

Upgrades (33) comprised of UGO(2) + UIG(3) + UIR(6) + URG(22)+ URO(0)

Downgrades (47) comprised of DOG(10) + DOR(3) + DOI(3) + DGR(22) + DGI(7)+DRI(2)

Same grade (105) comprised of **SOO(12)** + **SGG(86)** + SRR(6) + SII(1)

LEADING THROUGH INSPECTIONS: EXPLORING EMOTIONS

Analysing how leaders describe their experience *before, during and after* inspection

The HeadsUp4HTs team asked participating leaders to share three words to describe their experience before, during and after inspection. While leaders shared narrative comments associated with each of these phases, our initial analysis exclusively focused on the words themselves. Almost all shared words – across all three phases of inspection – were emotions. In turn, as HeadsUp4HTs had previously hosted a community

book club with Professor Mark Brackett, we adopted the emotions grid from *Permission to Feel*, to frame the analysis of leaders' emotions.

The emotions grid

The four quadrants of the emotions grid is framed by two axis. The vertical axis represents energy (from low to high) and the horizontal axis represents pleasantness (low to high). The red emotions quadrant represents low pleasantness/high energy. Blue represents (low pleasantness/low energy). Green emotions are low pleasantness/low energy. Finally, yellow emotions are high pleasantness/high energy. A quick scan of the grid highlights that red is the least desirable emotional state with high levels of energy and unpleasantness linked to anxiety, anger and worry. Blue remains unpleasant but with a higher degree of apathy and exhaustion.

LEADING THROUGH INSPECTIONS: EXPLORING EMOTIONS

Selecting our initial analytical foci

In the post-2021 dataset, our initial observations of the pre and post inspection ratings categories appeared to show that leaders' experienced high levels of negative emotion even when the inspection outcomes are good or outstanding. For these reasons, we focused our intensive analysis on two categories of leaders in schools with good or outstanding ratings who remained at good or outstanding as a result of their post-2021 inspections. In the following slides, we highlight patterns within 'outstanding to outstanding' and 'good to good' categories.

Emotion Grid

Enraged	Panicked	Stressed	Jittery	Shocked	Surprised	Upbeat	Festive	Exhilarated	Ecstatic
Livid	Furious	Frustrated	Tense	Stunned	Hyper	Cheerful	Motivated	Inspired	Elated
Fuming	Frightened	Angry	Nervous	Restless	Energized	Lively	Enthusiastic	Optimistic	Excited
Anxious	Apprehensive	Worried	Irritated	Annoyed	Pleased	Happy	Focused	Proud	Thrilled
Repulsed	Troubled	Concerned	Uneasy	Peeved	Pleasant	Joyful	Hopeful	Playful	Blissful
Disgusted	Glum	Disappointed	Down	Apathetic	At ease	Easygoing	Content	Loving	Fulfilled
Pessimistic	Morose	Discouraged	Sad	Bored	Calm	Secure	Satisfied	Grateful	Touched
Alienated	Miserable	Lonely	Disheartened	Tired	Relaxed	Chill	Restful	Blessed	Balanced
Despondent	Depressed	Sullen	Exhausted	Fatigued	Mellow	Thoughtful	Peaceful	Comfy	Carefree
Despair	Hopeless	Desolate	Spent	Drained	Sleepy	Complacent	Tranquil	Cozy	Serene

