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6 November 2018

The Rt Hon. Damian Hinds MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Amanda Spielman
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

Dear Damian,

Advice letter from Amanda Spielman, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, about Ofsted's monitoring of the inspectorates for independent schools

Today I am publishing my annual reports on the quality of inspection work by the inspectorates for independent schools, the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) and the School Inspection Service (SIS).

I am required under section 107 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 to prepare and send these reports. However, I am concerned that they are of increasingly limited value because Ofsted's ability to monitor the work of the inspectorates is seriously hampered by the existing commissioning arrangements.

Ofsted can only carry out monitoring of these inspectorates' activities when commissioned to do so by the DfE. However, it is now the third consecutive year that the monitoring activity commissioned has provided insufficient evidence to make an in-year recommendation about the continued approval of the inspectorates. Therefore, over time, the arrangements agreed between DfE and Ofsted as part of the response to the 2015 spending review have meant that I am unable to provide you with a reasonable level of assurance about the quality of the inspectorates' work, in order to inform your decision about their on-going approval.

In total, over the past three years, Ofsted has been commissioned to conduct on-site monitoring visits of only two ISI and two SIS school inspections. The only other source of evidence available to inform my annual reports has come from reviewing inspection reports. My inspectors have not had access to the evidence bases gathered during these inspections, and as such, have been limited to making an assessment about whether the report is internally coherent. They cannot make any assessment of how the inspection was conducted, what evidence was gathered, and

whether it supports the judgements made. Additionally, the two inspectorates have not provided Ofsted with sufficient management information of their inspection activities, for example the profile of grades being awarded to be able to review overall inspection outcomes. This level of evidence and information is clearly not sufficient to provide for an objective assessment of the quality or standards of their inspections.

I am therefore concerned that, while many inspections are doubtless carried out to a high standard, the system is not currently configured so that any problems can be spotted and tackled, for example regarding potential safeguarding issues in the schools.

Recommendation

For that reason, I am recommending to you that the current monitoring arrangements are reviewed and new ones put in their place. These new arrangements should have ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all children educated in the independent sector as their focus, and as a minimum, should allow Ofsted to:

- identify and conduct increased unannounced on-site monitoring visits, to allow more evaluation of inspection practice
- identify and conduct evidence base reviews, so that inspection report findings can be corroborated with the evidence gathered
- carry out termly safeguarding focused checks, to verify that any safeguarding issues were followed up and reported on appropriately
- require that the inspectorates provide inspection management information to Ofsted, including grade profile analyses of inspection outcomes at least every six months, to allow regular review of those outcomes.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda Spielman".

Amanda Spielman

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector