BEYOND OFSTED

an inquiry into the future of school inspection

AT A GLANCE

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Beyond Ofsted: at a glance

Introduction from Beyond Ofsted chair

The evidence is clear. Ofsted has lost the trust of the teaching profession, and increasingly of parents. There is a now an opportunity for transformational change.

There is good evidence that a long-term relationship with an external partner of improvement builds trust and drives improvement. It allows that person to get to know the school's unique context and advise accordingly.

This approach is at the heart of our recommendations in this report. We should increase accountability to parents with the opportunity of real time transparent reporting of school outcomes, including regular surveying of parents and pupils. The leadership of the school should be supported by an external partner who has regular engagement with the school around the inputs of the curriculum and pedagogy. This would produce an action plan for governance and the school community to understand what is working well and what can be done better.

Jim Knight

Rt Hon Lord Knight of Weymouth

Recommendations in summary

- **Every school will conduct its own self-evaluation – the school performance review (SPR) – which it will report to stakeholders. The government will work closely with the whole sector to develop guidance on what the SPR should comprise, which might include mandatory and optional elements. Accountability will then be principally to parents and the wider community.**
- **Schools will work with an external school improvement partner (SIP), delivering on an action plan, informed by the SPR. Schools in a trust might have a SIP appointed from within that trust. Others would use a SIP provided by their local authority (LA). Some funding may be needed to increase LA capacity for this work.**
- **While they are working on the SPR, schools will engage in an ongoing dialogue with their SIP who will typically be experienced in school leadership and improvement. They would include serving head teachers.**
- **SIPs will validate the SPRs.**

- **The purposes of the SPRs are to enhance schools' capacity for self-improvement and to provide information to stakeholders. It would not be the means by which a school would be held accountable by the Department for Education (DfE) or by Ofsted.**
- **Safeguarding audits will be conducted annually by a separate body, under the oversight of a national safeguarding body. LAs will be able to take over the annual safeguarding visits when deemed ready by the national safeguarding body. The public sector equality duty would apply, for both pupils and school staff.**
- **The role of inspectors will change so that they focus on the governance of, and capacity for, school improvement and respond to any challenges faced, including the relationship between the school and the SIP. They would not routinely inspect teaching practice and pupil outcomes. For schools in a multi-academy trust (MAT), the inspection would focus on the capacity and approach of the trust to evaluating its schools' SPRs.**
- **The inspectorate will be reformed so that inspectors develop and maintain appropriate training and expertise in the area of school improvement, to be able to build the capacity of the school leadership team. This must include understanding the context of the school, including relevant expertise for specialist settings such as special schools and alternative provision. It must also include a thorough understanding of good school governance.**
- **Crucially, the inspectorate will be fully independent of government so that it can hold the Government, its policies, and the effects of these policies, to account through system-wide thematic inspections, including sufficiency of teacher supply.**
- **Our final recommendation is for an immediate pause of routine inspections to allow time to reset and regain the trust of the profession. Duty of care to the profession in order to develop collaborative learning cultures, which generate excellent professional skills and competencies, should be at the heart of any reform.**

These recommendations are designed to restore trust and address the intensification of leader and teacher workload, while reforming a system which is ineffective in its role of school improvement.

The inquiry's work

Ofsted is in need of major reform. Our research found that it is currently seen as not fit for purpose, and as having a detrimental impact on schools which some perceive as toxic. We acknowledge the need for quality assurance of schools as any institution in receipt of public money should be subject to accountability. However, we need to build trust back into the system so that it can work. The need for change is compelling and urgent.

The chair, UCL researchers and the advisory board have explored a range of models to inform the inquiry's vision of school inspection. Each model was based on a range of evidence from the survey and focus groups, international comparisons, research literature, comments from the advisory board and other stakeholders. Models proposed included systems where there is no inspection at all to a system similar to

what we have now in England but with greater levels of support.

After considering a range of options, a hybrid model was chosen as the most impactful and appropriate given the inquiry's evidence and the unique trajectories of education policy in England. It is a combination of external accountability to parents, self-evaluation and long-term support at school level and inspection of the governance of, and capacity for, school improvement at the school group level.

We believe that it is essential for the health of the system as a whole that we build trust in the profession. This must be part of measures to urgently address the acute problems of recruiting and retaining people in the teaching profession. We need a system based on support which recognises and develops teachers' expertise, rather than one based on fear and compliance. We agree with the consensus that there should no longer be any single-phrase judgements in school inspection system.

Schools still need to be accountable to their local community, and better transparency of outcomes to parents through the proposed school performance review will do that. This should include surveying parents and pupils. We are persuaded by the international comparisons that **self-evaluation through a long-term relationship with an adviser is the best approach to school improvement**. This is best achieved by using a school improvement partner for external validation of the school performance review.

