

All Party Parliamentary Group on Schools, Learning, and Assessment

Ofsted and School Inspection

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday 23 April – 4:15pm to 5:15pm – Jubilee Room, Palace of Westminster

Parliamentarians in attendance

Peter Swallow MP (Chair), Tris Osborne MP, Sam Carling MP, Jodie Gosling MP and Ian Byrne MP.

Guest speakers

Dame Alison Peacock, Chief Executive of the Chartered College of Teaching, Dr Kulvarn Atwal, Executive Head Teacher of Highlands Primary School and Uphall Primary School and Professor Julia Waters, sister of Ruth Perry.

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed attendees and introduced the guest speakers. He explained that the meeting will focus on Ofsted's proposed 'report card' system and inspection framework, exploring how the proposals may impact the profession and students.

2. Remarks – Professor Julia Waters

Julia began by explaining that her sister Ruth Perry took her own life in January 2023 following an Ofsted inspection. Ruth had no history of mental illness or depression. The coroner's central concern was the harm caused by Ofsted on school leaders mental health and warned that "there is a risk of future deaths if only lip service is paid to learning from tragedies like these".

Julia warned that Ofsted's proposed report card system is still punitive and judgement based and would put more pressure on teachers and school leaders. She is concerned that there is a fifth judgement area and more ill defined criteria.

She concluded by urging Ofsted, the Department for Education and the government to:

- Follow the Coroner's recommendations, the prevention of future deaths report and work alongside educators and suicide prevention experts
- Create an independent complaints and appeals process for Ofsted
- Ensure rigorous training, recruitment and oversight of inspectors

3. Remarks – Dame Alison Peacock

Alison explained that the Chartered College have worked to consult members on Ofsted's proposals but there is a degree of fatigue about the volume of surveys and consultations. Members want meaningful engagement rather than tokenistic input.

Members are concerned about the professionalism of inspectors, their consistency and their ability to understand diverse school contexts. The lack of distinction between different grades on proposed report cards may make inspections even more unreliable.

Some of the proposals outlined in the Ofsted consultation are welcomed, for example, the focus on inclusion. However, Alison explained that the interpretation of inclusion often feels narrow, focusing only on students with SEND and those from deprived backgrounds rather than embracing a holistic and whole-school approach to inclusion.

Alison also explained that there is a perception that inspections overly emphasise outcomes in more advantaged areas, failing to properly account for the challenges and achievements of schools in more deprived settings. Context is king and must be genuinely considered.

Small schools also feel that they will continue to be placed at a disadvantage as they often lack the capacity and resources to prepare for inspections compared to larger MATs.

4. Remarks – Dr Kulvarn Atwal

Kulvarn began by explaining that he has been a headteacher for 12 years. He has led 8 inspections personally and shadowed 2 others. In all cases, the responsibility heavily fell on the headteacher's shoulders. Across those 10 inspections, he felt that there was no sense of a consistent or standard approach, undermining the reliability of judgements. He is concerned that Ofsted's proposed reforms would not address this.

When discussing reforms Kulvarn believes we need to be asking what the purpose of Ofsted is. He does not believe the system in its current form is acting as a force for improvement and to hold schools to account - aims that all school leaders would support.

He further stated that Ofsted is asking inspectors to do an impossible job, stating that it is impossible to expect a small group of inspectors to deliver a reliable and evidence-based judgement after only two days in a school.

He concluded by calling Ofsted a "corrupt regime" and stating that as long as inspections are conducted in a climate of fear, schools will be encouraged to "play it safe" rather than innovate.

5. Discussion and Q&A

Tom Middlehurst (ASCL) suggested that the APPG should focus on asking what Parliament can do to drive change.

Professor Peter Tymms observed that politicians often feel they cannot call for Ofsted to be abolished, but advocated for taking an evidence-based approach to create an alternative system. He warned that continuing with the current Ofsted model is doing harm to the education system.

Peter Swallow MP acknowledged concerns raised during the meeting but welcomed the recent shift towards a greater focus on inclusion and SEND.

Anthony Smith (Headteacher in Watford) expressed concern about speed of proposed reforms which leave schools little time to properly consider and respond to things.

6. Next steps

Peter Swallow MP encouraged attendees to participate in the Ofsted consultation and committed to writing to Ofsted after this session to summarise concerns raised during the meeting.

7. AOB

Frank Norris wrote to the APPG and asked for meeting attendees to be alerted to [the Alternative Big Consultation report](#) which was released on 22 April.