



House of Commons
Committee of Public Accounts

**Ofsted's inspection of
schools**

Sixtieth Report of Session 2017–19

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

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The Committee of Public Accounts

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Summary

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) plays a vital role in making sure that children in schools across England receive the quality of education that they deserve. We recognise that Ofsted's budget has been cut significantly in recent years, and the amount it spent on inspecting the schools sector fell by 52% in real terms between 1999–2000 and 2017–18. However, this has led Ofsted and the Department for Education to focus narrowly on the cost of inspection, rather the value of getting independent assurance about schools' effectiveness. There have been clear shortcomings in Ofsted's performance—it has completed fewer inspections than planned, it has failed to meet its targets for how often schools should be inspected, and schools are being left for longer between inspections. Ofsted now inspects good schools through just a short one-day inspection and, under legislation, outstanding schools are exempt from routine re-inspection altogether. Ofsted is therefore not providing the level of independent assurance about the quality of education that schools and parents need.

As well as reporting on individual schools, HM Chief Inspector's role includes advising ministers about the quality of schools. Championing standards is an important part of any independent inspector's remit, and we were disappointed that HM Chief Inspector seemed reluctant to offer her views about wider issues affecting the school system. For its part, the Department needs to be clearer about what the purpose of inspection is and where responsibility for improving underperforming schools lies.

Introduction

Ofsted inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people and services that provide education and skills for learners of all ages. This report concerns Ofsted's inspection of schools. Approximately 21,500 state-funded schools in England, educating a total of some eight million pupils, are subject to inspection by Ofsted. Of its total spending of £151 million in 2017–18, Ofsted spent an estimated £44 million on 6,079 inspections of state-funded schools.

Ofsted is a non-ministerial government department, headed by HM Chief Inspector. HM Chief Inspector is accountable to Parliament for securing value for money for Ofsted's spending. At March 2018, Ofsted's school inspections were undertaken by 166 directly employed inspectors (HM inspectors) and approximately 1,470 contracted inspectors (Ofsted inspectors). Ofsted carries out its inspections independently of the Department for Education (the Department) and of the schools it inspects. However, the Department influences Ofsted's work in a number of ways, such as proposing to Parliament legislation that determines aspects of Ofsted's work, including the overall frequency of inspection, and negotiating Ofsted's budget with HM Treasury. The Department relies on Ofsted's work to gain assurance about the quality of schools and teaching, and to intervene where schools are underperforming.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. **Ofsted incorrectly reported to Parliament that it had met the statutory target for re-inspecting schools every five years.** Ofsted has a statutory target to re-inspect non-exempt schools within five academic years of the end of the academic year in which the last inspection took place (primary and secondary schools are exempt from routine re-inspection if Ofsted previously graded them as outstanding). Ofsted stated in its annual report and accounts for 2016–17 that it had met this target in 2015/16 and was on track for 2016/17. However, Ofsted had in fact failed to meet the statutory timescale for 43 schools (0.2%) between 2012/13 and 2016/17. Providing Parliament with incorrect information is a serious matter. HM Chief Inspector apologised for the control weakness that led to the misreporting, and committed to correcting the position in Ofsted's annual report and accounts for 2017–18. Ofsted explained that, in the 43 cases, its staff had made decisions that led to the target being breached, but had not communicated this to senior management. In 32 cases, the school had expanded or merged with another, and Ofsted had erroneously classified the schools as new; in the 11 other cases, there were exceptional circumstances such as schools which were due to close. Ofsted said that it had put new procedures in place to make sure that any decision to defer an inspection beyond the statutory target is reported to HM Chief Inspector or Ofsted's Chief Operating Officer. If a school provided inaccurate information, Ofsted would be critical. It needs to show that it can meet the same standards as it demands of schools.

Recommendation: *Ofsted should report annually to Parliament, in its annual report and accounts, on how many schools have not been inspected within the statutory target and the reasons why.*

2. **It is unacceptable that so many schools are exempt from re-inspection and so have not been inspected for six or more years.** Under legislation, schools that Ofsted has graded as outstanding are exempt from routine re-inspection, unless Ofsted identifies a particular risk. At August 2017, 1,620 schools had not been inspected for six years or more, including 296 schools that had not been inspected for 10 years or more. As a result, some pupils go through the whole of primary and/or secondary school without any independent assessment of their school's effectiveness. It is reasonable to assume that not all these schools remain at the same level of performance after so many years. In addition, grades awarded under Ofsted's previous inspection frameworks are not fully comparable to more recent grades because the previous frameworks paid less attention to pupil progress. This limits the extent to which parents can use Ofsted grades to compare schools on a like-for-like basis. Many headteachers in schools previously graded as outstanding are likely to want to be re-inspected as they would value external verification of their school's performance. HM Chief Inspector acknowledges that most people would think it reasonable to expect a school to be inspected during a child's time in that school.