We are encouraged in this conclusion by our reflections on evidence from similar systems in other countries:

- Denmark, Estonia, Italy and Japan have no regular external school inspection but do require self-evaluation.
- Singapore has inspection as a compulsory part of self-evaluation; no overall grade is given. Depending on the outcomes, support will be given to the school to achieve the changes recommended by the inspection.
- South Korea sees self-evaluation as a key part of inspection, but also inspects schools directly. This is not a punitive system but is orientated toward supporting schools in identifying issues, ways of addressing their shortcomings and the means of putting these changes into practice.
- Canada varies from province to province. In British Columbia external inspection is used as a verification of self-evaluation and to ensure that the school meets its legal requirements. Lessons may be observed, but the primary purpose is to verify the documents that the school publishes.
- The USA also varies from state to state. New York City uses a quality review to validate the data produced in a report card. Chicago has a report card with no external validation. Inspections are not experienced by the majority of American schools.
- Scotland's new proposals support the drive towards empowerment with a strong focus on self-evaluation and an establishment's capacity to improve.

We thus recommend removing Ofsted from direct contact with schools and reforming it to operate at the level of school group-level governance. Our proposals for inspection and accountability are focused on strong governance which should always secure

good compliance with legal requirements and equally ensure that there is internal capacity for school improvement to meet the needs of every child in their care.

How would this work?

School-level quality assurance

This part of the model would involve the following elements:

- Schools conduct an annual self-evaluation of strengths and challenges and plans for improvement called a school performance review (SPR).
- The content of the SPR will be based on a list of contents agreed at national level, but schools can add/adapt according to context. This means that self-evaluation can be consistent but also appropriate and suitable to local context and community.
- The SPR should prioritise pupil and staff mental health and wellbeing, a broad and balanced curriculum, inclusive and supportive practices, and a sense of belonging, ie the school's environment where all can flourish personally and academically.
- This process will be supported and validated by a school improvement partner (SIP), who is trained to support school leaders in evaluation and improvement, and is appointed by the school's governing body. They will have an understanding of the school context.
- The validated SPR is published as an action plan. This will include areas of good practice that others can learn from, alongside aspects where they need to learn from others.
- There are no grades on the SPR and it is not used as part of school accountability to the DfE or Ofsted.
- There will be collaboration, peer review and mutual support via networking with local schools in MATs or appropriate clusters.
- Safeguarding is a vital component of accountability and is dealt with separately as detailed below.

School group-level accountability

Many schools are now in MATs. Others are in local authority control, some are in federations and in single academy trusts. These proposals can work effectively across all modes of governance; they can work equally for local authority schools with some resource from the DfE to LAs to rebuild their school improvement capacity. It is vital that capacity is built at local authority level as these have become seriously under-resourced in the last decade.

On this basis, school groups (including LAs and single academy trusts where relevant) would be inspected by Ofsted on a regular cycle of every three to five years. The focus would be on their leadership and governance and capacity for accurate self-evaluation to address challenges and serve all learners' needs. Features would include:

- Examination of the governance of the delivery of school progress reviews and action plans.
- MATs, federations or school governing boards would need to demonstrate that their quality assurance, resource

management, risk management and school improvement capacity were all sufficient, drawing on the information from school action plans and performance reviews.

- Inspections of governance would be published, but with no single-phrase judgement. If inspection found weakness in the quality and capacity for self-evaluation, they could recommend areas for improvement and further support. In the case of MATs and single academy trusts, this would be support to the members and the trust board as appropriate. For LAs, this would be support to the portfolio member of the LA cabinet for education and the director of children's services or their equivalent. If there is significant failure, they could impose an interim executive board to replace the governance body.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding matters, and we want it to be better than it currently is. It should be conducted separately under the governance of a national safeguarding body. It will eventually be the responsibility of LAs but, given that LA safeguarding competence has been allowed to erode due to lack of resourcing over the last decade, the national safeguarding body would have to carry out the routine inspections until LAs are deemed ready. Full and proper attention should be paid to safeguarding and other legal frameworks such as the Equalities Act. Failure to meet safeguarding requirements would require immediate responses from the school leadership, with a follow-up check in place before outcomes are published.

The work of inspectors

Ofsted inspectors' role and expertise will be enhanced in terms of being used constructively for thematic inspections and research reports, as well as their inspection of group-level governance. There is a critical role for them in capacity building in response to the many complex issues facing the education service – especially if they are seen as seen as independent of government. Hence in this system, as well as inspecting governance, Ofsted would continue to exist, and would conduct research and thematic reviews to inform government policy and Ofsted. The chief inspector would be independent of government. Inspectors would be experienced and trained in the sectors they inspect. The existing right of parents to trigger an inspection would remain.

A pause

Given this fundamental and transformative change, we recommend an immediate pause to routine inspections. Parents and governing bodies will, however, retain the right to call for a school-level inspection if concerns are raised. Schools can request a school-level inspection, with schools currently designated Requires Improvement having priority.

Although these recommendations are based on research in the primary and secondary sector it is hoped that the model is applicable to other sectors and that its context-specific nature and focus on governance will be welcomed. These reforms would perhaps have impacts on Ofsted's other functions relating to early years and initial teacher education, and we would recommend more detailed reviews of their work in these areas too.

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