High Energy

Low Energy

Low Pleasantness

High Pleasantness

Source: *Permission to Feel*. M. Brackett

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LEADING THROUGH INSPECTION

FROM OUTSTANDING TO
OUTSTANDING
SINCE 2021

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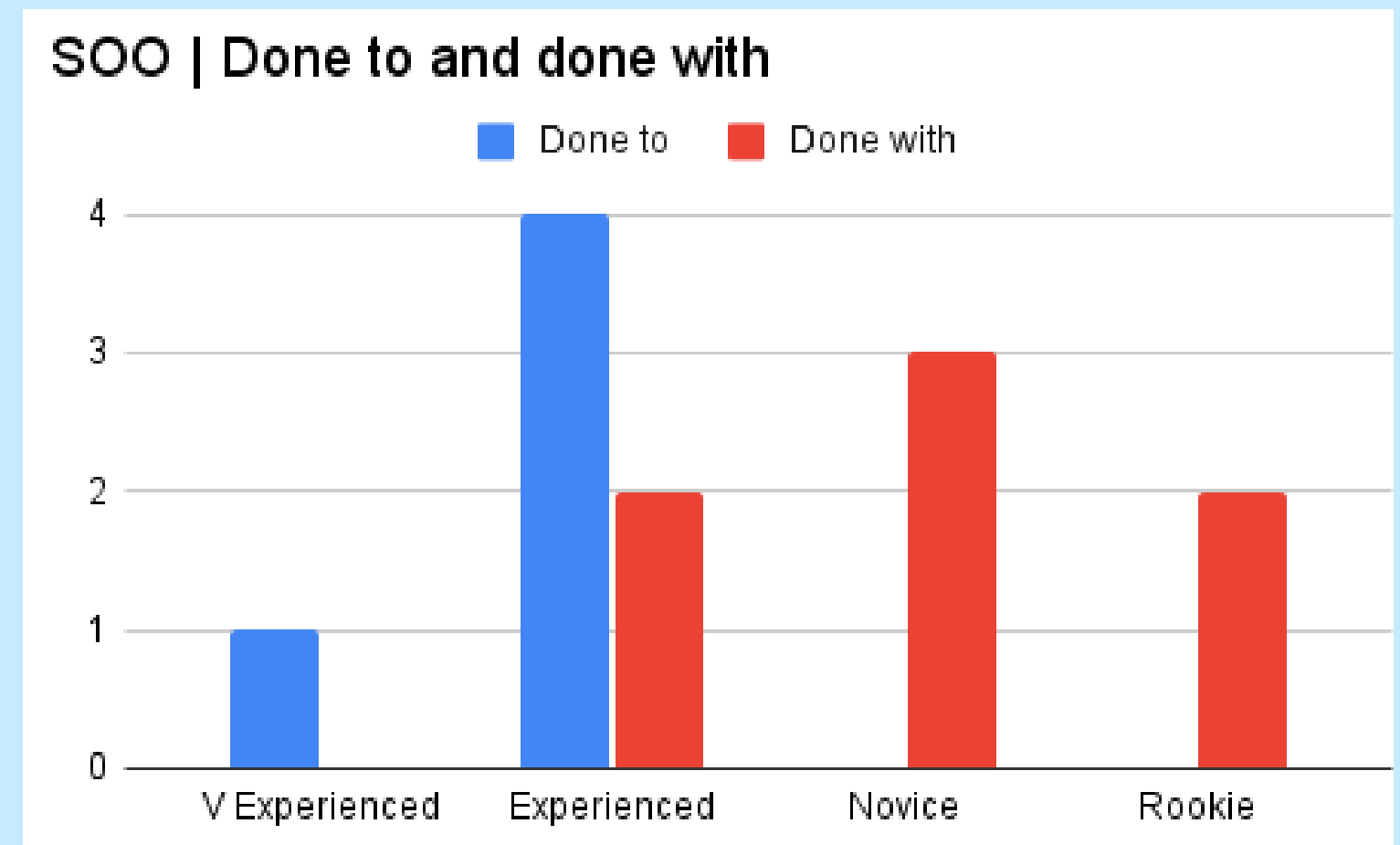
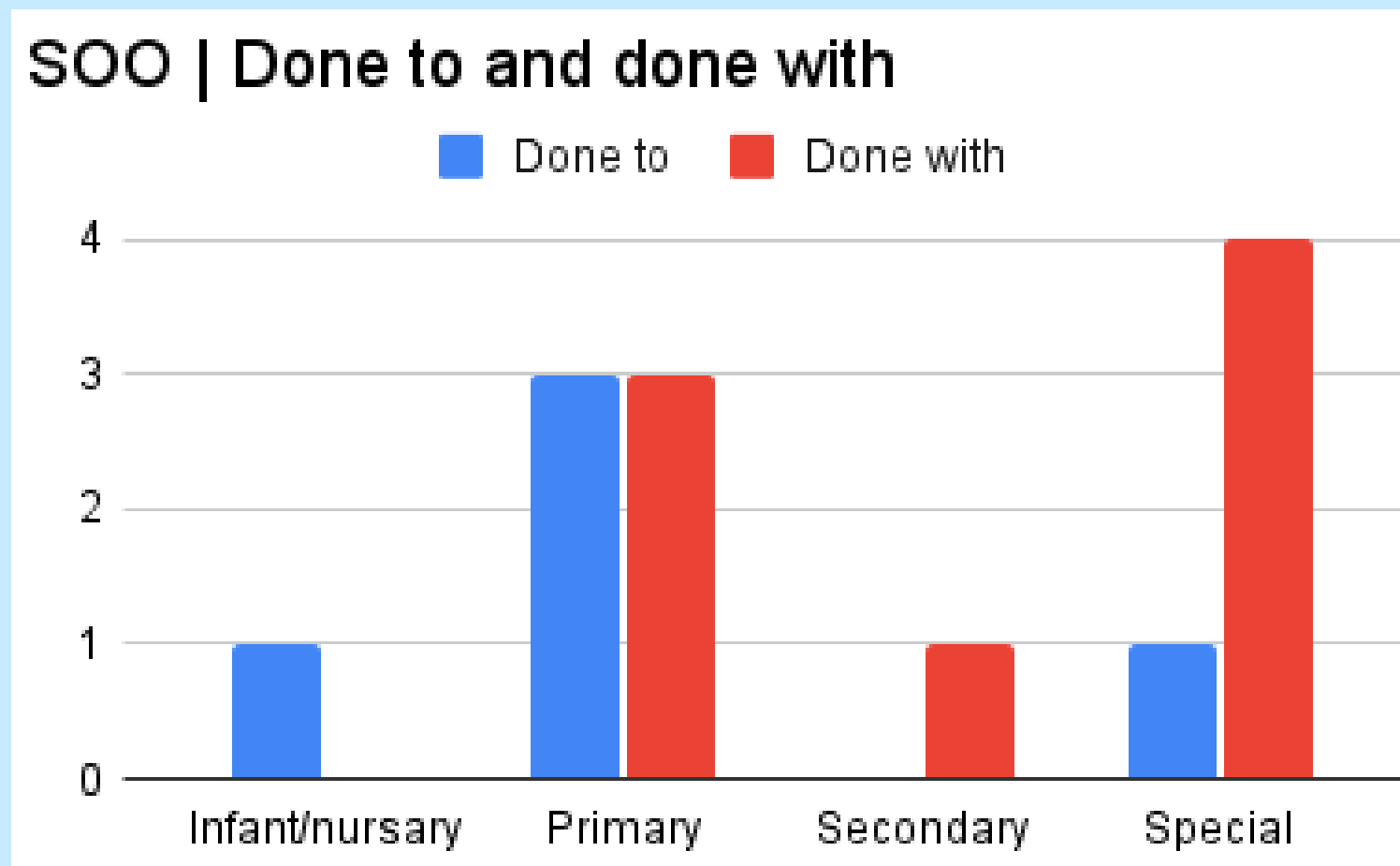
 UCL



POST-2021 | OUTSTANDING TO OUTSTANDING | 12 SCHOOLS

Leaders described whether their post-2021 inspection had been 'done to' or 'do with' the school. To summarise leaders' views from the 12 outstanding to outstanding schools, and share the breakdown of the types of schools and leaders' experience profiles, we highlight the profile of participating leaders in two ways.

The first chart breaks down the 12 outstanding to outstanding schools by type of school. Second, we highlight leaders' experience vis-a-vis their experience of the inspection. While we can not provide definitive analysis of the difference between done to and done with comments, the charts below provide insight into the distributions of responses and the type of school and leaders experience within this cohort.