Recommendation: *The Department should re-examine the rationale for exempting schools graded outstanding from routine re-inspection, and report back to us on its assessment in December 2018.*

3. **Ofsted's short inspections do not allow inspectors enough time to make a meaningful assessment of a school's performance or to help schools to improve.** Ofsted inspects schools previously graded as good through a short, one-day inspection, on average every four years, rather than through a full two-day inspection. This has become the norm as two-thirds of schools are graded as good. Short inspections inevitably provide less assurance about schools' effectiveness and allow inspectors less time to discuss with schools how they might improve. Ofsted explained that short inspections involve discussing the school leadership's evaluation of the school's performance and triangulating that with data and some observation of, and discussion about, the school; it acknowledged that this is far short of a full review of all aspects of a school. Shorter inspections provide some assurance to government and the responsible authorities, such as governing bodies, that schools meet a certain standard, but they are less about providing advice to teachers and information for parents.

Recommendation: *Ofsted and the Department should review whether the short inspection model provides sufficient, meaningful assurance about schools' effectiveness, and evaluate the costs and benefits of alternative approaches, including carrying out more full inspections. They should report back to us on the findings in December 2018.*

4. **Ofsted does not give parents enough opportunity to contribute their views as part of school inspections.** Ofsted's inspection reports are an important source of information for parents choosing schools for their children. Parents are therefore a crucial audience and they would like Ofsted's reports to reflect their views more. Ofsted seeks parents' views via an online survey and through talking to parents at the school gates during inspections. Parents can access the online survey at any time but can enter free-text comments only once Ofsted has announced an inspection, which means they have a very short time (often only one day) in which to give their views. There is also only a very limited opportunity for inspectors to talk to parents as they drop off or collect their children. Ofsted appears to have good intentions to improve how it engages with parents and has held focus groups to explore parents' views about this. However, we are not convinced that Ofsted yet has concrete plans to turn these intentions into actions.

Recommendation: *In the report to us in December 2018, Ofsted should set out its plans, with specific actions and target dates, for collecting more and better evidence from parents about schools.*

5. **Ofsted has struggled to employ enough school inspectors, meaning that it has failed to complete its inspection programme.** Ofsted has carried out fewer inspections than planned, although performance has improved since 2015–16 when it completed only 65% of planned inspections. In 2017–18, Ofsted completed 6,079 inspections—94% of the planned number. While Ofsted assures us that it has enough contracted inspectors, it still does not have enough directly employed HM inspectors—at March 2018, it employed 30 (15%) fewer HM inspectors than it had budgeted for, and there was also a shortfall in each of the two previous years. Although turnover of HM inspectors has fallen, it remains high (19% in 2017–18). Ofsted says that recruiting and retaining inspectors is one of its top priorities and that it has a programme of work to improve the position, for example by reducing

inspectors' workload and improving their training. We heard that training as an Ofsted inspector was excellent continuing professional development for teachers. As only headteachers and deputies whose schools have been graded as good or outstanding can become contracted Ofsted inspectors, this training is not available to teachers in schools that need most improvement.

Recommendations:

Ofsted should write to us in April 2019 with an update on the gap between the numbers of HM inspectors employed and budgeted for, and the turnover rate.

Ofsted should also consider opening up its training to headteachers and deputies working in schools graded as requires improvement and inadequate so that these schools can benefit in the same way as schools that are performing well.

6. **Ofsted does not make the most of its unique position to use intelligence from inspections to lead change and be a force for school improvement.** HM Chief Inspector has a statutory role to advise the Secretary of State for Education on the quality of schools. Her independence and status as the head of a non-ministerial government department puts her in an ideal position to speak freely, without fear or favour. Inspectors are on the ground in schools every day, witnessing the challenges that schools are facing and the underlying causes of poor performance. Ofsted should be sharing these insights with the Department and more widely. We asked HM Chief Inspector for her views on the wider issues affecting the school system, including the impact of funding pressures, for example on the breadth of the curriculum, and concerns about pupils' mental health and wellbeing. We were disappointed that she did not provide clearer and more direct answers. Ofsted has also reduced its school improvement activity in recent years, publishing only two research and analysis reports in 2017, compared with 13 in 2013. Ofsted tells us that it is now expanding its research programme again. For example, it has undertaken research into the curriculum taught in schools, including the subjects which are being dropped, and it has published a report about what schools are doing to combat child obesity.

Recommendation: HM Chief Inspector should write to us by October 2018 with her reflections on the main risks to schools' effectiveness and the systemic causes of poor performance, including the impact of funding pressures.

7. **The system for school accountability and improvement is muddled, leading to confusion for schools and parents, and inefficiency where roles overlap.** Although Ofsted aims to be a force for improvement, it is not itself responsible for school improvement; that responsibility rests with a school's governing body, the multi-academy trust or the local authority, and ultimately with the Department. When schools are failing, the Department, through the regional schools commissioners, is responsible for helping them to improve. By way of example, we asked about the 78 schools previously graded as inadequate where Ofsted did not meet its target to re-inspect within either 18 or 24 months between 2012/13 and 2016/17. However, Ofsted and the Department could not explain clearly what is in place to improve the quality of education in these schools and who is responsible for making that urgently needed improvement. Given this lack of clarity, we are unclear about the basis for

the Department's decisions about funding for school improvement—the eight regional schools commissioners spent £32 million in 2017–18, compared with the £44 million that Ofsted spent on inspecting schools. The Department acknowledges that the system for school accountability and improvement is complex. In May 2018, the Secretary of State set out principles to inform a review of school accountability and the Department plans to consult on detailed proposals in autumn 2018.

Recommendation: As part of its review of accountability, the Department should make clear where responsibility for school improvement lies. The Department, working with Ofsted, should also assess whether the balance of spending is right between different parts of the system for school accountability and improvement, including between Ofsted and the regional schools commissioners.

1 Ofsted's performance

1. On the basis of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, we took evidence from the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) and the Department for Education (the Department).¹ We also took evidence from the National Association of Head Teachers, the National Education Union and Education South West, a multi-academy trust that runs 10 schools.

2. Ofsted is a non-ministerial government department, headed by HM Chief Inspector. HM Chief Inspector is accountable to Parliament for securing value for money for Ofsted's spending. Ofsted inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people and services that provide education and skills for learners of all ages. Its total spending in 2017–18 was £151 million.²

3. This report concerns Ofsted's inspection of schools. Approximately 21,500 state-funded schools in England, educating a total of some eight million pupils, are subject to inspection by Ofsted. Ofsted grades schools using a four-point scale: outstanding; good; requires improvement; and inadequate. Ofsted carries out its inspections independently of the Department and of the schools it inspects.³ In 2017–18, Ofsted spent an estimated £60 million on inspecting the schools sector,⁴ a reduction of 52% in real terms since 1999–2000. Of this, Ofsted spent an estimated £44 million on carrying out 6,079 inspections of state-funded schools.⁵

4. The Department is responsible for education policy including the national curriculum and school performance measures. It is also responsible for inspection policy and proposes to Parliament legislation that determines aspects of Ofsted's work including: which schools are subject to inspection and which are exempt; the overall frequency of inspection; and the broad areas of performance that Ofsted must report on. In addition, the Department negotiates Ofsted's budget with HM Treasury.⁶ The Department relies on Ofsted's work to gain assurance about the quality of schools and teaching, and to intervene where schools are underperforming.⁷

Ofsted's statutory target for re-inspecting schools

5. Ofsted has a statutory target to re-inspect non-exempt schools within five academic years of the end of the academic year in which the last inspection took place. Primary and secondary schools are exempt from routine re-inspection if Ofsted previously graded them as outstanding. Ofsted reported, in its annual report and accounts for 2016–17, that it had met the statutory target in the 2015/16 academic year and was on track to meet it in 2016/17. However, the National Audit Office's analysis found that Ofsted had failed to meet the statutory timescale for 43 (0.2%) of the 17,503 schools that were not exempt from re-inspection between 2012/13 and 2016/17.⁸

1 C&AG's Report, *Ofsted's inspection of schools, Session 2017–19*, HC 1004, 24 May 2018

2 C&AG's Report, paras 1, 4

3 C&AG's Report, paras 2–3, 9

4 Ofsted's inspection of the schools sector comprises inspections of state-funded schools, teacher training providers and some independent schools, and monitoring visits.

