

Amanda Spielman launches Ofsted's Annual Report 2018/19

Introduction

Good morning everyone, and thank you for coming today to the launch of this Annual Report, which is my third as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector.

It's unusual for us to be publishing in January. This is normally a pre-Christmas event, but it had to be put on hold because of the election. Still, if anyone made a New Year's resolution to listen to more speeches about education and children's social care, I am entirely at your service.

The election brought a lively political debate about the future of Ofsted. While that's for policy makers to decide, it is nice not to have to worry, at least today, about being handed a p45 mid-speech.

But even while Ofsted was in the uncomfortable position of being a political football, we were of course getting on with the day job, which means working firmly and unapologetically in the interests of children. Which is of course what we have always done.

Before I talk about our work in 2018/19, I just want to remind you briefly about some recent changes we have made.

A couple of years ago, we started to change the way that we inspect social care. In 2017, we introduced the social care common inspection framework. This was a big step forward, for social care providers of all kinds, and for us too. And, in 2018, we brought in the ILACS framework for children's services departments in local authorities, really emphasising the things that matter most to children themselves.

Now, after four years of the common inspection framework, education also has a new framework – covering early years, and schools and post-16 education.

While the social care frameworks are now well embedded, we're only one term in to this new education framework. Over time, it will give a more balanced view of schools, nurseries and colleges. It will help them concentrate on giving the best possible education and reduce anxiety about short-term results. Because the excessive focus that we've seen on grade targets and on predicting and managing outcomes has led to some corrosive practices and poor decision-making.

And we must guard against restricting education excessively. Exam results are of course important, but they must reflect real achievement. We should not incentivise apparent success without substance. It doesn't represent a good education for any child. And for those who aren't being read a different story every night, who aren't taken to the museum at the weekend, who don't get the chemistry set for Christmas, it's especially impoverished. These

children need and deserve a proper, substantial, broad education for as long as schools have them.

And we can't afford, as a country, to lose talent, imagination or the scholars of the future because we restrict their education too early. I am proud that Ofsted is now highlighting where this happens and rewarding the places where it doesn't.

We recently inspected a school that had been requiring every child to take a sports science qualification, using up a valuable GCSE slot, whether or not they had any interest in sports science at all. We've seen schools requiring almost every child to take a qualification in English for speakers of other languages, even though they were nearly all native English speakers who were also taking English language and literature GCSEs.

We've seen schools that have been cutting back drastically on all children's opportunities to discover the joys of languages, art, music, drama and humanities – so that most children have to give them up at age 12 or 13, when they have barely begun to discover what these subjects have to offer.

Now of course, there will always be a minority of children who really will struggle with the full curriculum. But providing tailored pathways for this minority really is very different from putting all or most children in a school on a narrow, sometimes repetitive curriculum, to achieve exam results that are better than the school down the road.

We mustn't succumb to the seductive but wrong-headed logic that we help disadvantaged children by turning a blind eye to schools that narrow education in this way as long as they deliver acceptable grades at the end. Grades are hollow if they don't reflect a proper education underneath. And we have no idea yet who the most talented and singular women and men are who will drive this country forward in the 2030s, 2040s and 2050s. They could be in any primary or secondary school anywhere. All of them should have the chance to develop their talents. Poorer children shouldn't get a worse choice.

So the framework really matters, as so many people in education have told me already. And one aspect of it that is important is that we have raised the bar for the outstanding grade, because this grade needs to mean something. It means excellence that others can learn from. So it has to reflect both substance – the high quality of education from which good results will flow – and integrity – doing things in the right way, in the interests of all children.

But let's get on to the headline findings from this year's report.

Headline findings

The great majority of schools, colleges, nurseries and childminders continue to be judged good or outstanding. This reflects the hard work of teachers, leaders and other staff who work in them.

Eighty-six per cent of schools are good or outstanding. Eighty-one per cent of colleges and other post-16 establishments, as are 96% of nurseries and childminders.

In social care, we are seeing improvement, though from a much lower base: 48% of local authorities are now judged good or better after ILACS inspections, which compares well with 36% judged good or better in the first round of inspections under the previous framework. And sustainable improvement does take time to secure.