OUTSTANDING TO OUTSTANDING: EMOTIONS

Leaders' emotions | Outstanding to outstanding | Pre-inspection

Pleasant/L energy

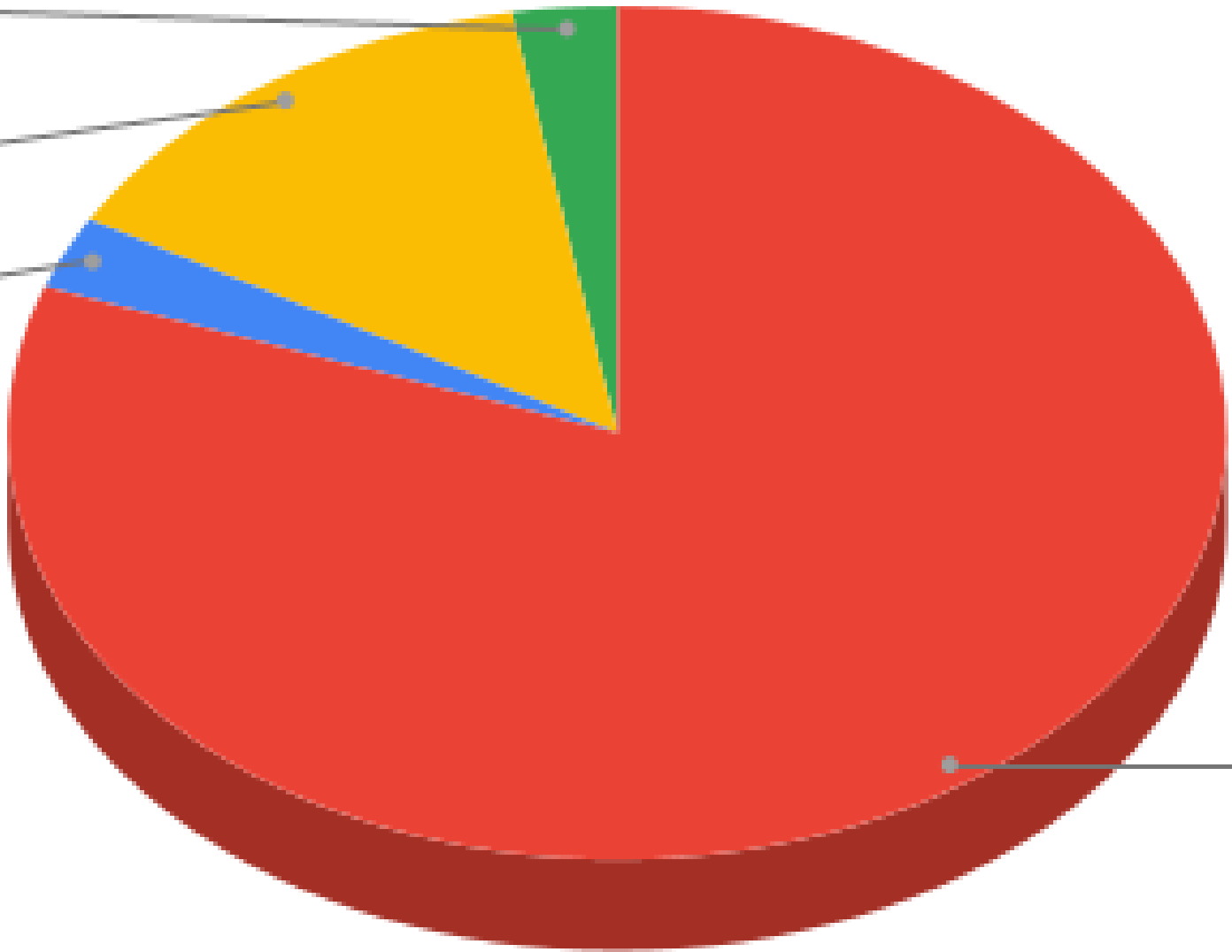
2.8%

Pleasant/H energy

13.9%

Unpleasant/L energy

2.8%



Unpleasant/H energy

80.6%

Pre-inspection



OUTSTANDING TO OUTSTANDING: EMOTIONS

Leaders' emotions | Outstanding to outstanding | During inspection

Pleasant/L energy

22.2%

Pleasant/H energy

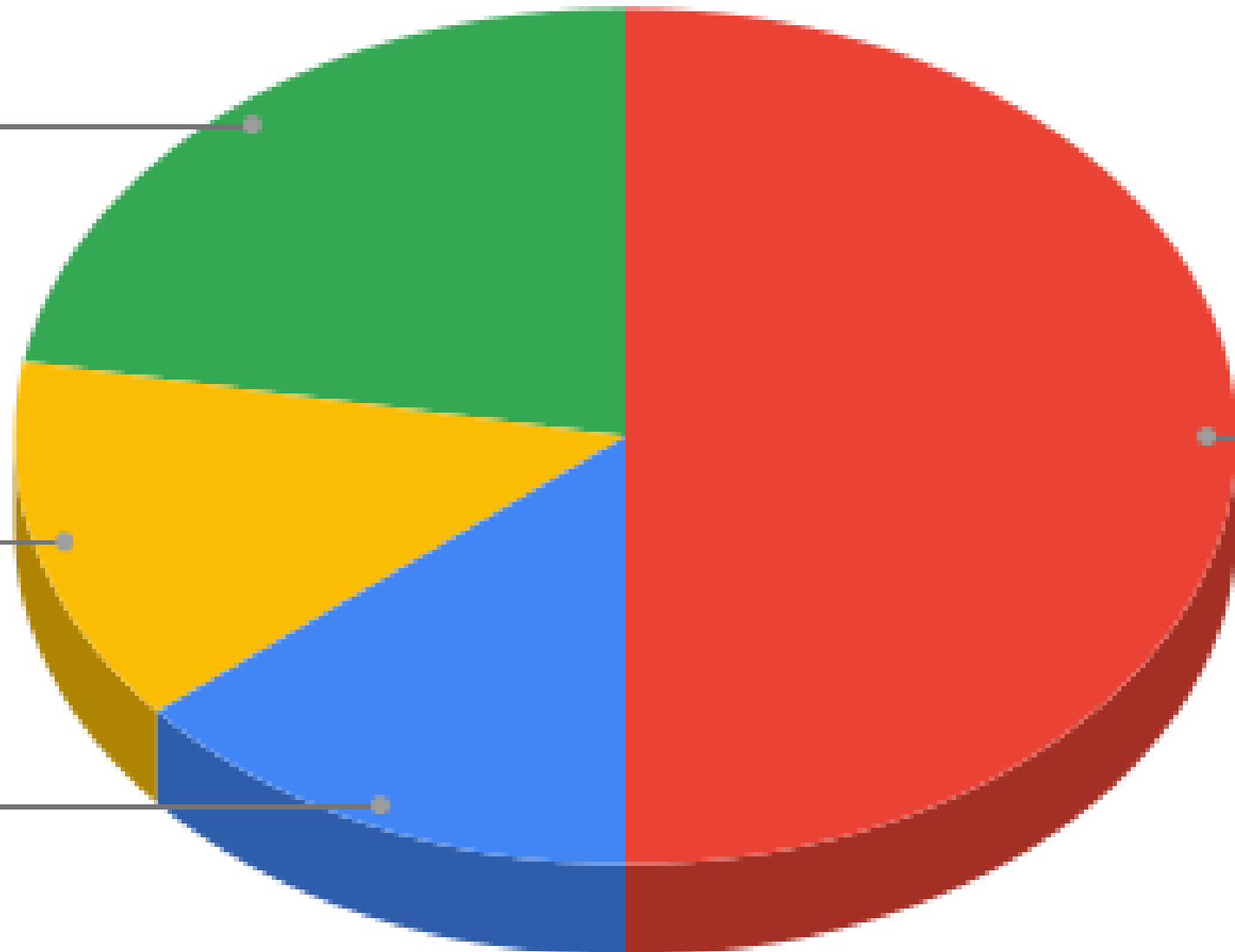
13.9%

Unpleasant/L

13.9%

Unpleasant/H

50.0%

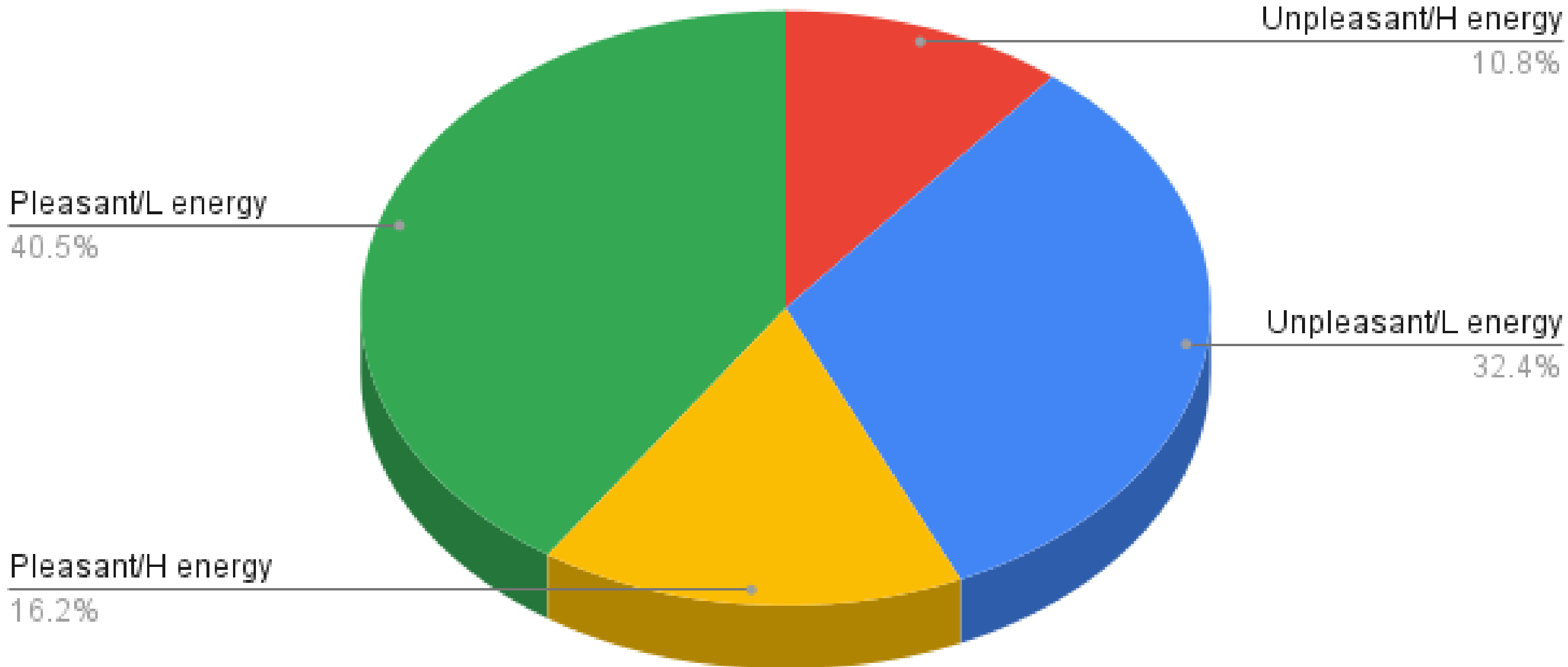


During inspection



OUTSTANDING TO OUTSTANDING: EMOTIONS

Leaders' emotions | Outstanding to outstanding | Post-inspection



Post-inspection



OUTSTANDING TO OUTSTANDING: PRIOR TO INSPECTION

Prior to inspection, leaders experienced a high degree of negative emotion with **81% of leaders' reported emotions classified as unpleasant/high energy (red)** and **3% classified as unpleasant/low energy (blue)** emotions. This is, perhaps, not surprising given the pressure on school leaders to retain their outstanding school-level inspection rating. However, we believe this level of anticipatory stress may present the potential for considerable negative impacts on the longterm health of leaders and educators and the overall quality of education they are able to provide. Leaders describe their experiences:

"Wellbeing levels across the staff team were severely compromised but especially at leadership level. Working hours were unbelievably long and the senior team lived, ate, breathed every detail of the inspection booklet. Being inspected after the new framework was introduced was really tough as we needed to shift our thinking/pedagogy and how we reviewed our own practice. In order to retain our outstanding grade we felt we had a mountain to climb as the goal posts had moved." (Novice special school leader)

"The run up to Ofsted is always so stressful. The pressure to be spot on is overwhelming and, although we're told not to do anything special or Ofsted, there are many things we do to tick ofsted boxes. I never feel on top of everything and as the head of a small, under-funded school, there is a lack of capacity to tackle school development points. The worry of being downgraded is awful." (Experienced primary school leader)

OUTSTANDING TO OUTSTANDING: DURING INSPECTION

During inspection, leaders continue to experience a high degree of negative emotion with approximately **50% reporting unpleasant/high energy (red)** and **14% unpleasant/low energy (blue) emotions**. This represents a hopeful sign that inspections were reducing reported anticipatory stress-related emotions. Leaders' reports suggest that almost 2/3 of emotions experienced during inspection are negative. We believe this rate is too high to support the short and long-term health of leaders and the profession. The majority of outstanding to outstanding leaders report feeling supported during the inspection and that the process was 'done with' the school. However, leaders consistently share how inspection-induced stress still leads to exhaustion and challenging emotions. As leaders share:

"The process was full on but we felt listened to and were able to discuss everything with the inspector. She was fair and understood the context of our school well. Despite it being tiring it was overall a chance to show who we are - just wish it came with less pressure." (Experienced primary school leader)

"Our most recent inspection was led by (an inspector) who was cold and robotic. It is understood that there is a lot of work to get through in the time they spend in school, but an inspector who has a degree of warmth would be nice. The two days felt like they were looking for the negative stuff, rather than the good. We had an ungraded inspection and maintained our outstanding judgement but we're told they would be back in 1-2 years as there was evidence that we might not be outstanding if it had been a full inspection." (Experienced primary school leader)

OUTSTANDING TO OUTSTANDING: AFTER INSPECTION

After inspection, leaders report experiencing fewer negative emotions with approximately **11% unpleasant/high energy (red)** and **33% unpleasant/low energy (blue) emotions**. Leaders described their outstanding to outstanding post-inspection experience using more positive descriptors including **41% pleasant/low energy (green)** and **16% pleasant/high energy (yellow) emotions**.

Increases in reported positive emotions followed leaders' successful retention of their school's outstanding outcomes. We were surprised, and concerned, at the persistence of negative emotions shared by leaders post inspection. Our worry? **If *outstanding to outstanding* leaders are sharing that almost 45% of their experienced emotions are negative, the inspection process is leaving even the most 'successful' leaders in an unhealthy place.** Leaders share their experiences:

"I felt a sense of immense relief. I was upset with myself that the day after was the first day as a Head that I didn't feel imposter syndrome. I wanted to judge myself on other standards and it made me realise that we are so conditioned to think of OFSTED as the only real indicator of our worth." (Novice special school leader)

"Feedback was wonderful. Had to wait 2.5 months for the report due to summer holidays - this was too long and a shame that we could not share with families of the children who had left. We talked a lot about how 'lucky' we were. I've reflected a lot on this since. We shouldn't feel lucky. Our experience should be normal for all schools. Our school is brilliant, staff are brilliant, children are expertly supported. Under the framework, outstanding was fair. We shouldn't feel lucky." (Experienced primary school leader)