5 C&AG's Report, paras 2, 13, 1.5

6 C&AG's Report, Figure 5, para 1.21

7 C&AG's Report, para 5

8 C&AG's Report, paras 11, 1.22

6. HM Chief Inspector apologised to us for the control weakness that had led to Ofsted incorrectly reporting its performance to Parliament, and said that Ofsted would correct the position in its annual report and accounts for 2017–18. She said that the misreporting was not a matter of oversight—in all 43 cases, staff had made decisions, based on good reasons, that led to the target being breached, but had not communicated this to senior management.⁹ HM Chief Inspector told us that in 32 cases the schools had expanded or merged with another school, and Ofsted had incorrectly classified them as new schools; in the 11 other cases, there were exceptional circumstances, such as schools which were due to close.¹⁰

7. We asked Ofsted what it had done to ensure that misreporting did not happen again. Ofsted told us that it had put new procedures in place to make sure that any decision to defer an inspection beyond the statutory deadline is reported to HM Chief Inspector or to Ofsted's Chief Operating Officer.¹¹

Ofsted's engagement with parents

8. Education South West told us that parents relied heavily on Ofsted judgements in their decisions about schools. Ofsted's 2017 survey of parents found that word of mouth from other parents (48% of respondents) and Ofsted reports (47%) were the two main sources of information for parents when choosing a school for their children. The top three factors when choosing were, in order of priority, proximity to home, Ofsted judgement and siblings at the school.¹²

9. However, parents would like inspection reports to reflect their views more.¹³ Ofsted described two ways in which it seeks parents' views about schools. It uses an online survey called Parent View which has a page for every school. Parents can provide responses to multiple-choice questions at any time. Once an inspection is announced, usually half a day before it starts, an additional section of the survey is made available, where parents can leave fuller comments about the school.¹⁴ We note that this additional section is disabled at noon on the last day of the inspection, so for a short one-day inspection it is only available for a maximum of 24 hours.¹⁵ Ofsted also highlighted that, in addition to the survey, inspectors speak with parents during the inspection. It accepted that this allowed inspectors a very limited amount of time to talk to parents as they dropped off or collected their children at the school gates.¹⁶

10. Ofsted acknowledged that it had not thought enough about parents as an audience for its inspection reports.¹⁷ In its written evidence, the National Governance Association highlighted that the needs of parents may not always be the same as those of school leaders and governing bodies.¹⁸ Ofsted said that it had held focus groups with parents to understand what they would like to be different. This research had produced slightly

9 Q 56

10 Q 59

11 Q 57

12 Q 24; C&AG's Report, paras 3.5–3.6

13 C&AG's Report, para 21

14 Qq 159–160; C&AG's Report, para 3.8

15 C&AG's Report, para 3.8, footnote 25

16 Q 158

17 Q 158

18 National Governance Association, para 5.2 ([OIS0003](#))

inconsistent messages—that parents wanted more opportunity to comment on schools but also that parents would like Ofsted to inspect schools without giving them notice. Ofsted said that no-notice inspections would make it even harder to engage parents in inspections.¹⁹ Ofsted told us that it was considering how it could update the online survey to make it easier for parents to use and would consider how inspections could involve parents more as part of developing its next inspection framework. In addition, Ofsted noted that it had been piloting alternative report formats with parents with the aim of making inspection reports as clear and useful as possible.²⁰

Recruiting and retaining inspectors

11. In 2015–16, Ofsted completed 3,572 inspections of state-funded schools, only 65% of its planned inspections. Performance improved in the subsequent two years, although the number of inspections was still less than planned—5,098 inspections (84%) in 2016–17 and 6,079 inspections (94%) in 2017–18. Ofsted also failed to meet its own targets for how often schools should be inspected. In addition, between 2013/14 and 2016/17, the average time between inspections increased for all types of school. For example, Ofsted did not achieve its target to re-inspect schools graded as good every three years; in 2016/17, the average time between inspections of good schools was around four years.²¹

12. One of the reasons that Ofsted failed to meet its targets was that it did not have enough inspectors. At March 2018, Ofsted's school inspections were undertaken by 166 directly employed inspectors (HM inspectors) and approximately 1,470 contracted inspectors (Ofsted inspectors), most of whom are serving practitioners.²² The National Association of Head Teachers told us that it had heard much more positive than negative feedback about the calibre of inspectors in its recent discussions with headteachers.²³

13. Ofsted has struggled to deploy enough contracted inspectors, partly because not enough of them have been trained to lead inspections. Since September 2015 Ofsted has contracted directly with individual inspectors, having previously outsourced inspection work to private companies. However, the change left Ofsted with an unexpected shortfall of inspectors as only 48% of the existing contracted workforce who applied met its standards and were offered contracts. Ofsted told us that the shortfall of inspectors had allowed it to achieve its savings target of £6 million for 2015–16, which was set partway through the year. It said that it now had enough contracted inspectors and had trained many more of them to lead inspections.²⁴ The Executive Principal of Education South West highlighted that training as an Ofsted inspector was excellent continuing professional development for teachers—the best he had received in 26 years in education.²⁵ Ofsted told us that its inspectors were all from schools graded as good or outstanding and that this was a requirement, although an inspector would not necessarily have to stop if they moved to support a struggling school.²⁶