This year, we made over two and a half thousand full inspections of social care providers – mostly children's homes, but also fostering and adoption agencies, residential special schools and others. Eighty-four per cent were graded good or outstanding in their most recent full inspection.

This is a strong picture of high or improving performance; and it's important to recognise that the vast majority of institutions we inspect are doing well.

But it's also important that we don't allow complacency to creep in. We must ask the tough questions and highlight inadequacy, as well as excellence.

Over the last year, we've done that, and while it's important to praise the good in this report, we must also expose the bad and provoke discussion on what could or should be done better.

For example, the latest PISA findings show that England has made some gains in maths and reading. That's good news. But we should not ignore stagnant outcomes in science. And this may come back at least in part to what happens in primary schools. Subject-level inspection and key stage 2 science tests were removed 15 years ago and 10 years ago, respectively. We know from the DfE's sample test that key stage 2 science achievement has plummeted since these control levers were removed. And more recently, our own primary curriculum work has shown us that subjects outside the core of maths and English are often weak, and that includes science. Secondary schools are now having to teach most children science from a lower starting point.

So, as we look at the high standards of education and good-quality care that most are achieving, we must ask: what lies beneath? Away from the excellent work going on in many places, what is getting in the way of further and faster improvement – and what does that mean for our children?

Education

Looking at education, we put a great deal of emphasis on integrity: doing the right things; putting the needs and aspirations of children first.

One aspect of integrity is making sure that children get a broad and rich education. That means, among other things, not taking short cuts with the curriculum; teaching a full curriculum; and teaching it well. Our new inspection framework does put the curriculum firmly at the centre of our approach to inspecting. We began it in September after a full and inclusive

consultation and I'm very pleased with the response.

While it's too early to draw any meaningful conclusions, we are seeing a shift in emphasis. Curriculum discussion is most definitely – and rightly – back on the agenda for leadership teams.

And the teaching profession has responded with enthusiasm. I'm approached at almost every event I attend by people telling me how rewarding it is to be going back to the fundamentals of education; thinking through what they teach and how best to teach it.

I'm proud of the part our new framework has played in spurring on this change. Our research clearly showed that those with the best curriculum successfully marry ambition for their students with effective planning and sequencing of their lessons.

But it also highlighted that, too often, the crucial work of proper curriculum planning has been neglected. Those who wanted to emphasise teaching skills were often fuzzy about what they really meant. In primary schools, the determination to perform well in SATs was sometimes skewing the curriculum just too far towards literacy and maths, to the detriment of other subjects. And in secondary schools, the overwhelming push to achieve respectable GCSE results sometimes was leading to repetitive exam question training.

Our research showed that schools in the most challenging circumstances can build and teach a strong, coherent and well-sequenced curriculum, just as well as any others. That's why we believe that our new framework is fair to these schools: professionals can build a good curriculum in any context.

But of course, there is more to the integrity of a school and its leadership than just its curriculum.

So, for example, we have identified and highlighted off-rolling this year and will continue to do so. The number of schools with unusual levels of pupil movement has grown and we are continuing to ask about this on inspection. Coercing parents into home-schooling when it's not in the child's best interest, or finding another way to move a child off a school's roll so they become somebody else's problem, is wrong. It undermines claims to integrity.

We have always defended the right of heads to exclude where necessary. But it has to be justified, and it has to be done fairly and properly, so that the future of the excluded child is fully considered and planned for.

We continue to see that formal, registered alternative provision, such as pupil referral units (PRUs), is mostly good or outstanding. Some 83% of PRUs are judged good or better – which is often forgotten when commentators look for easy links between exclusion and crime. But we know that there are other, murkier operators in this space.

Many of the places our unregistered schools task force investigates are unregistered alternative provision. These almost always offer a poor standard of education and are frequently unsafe. Most are simply not fit to be

described as 'schools' at all. And it's actually quite shocking to find that some of these outfits are commissioned by unwitting local authorities and therefore funded by the taxpayer. The authorities are simply not checking that these places comply with the law.

And the law is not strong enough.

Our task force has now provided the evidence for three sets of convictions of illegal schools and their operators. But there is nothing to stop a convicted operator from continuing to run their school – as one convicted head flagrantly told the BBC she intended. Ironically, the laws designed to close a legal school don't apply to one that operates outside the law. This is a loophole that has to be closed.