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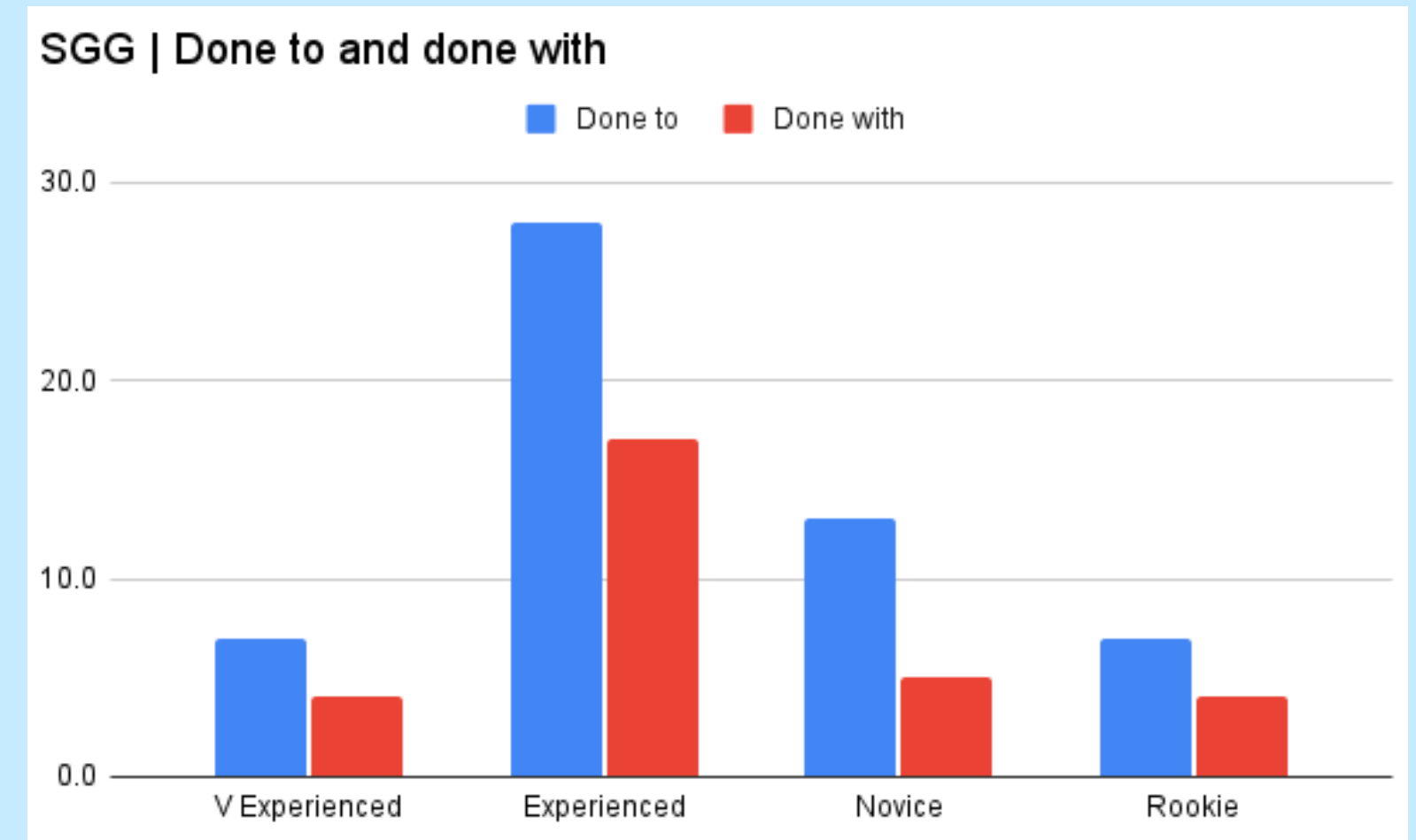
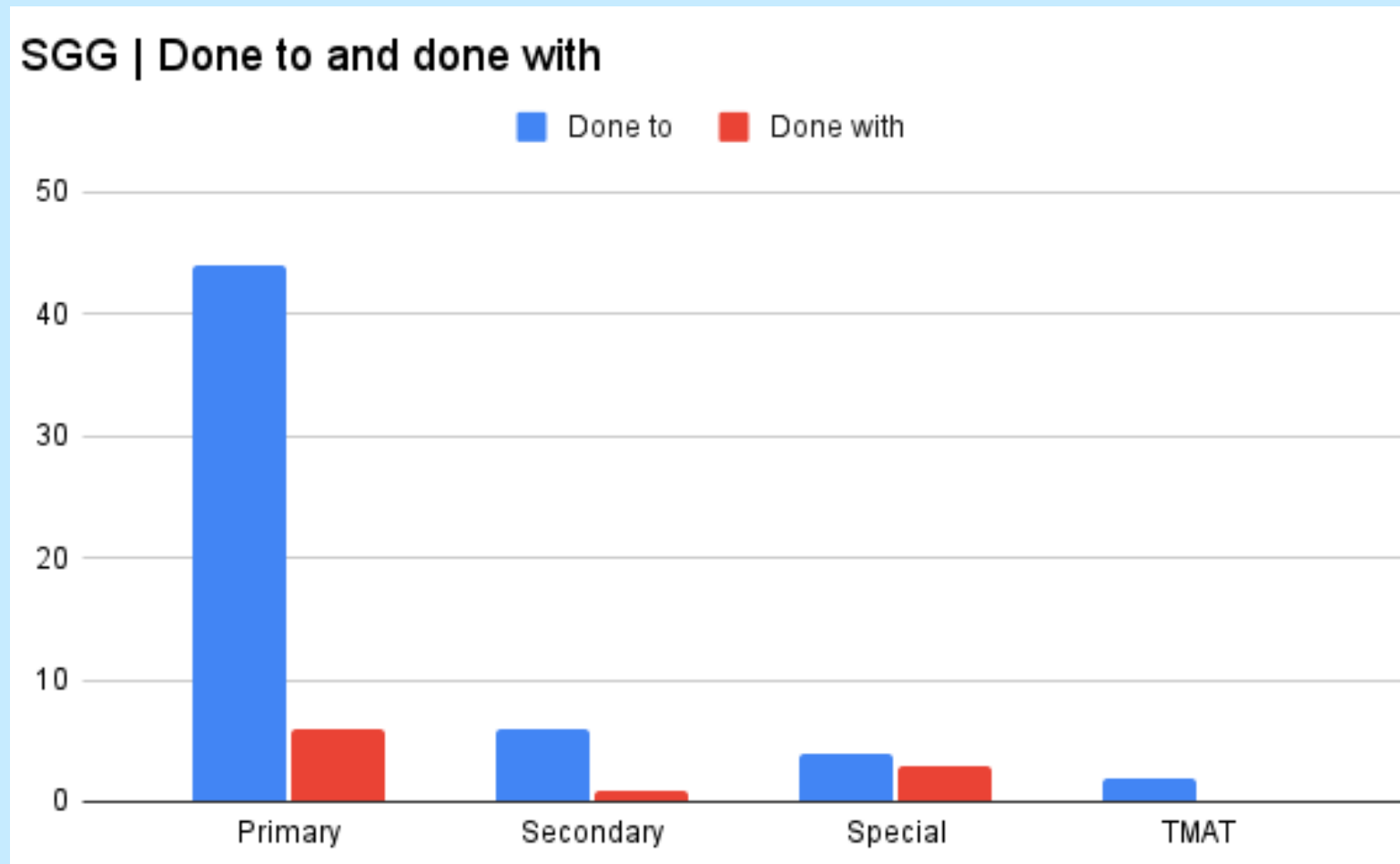
LEADING THROUGH INSPECTION

**FROM GOOD TO GOOD
SINCE 2021**



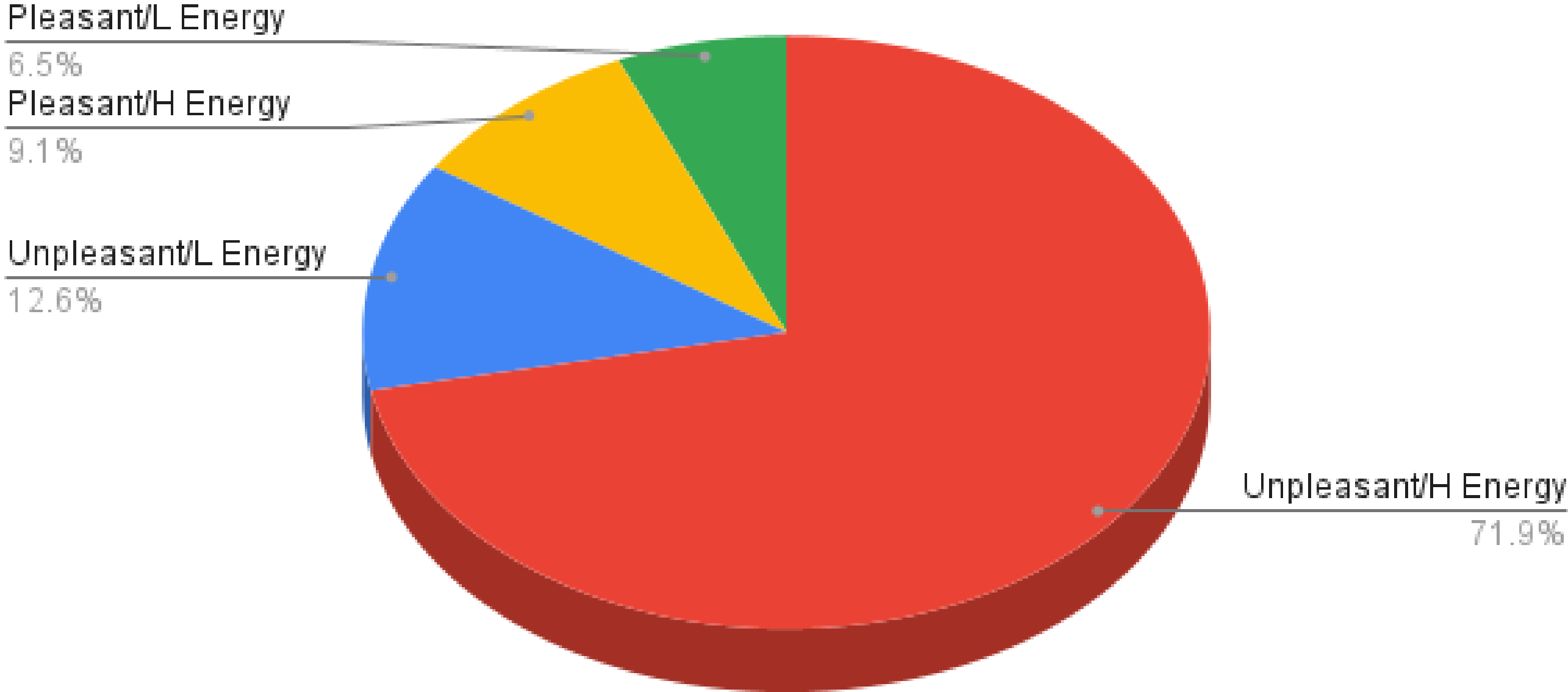
POST-2021 | GOOD TO GOOD | 87 SCHOOLS

Leaders described if their post-2021 inspection had been 'done to' or 'do with' the school. To summarise of leaders' views from the 87 outstanding to outstanding schools, and share the breakdown of the types of schools and leaders' experience profiles, here we highlight the profile of participating leaders in two ways. The first chart, breaks down the 87 outstanding to outstanding schools by type of school. Second, we highlight leaders' experience vis-a-vis their experience of the inspection. While we can not provide definitive analysis of the difference between done to and done with comments, the charts below provide insight into the distributions of responses and the type of school and leaders experience within this cohort.

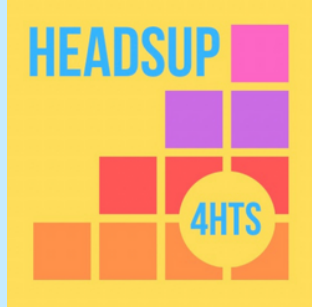


GOOD TO GOOD: EMOTIONS

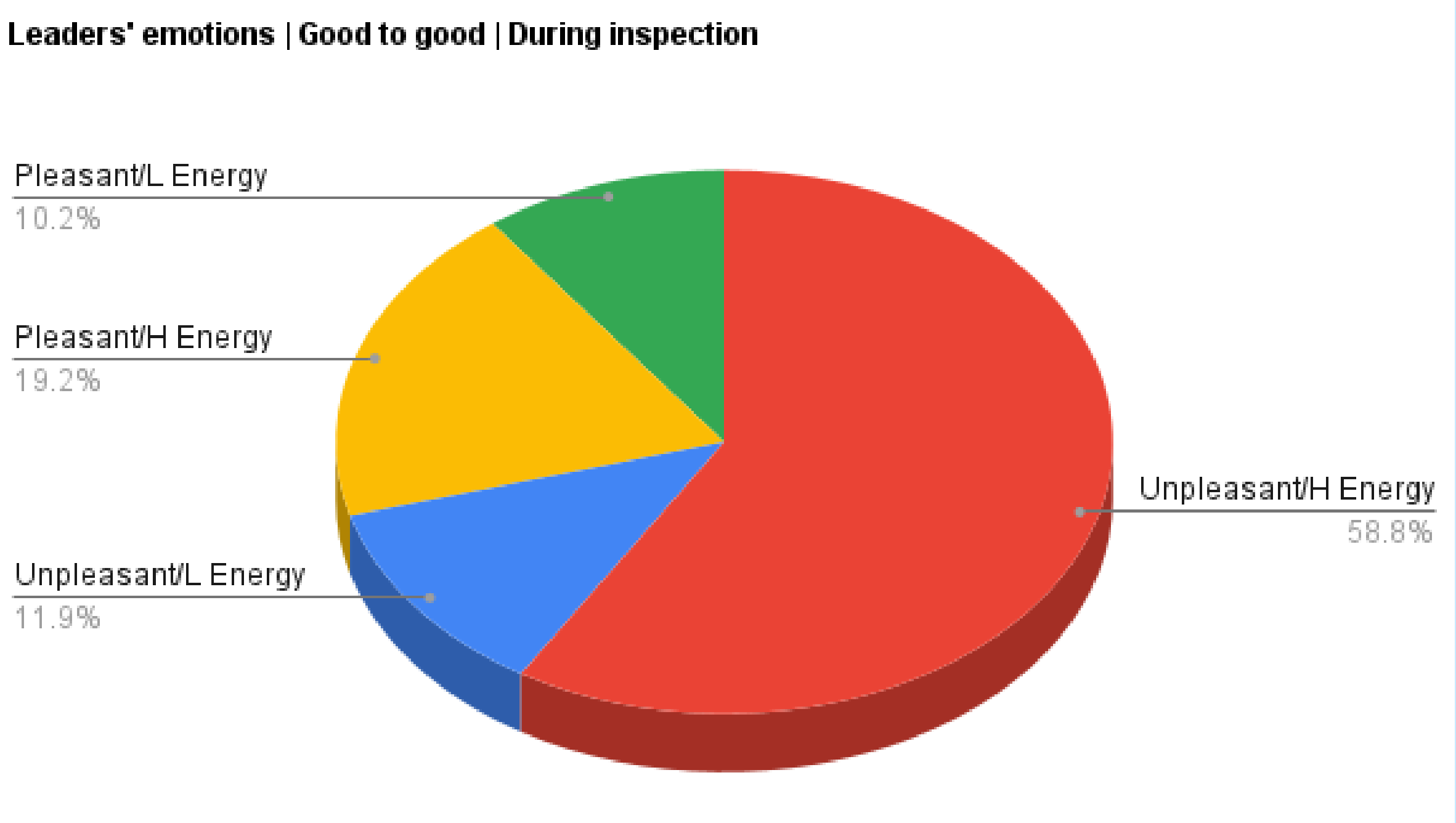
Leaders' emotions | Good to good | Pre-inspection