19 Q 158; C&AG's Report, para 21

20 Qq 158, 166

21 C&AG's Report, paras 12–14, Figure 10

22 Q 72; C&AG's Report, paras 4, 2.20

23 Q 3

24 Qq 72–74; C&AG's Report, paras 2.27–2.30

25 Qq 2, 22

26 Q 97

14. Ofsted has also struggled to retain enough directly employed HM inspectors. It had a shortfall in each of the past three years and, at March 2018, it employed 30 (15%) fewer HM inspectors than it had budgeted for. Turnover of HM inspectors fell from a high of 26% in 2016–17 to 19% in 2017–18.²⁷ Ofsted told us that turnover was concerning—the rate had fallen nearly to the level in 2014–15, before it introduced short inspections, but it needed to continue to move things in the right direction.²⁸ Workload is one of the main reasons why HM inspectors leave Ofsted—in the 2017 civil service people survey, 45% of HM inspectors said they did not have an acceptable workload.²⁹ The National Association of Head Teachers described the experience of one of its members who is a contracted inspector, who found it a “near-impossible task” to get through the work that was needed for a one-day inspection.³⁰

15. Ofsted told us that recruiting and retaining inspectors was one of its top priorities and that it had a programme of work to improve the staffing position.³¹ It explained that its original approach to short inspections (whereby it converted to a full two-day inspection immediately when inspectors judged during a short inspection that a school might be worse or better than good) had created unacceptable workload for inspectors. It had changed its approach at the start of 2018 and no longer converted to a full inspection immediately unless there were serious concerns, for example about safeguarding. This change had been made partly to reduce inspectors' workload. Ofsted also told us that it had broadened the training for inspectors to help with retention.³²

27 C&AG's Report, para 15, Figure 11

28 Q 95

29 Q 75; C&AG's Report, para 2.23

30 Q 5

31 Q 95

32 Qq 75–78, 95

2 Assurance about schools' effectiveness

Schools exempt from inspection

16. Under legislation, schools that Ofsted has previously graded as outstanding are exempt from routine re-inspection, unless Ofsted identifies a particular risk (such as where concerns are raised about the school) or unless there is a significant change (for example the addition of a sixth form). At August 2017, 1,620 schools had not been inspected for six years or more, including 296 schools that had not been inspected for 10 years or more. As a result, some pupils go through primary and/or secondary school without any independent assessment of their school's effectiveness.³³ We asked HM Chief Inspector for her view on what would be the ideal inspection cycle. She said that most people would think it reasonable to expect a school to be inspected during a child's time in that school.³⁴

17. We asked our pre-panel witnesses whether outstanding schools should be re-inspected. The National Education Union said that all schools should go through a quality assurance process, but that should not be something that happened "on a snapshot basis".³⁵ The National Association of Head Teachers and Education South West told us that many headteachers in schools previously graded as outstanding are likely to want to be re-inspected as they would value external verification of their school's performance.³⁶

18. We heard from the witnesses, and in written evidence from the National Governance Association, that grades awarded under Ofsted's previous inspection frameworks were not fully comparable to grades awarded under the current framework, for example because the previous frameworks had paid more attention to attainment and less attention to pupil progress.³⁷ The National Association of Head Teachers told us that headteachers of outstanding schools felt at a disadvantage when showing parents around their school as they had no recent inspection report to point to as evidence of their current performance, and noted that the exemption from inspection limited the extent to which parents could judge one school against another.³⁸ Education South West said that, without an Ofsted inspection to ask questions about how many children had started and finished a course, outstanding schools could, for example, withdraw children from a course if the school expected that they would not do well; this could enable the school to achieve a higher performance score.³⁹

Ofsted's short inspections

19. Ofsted inspects schools previously graded as good through a short, one-day inspection, rather than through a full two-day inspection. As 65% of schools are currently graded as good, short inspections have become the norm. The National Association of Head Teachers said that Ofsted had become reliant on the short inspection model to perform its duties.⁴⁰

