

4 December 2018

Meg Hillier MP
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
Westminster
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Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

In its report 'Ofsted's inspection of schools', the Committee asked me to review the short inspection model to ensure it provides sufficient, meaningful assurance about schools' effectiveness, and to set out my plans for collecting more and better evidence from parents about schools.

This letter responds to those requests.

Short inspections

As I discussed with the Committee during the oral evidence session, I do consider that under our current inspection framework a short inspection provides the government with sufficient assurance that a school remains good. It doesn't, however, allow for the same level of detailed inspection and assurance as a full section 5 inspection.

As I am sure the Committee is aware, Ofsted is in the process of designing a new inspection framework. The new framework will be the result of more than two years of research and discussions with the sector. In January 2019 we will launch a full public consultation on our proposals and the final framework is due to come into effect in September 2019.

In planning for this framework, we have considered the size, shape, composition and tariff of school inspections. We have considered what is required to support the new framework, and what is practically deliverable by inspectors and by Ofsted. In particular, I have been clear that I want to use the opportunity presented by the new framework to maximise the amount of time that inspectors spend on site, engaging with school leaders, teachers and pupils.

To do this, we believe it is necessary to review the role played by 'short inspections', also known as 'section 8 inspections of good schools', given that they now constitute

the majority of school inspections. When designing the new proposals for revised section 8 inspections of good schools, we have sought views from inspectors, unions and the DfE. We are conducting a number of pilot inspections over the autumn 2018 and spring 2019 academic terms to test options for revisions to these inspections. Our work so far has given me confidence that we will be able to allocate more inspector time to on site activities, which I hope will address some of the committee's concerns.

I will be releasing more details of the proposed changes to the short inspection model when I launch the Education Inspection Framework consultation in January 2019 and would welcome feedback from the committee. Pending the outcome of that consultation, any changes will be implemented from September 2019.

Collecting evidence from parents

Ofsted exists to serve parents, to help them pick the right school for their child, to provide assurance about the quality of education their pupils are receiving, and we also use their views to inform our inspection judgements.

During inspection

There are a number of ways for parents to give their views during an inspection. Inspectors spend time in the playground, and at the school gates, in the morning and evenings so they can speak to parents. It is also possible for parents to ask for a private telephone call or meeting with an inspector if they have something they want to discuss in more detail.

Schools are responsible for ensuring that every parent is made aware of the opportunity to fill out the questionnaire on Ofsted's Parent View website. Parent View is a dedicated website used by Ofsted to collect the views of individual parents and each school has its own page where parents can anonymously answer a number of questions. While parents can fill out Parent View at any time, during an inspection additional free text questions appear, allowing parents to give more extensive answers. For your information, I have included all the the Parent View questions as an annex to this letter. These answers are then used by the inspectors to help them form lines of enquiry for the inspection and, ultimately, judgements about the school.

While Parent View has served our inspection needs reasonably well, we are currently in the early stages of a project to replace the existing site with a new service, which better meets parents' needs. The new system is being specifically designed to increase the volume, quality and diversity of views that we collect from parents both during and outside of inspection. This includes considering different platforms, ways of gathering and presenting data and the questions we ask parents. To that end we

are looking at how other similar 'customer feedback' portals, from both the public and private sectors, operate.

As part of this work we are investigating how we better meet the needs of parents, inspectors and schools to provide a more valuable service to them. We want to make Ofsted more accessible to parents - making it easier for them to provide feedback that is most reflective of their child's educational experience. We want to ensure that the feedback we receive and share from parents is robust, meaningful and of benefit to other parents, schools and Ofsted inspectors. To inform that work we have conducted a series of focus groups with parents across the country to better understand how they would like to share their views, how they would like to see the views of others and what they would like to provide views on.

After this initial exploration we will then develop options for what this new service could look like. We will test these with parents and inspectors so that we can learn what does and doesn't work for them. Once we have identified the best option, we will test and pilot before launching a final, live product.

After inspection

Our inspection reports need to be accessible to parents and give them the information they need. To help us make sure they do, we have conducted research, including discussions with groups of parents to help us understand how best to design our reports under the new framework. We continue to speak to a range of parents to make sure that our information is accessible, engaging and conveys the ethos of the school in a way that parents will find most useful. We already know that parents would like our reports to give a better idea of what makes a particular school distinctive.

We will launch our new style reports alongside the new framework. Exactly what these changes will look like will be finalised in the coming months on the basis of this feedback.

Outside of inspection

Outside of day to day inspections, Ofsted regularly engages in education policy discussions and debates, and the Research and Evaluation Team use our inspection insights to conduct research into the sector. We feel that it is important to engage parents as often as possible in our wider work.

To do this we run a virtual parents panel with over 1000 members who have contributed to several areas of policy development. There are numerous examples of where this panel has helped inform Ofsted decisions. During the short inspection

consultation last year, we sent our proposed changes to this panel and following comments from parents and others, we refined the proposals.

We also engage parents on an ad hoc basis where necessary. In November 2016 we were proposing changes to the Early Years inspection reports. We ran discussion groups with parents, who didn't like the proposals; as a result of this direct feedback we dropped the planned changes.

We also run an annual parents attitude survey¹. These yearly surveys help us to understand better how parents view Ofsted and what we need to do differently. It compares parents' attitudes year on year, which allows us to see if changes we are making in policy are understood and welcomed and where they are not. We have also used the survey to test our position on issues such as Parent View, the proposed Education Inspection Framework and the curriculum.

I hope you find his information helpful.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Spielman
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

¹ Annual parents survey 2017: parents' awareness and perceptions of Ofsted
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/annual-parents-survey>