An education system with integrity simply would not tolerate illegal and unregistered schools that cheat children of a decent education. But not enough is happening to tackle unregistered schools.

Special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)

Turning briefly to special educational needs and disabilities, it's fortunate that we have many fantastic examples of schools that value and respect all pupils, including those with additional needs. The strength of a school is not just measured by how well it educates its high achievers, but by how well it educates all children. Schools should be – and many are – just as ambitious for children with SEND or any other kind of disadvantage.

As of last January, about 15% of school children were recorded as having SEND. That's 1.3 million children, of whom a million were getting some kind of SEN support. The system is clearly stretched – and struggling to provide support to all who could benefit from it. Paradoxically, there are problems both with the over-identification of some kinds of SEND in some places and under-identification in others.

We need to get that right so that scarce resources are directed to the right children at the earliest possible point in their lives. And we need to prioritise effectively and prevent needs increasing as children get older.

SEND is an emotive issue, but if support is spread so thinly that those who most need it are missing out, then we are not being fair to these children.

With the CQC, we make joint inspections of SEND provision, covering education, health and care, area by area. And results are concerning, with significant weaknesses identified in half the areas we have inspected. Too often, poor joint commissioning is leading to fragmented responses. Local partners need to work more coherently to make better use of limited resources.

And this is an area where the problems are about more than just the level of funding. The DfE's current review of the SEND system is very much needed, and we are contributing all our knowledge and expertise to it.

Early years

And of course, education doesn't start at five and end at 16.

Early education makes a big difference to young children and its importance is underlined by the early years foundation stage reforms and the current consultation on the new Early Learning Goals.

The work of nurseries and childminders is, of course, a fine balance between education and care. It's sometimes difficult to separate the two. The tensions that sometimes bubble up in discussions in this sector are often about how far the pendulum swings one way or the other. We know that many nurseries are very good at caring for children and keeping them safe – and quite rightly. But we have always championed learning at a young age and, with the new inspection framework in place, we are seeing more discussions about what an early years curriculum should be aiming to achieve.

The early years market has changed quite a bit in recent years. The overall number of childcare places has increased. But within that, nursery chains have expanded, while the number of childminders has continued to fall.

Our recent survey of childminders leaving the job shows that there are many reasons for giving up – the most cited being cost, bureaucracy and changing personal circumstances, in that order.

Sustainable, high-quality childcare is crucial for many families – and standards are high. The vast majority of nurseries and childminders are rated good or outstanding, and that isn't surprising, since we take prompt action to close down those that really aren't good enough. Also, parents are extremely reluctant to send their child to a nursery or childminder that is less than good. That means poor providers generally don't last long in the market. They either improve swiftly, close or – in the case of nurseries – get taken over by bigger organisations.

And we are seeing more and more nurseries acquired or opened by large chains. Several operate nationally and some internationally – in China and North America, as well as across Europe.

These larger organisations can bring new thinking and practice back into their English nurseries. One large chain told us that discovering how early Chinese children start learning to use chopsticks has lifted their own expectations here about young children's ability to learn to use a knife and fork.

And now that nearly all children are in formal childcare before they start school, we have an opportunity to make sure that all children really are ready for school. Our EIF inspections so far do show that nurseries and childminders are taking the curriculum and what children are learning seriously.

Further education and skills

At the other end of the age range, the discussion of further education and skills (FES) has taken on extra significance. In 10 days, the UK will leave the European Union and start to plot its future trading relationship with Europe and the rest of the world.

Now, more than ever, we must think strategically about skills and how the further education sector is funded and encouraged to provide the right courses of the right quality.

I'm not happy that some colleges steer too many of their students towards superficially attractive courses that fill their rolls and attract funding – whether or not they open doors for the students who take them.

This doesn't mean the courses young people are taking are completely worthless. But flooding a local job market with young people with (say) low-level arts and media qualifications, when the big growth in demand is for green energy workers, will result in too many under-employed and dissatisfied young people and wind turbines left idle.

We need a clearer focus on matching skills to opportunities. Not just for Brexit. Many FE providers operate in places the government says it wants to 'level up'. What better way to level up than to radically improve the quality of vocational and skills education in our towns? But it does also mean tackling the small minority of colleges that have under-performed or been 'stuck' for years.

Apprenticeships have become a much larger part of our post-16 work. Over the last two years, the number of further education and skills institutions has grown by over 60%. Most of the growth has been in independent learning providers (ILPs), who offer the majority of apprenticeships. Their numbers have more than doubled to 1,200. Remember, there are fewer than 200 general FE colleges.

And our inspections tell us that too many providers are not clear about the purpose of their apprenticeships. The quality of courses is still sometimes too low and the proportion of ILPs judged good or outstanding declined this year, for the third year in succession. This needs to change.

Changes to the funding model and the introduction of the levy have driven growth in the number of providers, but they've also bent apprenticeships out of shape. Even with more providers, the overall number of apprentices has dropped – and this has a particular impact on younger age-groups.

Apprenticeships can be transformational for young people. And yet one in five of all new levy-funded apprenticeships are higher- and degree-level, often aimed at people who are already doing the job, or who don't need the leg up that a great entry-level apprenticeship can provide.

Meanwhile, there are more than twice as many apprentices in business and retail as there are in the priority areas of construction and engineering.

The government and providers must look at what can be done to redress the balance across apprenticeships. The critical 16 to 19 age-group needs to be better catered for and decisions must be made about how to reverse the decline in school leavers taking up apprenticeships.

More generally, there is clearly room for greater targeting of government funding in post-16 education of all kinds.

Social care

I'd like to speak now about children's social care.

Making good decisions for children lies at the heart of our approach to social care. These are the most vulnerable children, and we always want to see that the right decisions being taken by those with the power and responsibility to help them.

The performance of social care services is improving and there's a great deal of good work being done at a local level. But it is unquestionably disappointing that half of local authorities are less than good.

Last year, I spoke about the financial pressures that the sector was under. The funding situation hasn't improved and children's services are still chronically under-resourced, in a context of increasing demand.

But it would be wrong to attribute all the weaknesses in the system to a lack of money alone. Better ways of working would also help improve the overall picture for children.

We would have hoped to see the improvements that are being made in some local authorities mirrored at an area and national level, in well-functioning partnerships. But, too often, they are not.

I have already touched on the weaknesses in many SEND partnerships. This can lead to a disjointed and inefficient approach to providing for SEND children. Elsewhere in social care, we see similar deficiencies in multi-agency working holding back the good work of individual services. Silo working is a common theme, within organisations and across partnerships. We see many places where different agencies are still not working effectively together.

We have now completed five rounds of joint targeted area inspections, or JTAIs for short, working with the inspectorates for constabulary, probation, youth offending and health services. Through these JTAIs, we have looked at five themes that needed this joined-up approach:

- child sexual exploitation
- domestic abuse
- neglect of older children
- child criminal exploitation and – most recently –
- sexual abuse in the family, which reports shortly

We have reviewed the findings from all five to highlight common areas of

weakness. And again, these often relate back to silo working:

- a lack of information-sharing across agencies
- sluggish decision-making
- gaps arising from a failure to make the best use of each agency's expertise

There's also a lack of crossover with adult social care. That happens in the transition of disabled children into adults' services. And also when children are affected by the behaviour of adults who are sometimes themselves are in crisis – or who are inflicting domestic abuse. And there is sometimes a level of over-optimism about the capacity and capability of adults to change that can leave children vulnerable to further neglect and abuse in the home.

Of course, removing a child from their home is fraught with challenges – not least of which is providing the child with a safe, supportive place to live.

Our research into matching in foster care is complete and we'll be publishing our findings in the spring. That work was carried out against the background of a serious shortage of foster carers nationally. The 'Staying Put' policy – that allows young people to stay with their foster carers past the age of 18 – is welcome, but it does put extra pressure on the system.

Other significant issues are the supply of children's homes and the capability of their staff. The national supply is not matching the local needs of children. And children's homes are not in the right places. At the end of this year, there were around 130 more homes than the previous year. But while there were 60 more homes in the North West, the number in the South East shrank by nine. This does not reflect the geographical profile of the care population.

There is no co-ordinating strategy to manage the supply of children's home places at a national level. Unsurprisingly, this results in a lack of homes in the expensive cities and regions, and an oversupply in areas where property is cheaper. This encourages local authorities to send children far away from home, and indeed sometimes makes it very hard for them to do anything else, especially for teenagers with complex needs.

Our analysis of children's home ownership showed that the level of private equity investment in the sector is growing. It is creating new patterns of ownership, just as it is in nurseries. The 10 largest private and voluntary owners of children's homes own just under a third of all homes outside the public sector. They do do a good job, by and large – with a higher ratio of good and outstanding homes compared to other owners. But it's another example of how new ownership models may need us to rethink the lines of accountability.

There is also a clear need to consider how commercial operators (and indeed local authorities and others as well) can be guided and incentivised to open homes where they are most needed. In the absence of a coherent national approach, we will continue to see poor placements often made out of necessity rather than incompetence. And that includes the placing of young teenagers in

unregistered children's homes, which has recently attracted attention in the media and in Parliament.

Another big issue for children's homes are the low levels of training, support and pay that reflect an undervalued workforce. We need to make sure that residential care roles remain attractive.

And secure homes and centres have a particularly difficult job to do. The issues of capacity and capability that affect all children's homes are most concentrated here, and the picture is bleak. Of 14 secure homes, only eight are now judged good or outstanding. Disappointing as this is, the position of secure training centres (STCs) is worse. Two of the three STCs are graded as requires improvement and one, Medway, has recently been judged inadequate.

Secure training centres struggle with leadership and management and have many staff who are poorly trained and ill-equipped. We have raised serious safeguarding concerns, including over the use of pain-inducing techniques on children. There is a secure school plan to replace Medway, but the project is a long way from fruition. While the government is planning to replace all STCs, the three centres cannot simply mark time while they remain responsible for the children placed there.

Coming back to mainstream schools, we know how much parents care about behaviour at their child's school. And earlier this year, our research into teacher well-being showed that low-level disruption remains the bane of many teachers' working lives. It doesn't always grab the headlines, but it's hugely unsettling in classrooms.

Getting behaviour right lies behind so many education success stories. And as we highlighted recently, sorting behaviour helps improve schools that have been stuck in a cycle of low achievement for years.

Last year we began a research project looking at behaviour management, to uncover what effective schools do to maintain good discipline and teach children to self-regulate.

Unsurprisingly, we found that consistent policies work – when they are understood and practised by staff and bought-into by pupils and parents. That's the same whatever specific approach is taken. We aren't about to advocate a single off-the-peg solution. But our research helps us pinpoint where schools are getting it right, and to use that insight to refine our inspections.

Another piece of research we published last year looked at how schools in London were responding to knife crime. Sadly, it captured the mood of the times. Knife crime and knife fatalities have become one of the country's biggest public policy concerns. And our report highlighted the role that schools should play in the local partnerships that tackle knife crime. But at the moment, they are too often left out.

We also spoke out against a problematic narrative that directly attributes the rise in knife crime to school exclusions. We have emphasised that no

credible causal link has been shown between exclusions and knife crime, or indeed between exclusions and crime more generally.

There is a correlation, of course – children excluded are often those who have complex and difficult lives outside school. And we do need to make sure that we give these children good, full-time education, in the right school or alternative provision for them, to reduce the risk of them being drawn into gangs or exploited. But it doesn't follow that the act of being excluded makes a child pick up a knife or carry drugs, or that banning exclusions will solve wider societal issues.

Views like these are not always popular in every quarter, but they show how important it is that we speak truth to power, using our independence from government to urge change where it's needed and caution when it's required.

And we will still point out to parents that they need to do their bit – whether by setting and maintaining boundaries for their children or even just by potty-training them well before they reach school age.

This year, we've criticised the 24-hour contact culture that heaps pressure on teachers – as emails ping into their inboxes from parents who sometimes expect instant answers at random times of day or night.

And we've called for an end to the government's policy of exempting outstanding schools and colleges from inspection – which has removed so many from scrutiny for over a decade and deprived parents of a true and up-to-date picture. I'm very pleased that Ministers have now begun moves to scrap the exemption. Reaction so far, from the education sector and from parents, has been overwhelmingly positive about bringing these schools and colleges back into scope.

As well as speaking truth to power, we don't duck controversy or difficult topics. Everyone with a responsibility for children must speak openly and honestly about the bad things that can happen. Some subjects are inherently taboo, but we have seen all too often what happens when problems are not aired. We have seen it in the scandalous failure to tackle sexual exploitation of children because to do so meant crossing lines of race, culture and religion, with all their inherent sensitivities.

And that's why I have been so disappointed in how little progress has been made in people's willingness to discuss difficult issues publicly, despite the dreadful example of the grooming gangs.

On several occasions since I took this job, we have drawn public attention to serious concerns in the state and independent sectors, as well as in unregistered operations. We have seen schools illegally segregating pupils and giving girls a much worse deal than boys. We have found books in schools that promote corporal punishment or say that a wife cannot deny their husband. Teaching materials are censored to airbrush women out of history, even including Queen Elizabeth 1st.

Over and over again, we have reported findings that should have led to proper

public discussion of some very difficult issues, only to see that few people are willing to tread in these sensitive areas and that real concerns drop out of sight almost at once.

And more generally, many people find it hard to acknowledge that the different rights we value are not always easy to reconcile with each other. The interaction of religious freedom with the law of the land; rights for groups versus rights for individuals, perhaps especially girls; the extent of parents' rights over children – these are some areas where tensions arise.

And schools are often where these tensions play out. This year, a small number of state schools were picketed and bullied by protestors. Some were undoubtedly parents, but many others were seasoned agitators, wanting to escalate problems.

The subject of their anger was relationships education in primary school – which generally amounts to telling children that there are different types of families, some with a mum and a dad, some with just one parent, some with only grandparents, and some with two mums or two dads.

Out of this simple concept, protestors constructed a depressing tissue of exaggeration, outrage and, sometimes, lies. Actually, children were not being taught about the mechanics of gay sex; and they were not being turned towards homosexuality nor away from their families and their faith.

The children, as well as teachers, had to walk into school past placard-waving protestors and then listen to diatribe blasting through megaphones outside. It was, quite simply, intolerable.

And yet, there was no swift condemnation from government and remarkably little from other local and national political leaders. The powerful voices that should have supported the children and the school were largely muted. Headteachers spoke of being isolated. Where leadership was desperately needed, it was lacking.

So we spoke out. We backed the headteachers under fire and we said unequivocally that children should learn about different kinds of family. And I will keep us doing what we can to get people to face and talk about the difficult things. Very soon, we'll be publishing a joint thematic inspection report on another taboo subject: child sexual abuse in the family, which is often incest. That's a word that most of us aren't even comfortable saying. Let's try to give this research the discussion it deserves.

Conclusion

Today's report reflects on the changes we have made to our inspections: to look at schools, colleges, children's homes, nurseries and local authorities as they actually operate today. They are changes aimed at building inspection around the kind of professional dialogue that truly helps those we inspect.

And we also add value through our research reports; by sharing insights about the sectors we monitor; and by addressing the most difficult issues that

affect children, which are often hard to discuss. That is how we can be a force for improvement.

And as we look forward, we need to keep evolving and improving. We need to keep up with the changes that are taking place in the sectors we look at. True accountability to parents and the public – one of the main reasons we exist – ought to encompass the new ownership structures that are shaping both education and social care.

Whether it's multi-academy trusts running schools, national and international companies operating nurseries, or private equity companies owning children's homes – the models of ownership, of governance, of management are changing. Accountability needs to keep pace, to make sure that institutions continue to do the right things, act with integrity and make decisions in the best interests of children.

We need to reflect that our education and social care systems are increasingly interconnected, and co-operation is vital. Parents need to support schools' efforts to tackle bad behaviour. Local authorities and schools need to work together to make sure every child has a suitable place. Councils, police, health, justice and social services need to break down the silos. They need to involve schools to tackle knife crime, but not put the blame at their door. And Ofsted needs to play its part to incentivise this co-operation.

I truly believe that our education system and social care sector benefit from strong, independent scrutiny. It shouldn't be feared, and it mustn't be avoided. We entrust our children to schools and social workers; to nurseries and colleges. Inspection, undertaken in the right spirit, makes sure that shadows don't lengthen, dust doesn't settle and the progress of our schools and children's services can be seen and appreciated by all.

Thank you.

*[STCs: secure training centres]