33 C&AG's Report, paras 1.22, 1.24

34 Q 112

35 Q 21

36 Qq 17, 19, 26

37 Qq 34, 70; National Governance Association, para 2.2 ([OIS0003](#))

38 Qq 19, 26

39 Q 34

40 Q 5; C&AG's Report, para 10, Figure 3

20. The National Education Union and the National Association of Head Teachers told us that one-day inspections are not long enough to be useful. All three pre-panel witnesses commented that inspectors have to get through a lot of work in a one-day inspection.⁴¹ Education South West was positive about short inspections as the school was more involved than during a two-day inspection, and inspectors could therefore look more deeply into school improvement planning and the school's strategic knowledge of what is working and what is not working.⁴² Conversely, the National Education Union said that short inspections were largely about compliance and that its members did not expect to get a fair, valid and reliable inspection when Ofsted came to do a short inspection.⁴³

21. Ofsted told us that the short inspection process is far short of a full review of all aspects of a school. It explained that short inspections involve discussing the school leadership's evaluation of their school's performance, and triangulating that with data and some observation of, and discussion about, the school. Ofsted told us that the move to short inspections had meant that inspections were increasingly focused on providing assurance to government and the responsible authorities, such as governing bodies, that schools met a certain standard. Correspondingly inspections now focused less on other purposes, such as providing schools with constructive advice that helped them to improve, providing feedback and advice to classroom teachers, and providing information for parents.⁴⁴

22. We asked whether resource constraints were forcing Ofsted into a one-day inspection regime. HM Chief Inspector said that, without a doubt, Ofsted would prefer to be able to do longer inspections more often, where it could do more to contribute to school improvement and meet the needs of parents and teachers.⁴⁵

Use of intelligence from Ofsted's inspection of schools

23. HM Chief Inspector has a statutory duty to advise the Secretary of State for Education on the quality of schools and how this has improved.⁴⁶ HM Chief Inspector's independence and status as the head of a non-ministerial government department means she can speak freely, without fear or favour.⁴⁷ Individual school inspection reports are a rich source of data but Ofsted acknowledged that it was not using all this information as well as it could. It said that the introduction of electronic evidence-gathering should make it easier to draw its data together.⁴⁸

24. The Department told the previous Committee in 2017 that it would gain assurance that schools were achieving 'desirable' efficiency savings and that educational outcomes were not being adversely affected by the need to make savings in part from Ofsted inspections.⁴⁹ We asked HM Chief Inspector for her views on the impact of funding pressures, for example on the breadth of the curriculum. She did not answer our questions

41 Qq 5–6; National Education Union, paras 17–18 ([OIS0004](#))

42 Qq 2, 6

43 Q 6

44 Q 127

45 Q 197

46 Education and Inspections Act 2006

47 Q 63

48 Qq 137, 146, 188

49 Committee of Public Accounts, [Financial sustainability of schools](#), Forty-ninth Report of Session 2016–17, 28 March 2017

directly and told us that school funding sat with other parts of government; Ofsted looked at educational outcomes and its brief did not include matching for every school outcomes against the amount they were spending. HM Chief Inspector said she did not advise the Secretary of State about the impact of funding pressures, although she had started to have conversations with the head of the Education and Skills Funding Agency to ensure that their respective work joined up.⁵⁰ Ofsted told us that it had published and talked publicly about its research into the curriculum, for example about schools that shorten key stage 3 when most children stop doing music, art, drama, languages, history or geography. Ofsted said that its research had helped to prompt proper discussion about the trade-offs that schools were making.⁵¹ However, Ofsted also said that it was difficult to attribute issues with the curriculum explicitly to money, because there were many factors that influenced schools, including performance tables.⁵² In addition, we asked Ofsted about pupils' mental health and wellbeing. Ofsted simply said that these issues were difficult to measure and inspect.⁵³

25. In recent years, Ofsted reduced its school improvement activity, including its research programme—in 2017, it published only two research and analysis reports, compared with 13 in 2013.⁵⁴ Ofsted told us that it was now expanding its research programme again because policy makers and people running schools found its survey reports valuable. For example, as well as the findings from its research into the curriculum, it would soon be publishing a report about what schools are doing to reduce child obesity and it had a survey going on about knife crime. Following our evidence session, Ofsted wrote to provide us with details of its forward research programme. The Department confirmed that it made use of Ofsted's research when making policy.⁵⁵

The wider system of school accountability and improvement

26. Although Ofsted aims to be a force for improvement through its inspections, it is not responsible for improving individual schools.⁵⁶ Ofsted and the Department said that responsibility for improvement rested with a school's governing body, the multi-academy trust or the local authority depending on whether a school was an academy or a maintained school, and ultimately with the Department if a school was failing.⁵⁷

27. Ofsted did not achieve its internal target to re-inspect schools graded as inadequate within either 18 or 24 months, depending on the circumstances of the school, in 78 cases between 2012/13 and 2016/17.⁵⁸ We asked the Department and Ofsted who was responsible for assuring parents that those 78 schools were improving during the two-year gap between inspections. The Department explained that, when Ofsted judges a school to be inadequate, responsibility for helping it to improve lies with the Department. If it is a maintained school, the Department will direct the school to become an academy and seek a sponsor to support it; if the school is already an academy, the Department

50 Qq 138–142

51 Q 171

52 Q 144

53 Qq 137–138, 195

54 C&AG's Report, para 3.12

55 Qq 66, 137

56 Qq 127, 131, 133; C&AG's Report, para 1

57 Q 99

58 C&AG's Report, para 12

will look to re-broker the school to another academy trust.⁵⁹ We know, however, there are often delays in these processes.⁶⁰ Ofsted said that such schools remained part of its inspection programme and that it constantly reviewed the situation.⁶¹ We asked Ofsted whether it was in constant conversation with these schools during the two years between inspections. Ofsted said it was not, but that its regional directors monitored progress and would not hesitate to inspect a school if, for example, there were delays in re-brokering.⁶²

28. The Department summarised the system as 'Ofsted inspects and the Department improves'. It contrasted this with the position in the past when inspectors were responsible for helping schools to improve. It explained that it undertakes its school improvement activities through the eight regional schools commissioners.⁶³ The Department agreed, however, that there is a lack of clarity and confusion about what regional schools commissioners do, for example where their staff go into a school in advance of an Ofsted inspection to check on the school's progress. The Department said that the Secretary of State for Education recognised that the landscape was complex and, in May 2018, he had set out some principles for accountability. The principles were about clarity and transparency, and about different bodies' respective roles. The Department plans to consult in autumn 2018 about the details of how the system should operate.⁶⁴

29. The regional schools commissioners spent £32 million in 2017–18, compared with the £44 million spent by Ofsted on its inspection of state-funded schools.⁶⁵ Given the overlap in their roles, we asked the Department if it would be better to abolish the regional schools commissioners and redirect their funding to Ofsted.⁶⁶ The Department told us that it needed regional schools commissioners to undertake its school improvement work and that Ofsted had almost completed its inspection programme despite a significantly reduced budget.⁶⁷ However, we note that Ofsted lacks sufficient information on other important aspects of performance, including efficiency and impact.⁶⁸

59 Qq 98–110

60 Q 104; C&AG's Report, [Converting maintained schools to academies](#), Session 2017–19, HC 720, 22 February 2018

61 Q 108

62 Q 109–110

63 Qq 131, 189–191

64 Qq 101, 189–191; C&AG's report, para 8

65 [PQ 147898, 24 May 2018](#); C&AG's report, para 2

66 Qq 189–191

67 Qq 125, 129–130

68 C&AG's report, paras 19–20, 24

Formal minutes

Wednesday 18 July 2018

Members present:

Meg Hillier, in the Chair

Bim Afolami

Gillian Keegan

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown

Bridget Phillipson

Caroline Flint

Draft Report (*Ofsted's inspection of schools*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 29 read and agreed to.

Introduction agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Sixtieth of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 5 September at 2:00pm]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Monday 25 June 2018

Question number

Mary Bousted, Joint General Secretary, National Education Union, **Nick Brook**, Deputy General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers and **Matthew Shanks**, Executive Principal, Education South West

[Q1–38](#)

Matthew Coffey, Chief Operations Officer, Ofsted, **Julia Kinniburgh**, Director of Accountability, Curriculum and Qualifications, Department for Education, **Jonathan Slater**, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education and **Amanda Spielman**, HM Chief Inspector, Ofsted

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Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

OIS numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Department for Education ([OIS0005](#))
- 2 Jeff Brown, former Headteacher ([OIS0002](#))
- 3 National Education Union ([OIS0004](#))
- 4 National Governance Association ([OIS0003](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current session

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2017–19

First Report	Tackling online VAT fraud and error	HC 312 (Cm 9549)
Second Report	Brexit and the future of Customs	HC 401 (Cm 9565)
Third Report	Hinkley Point C	HC 393 (Cm 9565)
Fourth Report	Clinical correspondence handling at NHS Shared Business Services	HC 396 (Cm 9575)
Fifth Report	Managing the costs of clinical negligence in hospital trusts	HC 397 (Cm 9575)
Sixth Report	The growing threat of online fraud	HC 399 (Cm 9575)
Seventh Report	Brexit and the UK border	HC 558 (Cm 9575)
Eighth Report	Mental health in prisons	HC 400 (Cm 9575) (Cm 9596)
Ninth Report	Sheffield to Rotherham tram-trains	HC 453 (Cm 9575)
Tenth Report	High Speed 2 Annual Report and Accounts	HC 454 (Cm 9575)
Eleventh Report	Homeless households	HC 462 (Cm 9575) (Cm 9618)
Twelfth Report	HMRC's Performance in 2016–17	HC 456 (Cm 9596)
Thirteenth Report	NHS continuing healthcare funding	HC 455 (Cm 9596)
Fourteenth Report	Delivering Carrier Strike	HC 394 (Cm 9596)
Fifteenth Report	Offender-monitoring tags	HC 458 (Cm 9596)
Sixteenth Report	Government borrowing and the Whole of Government Accounts	HC 463 (Cm 9596)
Seventeenth Report	Retaining and developing the teaching workforce	HC 460 (Cm 9596)

Eighteenth Report	Exiting the European Union	HC 467 (Cm 9596)
Nineteenth Report	Excess Votes 2016–17	HC 806 (Cm 9596)
Twentieth Report	Update on the Thameslink Programme	HC 466 (Cm 9618)
Twenty-First Report	The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority's Magnox	HC 461 (Cm 9618)
Twenty-Second Report	The monitoring, inspection and funding of Learndirect Ltd.	HC 875 (Cm 9618)
Twenty-Third Report	Alternative Higher Education Providers	HC 736 (Cm 9618)
Twenty-Fourth Report	Care Quality Commission: regulating health and social care	HC 468 (Cm 9618)
Twenty-Fifth Report	The sale of the Green Investment Bank	HC 468 (Cm 9618)
Twenty-Sixth Report	Governance and departmental oversight of the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership	HC 896 (Cm 9618)
Twenty-Seventh Report	Government contracts for Community Rehabilitation Companies	HC 897 (Cm 9618)
Twenty-Eighth Report	Ministry of Defence: Acquisition and support of defence equipment	HC 724 (Cm 9618)
Twenty-Ninth Report	Sustainability and transformation in the NHS	HC 793 (Cm 9618)
Thirtieth Report	Academy schools' finances	HC 760 (Cm 9618)
Thirty-First Report	The future of the National Lottery	HC 898 (Cm 9643)
Thirty-Second Report	Cyber-attack on the NHS	HC 787 (Cm 9643)
Thirty-Third Report	Research and Development funding across government	HC 668 (Cm 9643)
Thirty-Fourth Report	Exiting the European Union: The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy	HC 687 (Cm 9643)
Thirty-Fifth Report	Rail franchising in the UK	HC 689 (Cm 9643)
Thirty-Sixth Report	Reducing modern slavery	HC 886 (Cm 9643)
Thirty-Seventh Report	Exiting the European Union: The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and the Department for International Trade	HC 699 (Cm 9643)
Thirty-Eighth Report	The adult social care workforce in England	HC 690 (Cm 9667)
Thirty-Ninth Report	The Defence Equipment Plan 2017–2027	HC 880 (Cm 9667)

Fortieth Report	Renewable Heat Incentive in Great Britain	HC 696 (Cm 9667)
Forty-First Report	Government risk assessments relating to Carillion	HC 1045 (Cm 9667)
Forty-Second Report	Modernising the Disclosure and Barring Service	HC 695 (Cm 9667)
Forty-Third Report	Clinical correspondence handling in the NHS	HC 929
Forty-Fourth Report	Reducing emergency admissions	HC 795
Forty-Fifth Report	The higher education market	HC 693
Forty-Sixth Report	Private Finance Initiatives	HC 894
Forty-Seventh Report	Delivering STEM skills for the economy	HC 691
Forty-Eighth Report	Exiting the EU: The financial settlement	HC 973
Forty-Ninth Report	Progress in tackling online VAT fraud	HC 1304
Fiftieth Report	Financial sustainability of local authorities	HC 970
Fifty-First Report	BBC commercial activities	HC 670
Fifty-Second Report	Converting schools to academies	HC 697
Fifty-Third Report	Ministry of Defence's contract with Annington Property Limited	HC 974
Fifty-Fourth Report	Visit to Washington DC	HC 1404
Fifty-Fifth Report	Employment and Support Allowance	HC 975
Fifty-Sixth Report	Transforming courts and tribunals	HC 976
Fifty-Seventh Report	Supporting Primary Care Services: NHS England's contract with Capita	HC 698
Fifty-Eighth Report	Strategic Suppliers	HC 1031
First Special Report	Chair of the Public Accounts Committee's Second Annual Report	HC 347
Second Special Report	Third Annual Report of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts	HC 1399