Pre-inspection



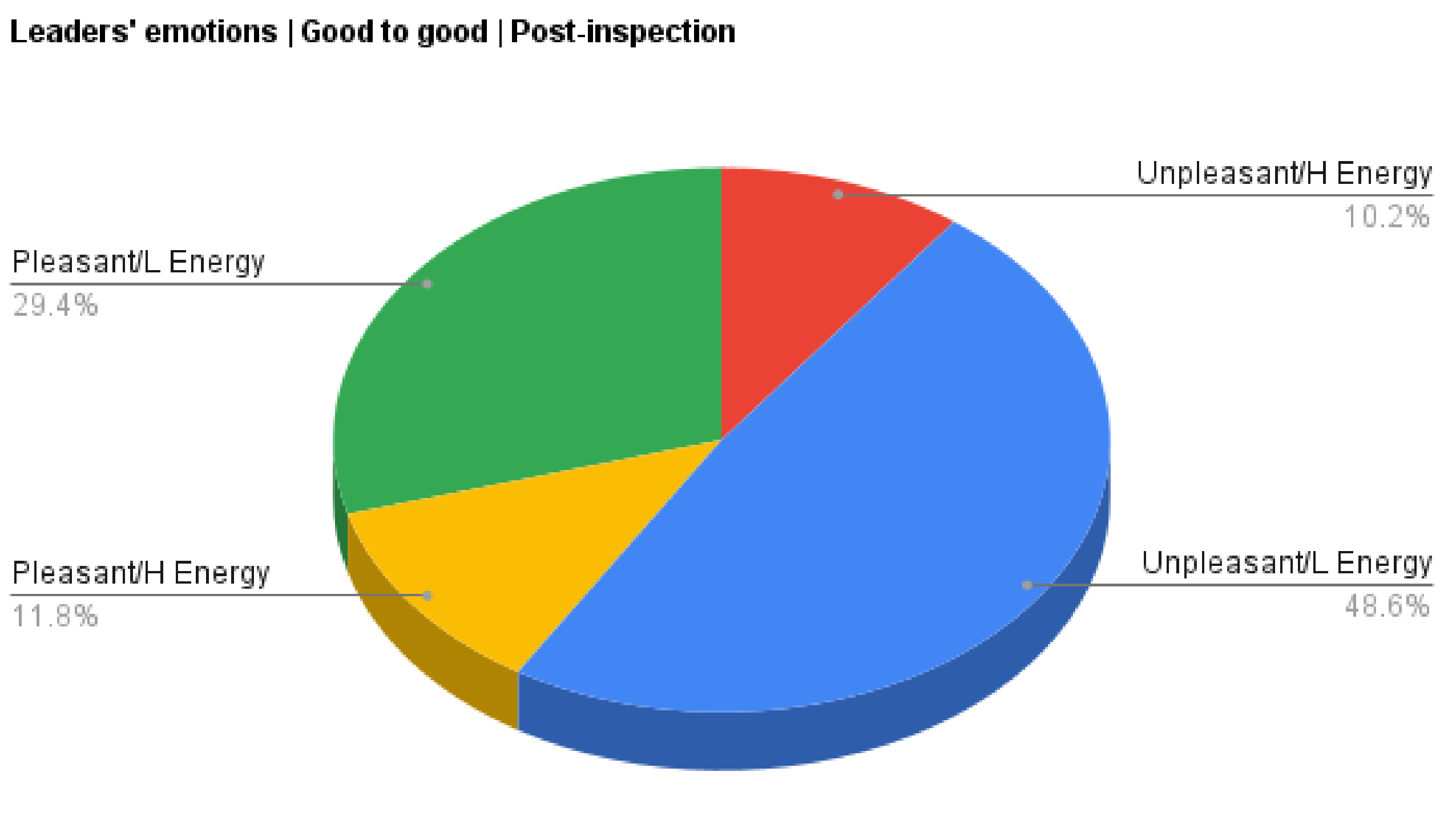
GOOD TO GOOD: EMOTIONS



During inspection



GOOD TO GOOD: EMOTIONS



Post-inspection



GOOD TO GOOD: PRIOR TO INSPECTION

Prior to inspection, leaders experienced a high degree of negative emotion with **72% of leaders reporting emotions classified as unpleasant/high energy (red)** and **13% classified as unpleasant/low energy (blue)** emotions. This is, perhaps, not surprising given pressures on leaders to retain or improve inspection rating. Leaders shared how anticipatory stress presents considerable negative health, wellbeing and professional risks. Leaders' comments most often related to anxiety, timing and school improvement:

Anxiety. *"Anxiety across the staff which was felt by the young people we work with (Rookie, Special school leader) | An impending fear of the high stakes nature and that ultimately I would lose my job if it didn't go well. Being under this sort of fear for an extended period of time was not good for my health." (Novice, Secondary school leader)*

The window. *"Each week is a waiting game, waking up each morning expecting 'the call' until a Wednesday lunchtime has passed. The consequences are working two plans each term / week for displays, trips, events just incase OFSTED come. (Experienced primary school leader) | High degrees of personal anxiety through the start of the week, noticeably subsiding as the call window passed - then inevitably starting again at the weekend. Resorted to CBT practices to contain this."(Experienced, Primary school leader)*

School improvement. *"Our true improvement journey stalled out as we anticipated the over-due arrival of OFSTED - maintaining, titivating and evidencing rather than meaningful school improvement. The LA advisor arrived monthly waving her highlighted list of over-due schools. The anxiety and anticipation rose to debilitating levels for myself. The staff were resigned to the wait and ready for the battle. I nearly resigned as a way to take back control." (Novice primary school leader)*

GOOD TO GOOD: DURING INSPECTION

During inspection, leaders continued to experience a high degree of negative emotion with approximately **59% unpleasant/high energy (red)** and **12% unpleasant/low energy (blue) emotions**. While less negativity in reported emotions was found, there appears to be greater variation in leaders' descriptions of the experience during inspection. Reports of positive interactions and emotions associated with inspections, appear to be related to inspector skill and demeanour. However, leaders consistently share how inspection-induced stress remains high and, highly unnecessarily:

"The impact on staff was obviously added stress and anger, they felt the Inspector did not take time to listen to their view of the school and wasn't particularly interested. It became very clear to me that the Inspector needed me to agree with her to stop the level of unreasonable requests. Which I did." (Experienced primary school leader)

"The inspector could not have been more supportive, but was also clear that there were some judgements she could not make as they were an impact of covid and this was not something she could consider. The whole experience was tough, tiring and extremely difficult for all staff." (Experienced primary school leader)

"The lead inspector, although demanding and intense, was ready to listen and when they felt there was reason to dig deeper they did so professionally and compassionately." (Novice special needs school leader)

"The inspection took place in the second week of the autumn term. We were told the school couldn't be outstanding as it was too early in the school year to make that judgement. It felt like a tick box, mad dash around the school to evidence a judgement the inspector had decided on after 5 minutes. Staff felt it was pointless, parents not interested, a sense of dissatisfaction and pointlessness." (Experienced primary school leader)

GOOD TO GOOD: AFTER INSPECTION

After inspection, leaders reported experiencing similar rates of negative emotions with approximately **10% labelled as unpleasant/high energy (red)**. However, leaders of good to good schools reported an increase to **49% unpleasant/low energy (blue) emotions**. Leaders describing their post-inspection good to good experience share more positive descriptors including **30% pleasant/low energy (green)** and **12% pleasant/high energy (yellow) emotions**.

Overall, the reported experience remains concerning. Although a good inspection rating is supposed to indicate positive school outcomes, even leaders of schools sustaining good ratings are reporting negative emotional consequences. Good to good school leaders are experiencing negative post-inspection emotions related to exhaustion, frustration and considering leaving the profession. Even when outcomes are good, and inspectors are professional, there are many leaders reporting experiences like this:

“The whole process is not supportive. The lead up, over many years, has demoralised staff and put a cloud over the school. Coming out of the experience I honestly feel traumatised. Again, I reiterate we had a really good inspector but I feel tearful most days and am now counting down to the next visit. A colleague described the feeling of PTSD and although it seems dramatic to those outside of education, I understand the description. I can't feel relieved it is over. I can't concentrate on the very positive comments in the report. I am scared of the reaction from parents when they see the first paragraph of the report. I am embarrassed that fellow heads in our cluster / local authority will see the report and that it is clear we are at risk. I have imposter syndrome. I feel as though I have let my school, staff and children down.” (Experienced primary school leader-ungraded inspection)

INSPECTIONS

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LEADERS FROM 287 SCHOOLS
ON ESSENTIAL CHANGES TO
IMPROVE INSPECTIONS

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LEADING THROUGH INSPECTIONS: ESSENTIAL CHANGES

Analysing leaders' views on what needs to change about the inspection system

The HeadsUp4HTs team asked participants to share their insight and advice about what needs to change to within the inspection system. The question, on the survey, was an open question and **every single leader** responding made suggestions.

Our team analysed each of the individual qualitative pieces of advice offered by participating leaders. Individual statements were grouped with similar pieces of advice. When thematic areas were established, a more specific quantification of the types of school and levels of expertise of the leader providing the advice was noted. Here, we present the five most frequently cited areas of improvement.

Core areas of advice provided by participating leaders includes changes to the:

- grading system
- support for schools
- flexibility in the framework to reflect school size, context etc
- inspector selection and training
- notification windows



ESSENTIAL CHANGES: ADVICE FROM LEADERS

Prioritising support for schools

- Leaders share 214 comments advising on the importance of establishing a **supportive and collaborative** inspection process that **prioritises school development and continuous improvement**. More specifically, leaders call for:
 - more supportive processes (69), more intentional areas for development and support (97) and more collaborative processes (48).
- Leaders specifically mentioning the importance of more supportive inspection processes include:
 - 34 Very experienced | 92 Experienced | 53 Novice | 35 Rookie leaders working across
 - 6 infant/nursery | 134 primary | 18 secondary | 1 MAT leaders | 14 special schools

Inspector selection and training

- Leaders proffered 161 ways to improve the overall quality of inspectors and how they are selected and trained. More specifically, leaders call for inspectors who: listen and demonstrate compassion and respect (47), have relevant expertise (41), are consistent (27) and are bias and agenda free (22).
- Leaders specifically calling for improved inspector selection and training include:
 - 9 Very experienced | 66 Experienced | 37 Novice | 17 Rookie leaders working across
 - 4 infant/nursery | 96 primary | 11 secondary | 21 special schools | 4 all through schools.

ESSENTIAL CHANGES: ADVICE FROM LEADERS

Changing the grading system

- Leaders share 147 comments identifying the need to change or remove current OFSTED gradings with 134 specific recommendations to remove grades and one word outcomes.
- The need for grading changes were expressed by:
 - 27 Very experienced | 45 Experienced | 36 Novice | 21 Rookie leaders working across
 - 5 infant/nursery | 111 primary | 21 secondary | 2 all through | 2 MAT leaders.

Establishing a more flexible framework

- Leaders express 74 challenges with a 'one size fits all framework' and the need to urgently recognise school phase (36), context (26) and size (7).
- Leaders suggesting the need for grading changes include:
 - 10 Very experienced | 43 Experienced | 15 Novice | 6 Rookie leaders working across
 - 1 infant/nursery | 63 primary | 0 secondary | 1 MAT leaders | 3 special schools | 3 all through schools.

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LEADING THROUGH INSPECTIONS

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

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ESSENTIAL CHANGES: ADVICE FROM LEADERS

Acknowledging the challenge with current notification windows

- Leaders provide 63 recommendations related to improving the inspection notification process. More specifically, leaders suggest changes that provide greater clarity about timing of inspections and adjustments to the window with the aim to reduce the stress associated with the process (41).
- A substantial number of specific comments from leaders were written throughout the survey in various sections. Consistently, the negative influence of the 'window' and the 'call' were highlighted. It appears, from our initial reading of the data, that many leaders feel that the window, waiting for the call and the uncertainty of timings have a negative influence on their mental health, the health of their staff members and, in some cases, impede true educational improvements. This evidence has not been fully analysed as part of our initial work. However, we can prioritise this analysis in a second round of work, if helpful.
- The need for grading changes were expressed by:
 - 4 Very experienced | 26 Experienced | 11 Novice | 22 Rookie leaders working across
 - 2 infant/nursery | 54 primary | 2 secondary | 4 special schools | 2 all through schools.

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We chose to focus our deep dive analysis on the emotions expressed by leaders throughout their *outstanding to outstanding* and *good to good* inspection processes. Our intention was to examine how leaders in these, seemingly successful, inspections experienced the process. We believed that these two groups of leaders would be the most likely to report positive emotions, experiences and outcomes.

Based on our analysis and the high level of negative emotions experience by the *outstanding to outstanding* and *good to good* leaders, we believe the following key areas **require urgent attention** if the overall inspection process can achieve its ambitions of securing accountability for school improvement and performance while caring for those leaders and educators responsible for improvement. More specifically, we support the call to urgently build a deeper understanding of inspection experience to shape future iterations of more supportive, collegial and productive inspections by:

- exploring and addressing high levels of reported pre-inspection anxiety
- examining educator experience during inspection
- establishing ways to reduce variability in inspection experience seemingly dependent on quality of the assigned inspector(s) and their approach to the inspection process
- creating strategies to understand, and in turn, address how inspection experience may be create prolonged negative influence on leaders' and educators' wellbeing
- examining and addressing how the inspection process may be influencing leaders' intention to remain and their ability to lead continuously improving, sustainable schools.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on our analysis, we reinforce calls made by other organisations recently for more in-depth knowledge of leader experience of Ofsted to inform future iterations of all elements of the inspection process. Most specifically, we believe these areas of potential future research should be prioritised.

Future questions to consider based on leaders' experiences of inspections:

- What are the short and long-term costs of, often prolonged, anticipatory stress to leader and educator health, wellbeing and intention to remain in the profession?
- How does anticipatory stress influence the short and long-term provision of quality education?
- Is there a relationship between the experience of inspections that are 'done with' vs 'done to' the school? Are 'done with' inspections more likely to happen at schools who maintain or are upgraded?
- What is the professional and emotional legacy of inspections on leaders of schools that successfully retain of outstanding and good grades?
- What can be done to create a more positive and professionally rewarding inspection experience?

We would like to thank all of the Headteachers who completed this survey, thus enabling the completion of this important research.

Your voices matter, your experiences are valued, and we persist in advocating for change.

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Dr Karen Edge and her team at UCL for gifting their time and expertise to analyse our survey results and for their contribution to our report.

HeadsUp4HTs' well-being support is intentional, impactful and sustainable.

We work with leaders across education through LAs and MATs - creating effective peer support networks and holding space for to support the emotional wellbeing of leaders in education.

**Want to know more?
Contact us at
support@headsup4hts.co.uk**

