

Michael Wilshaw Speech 15th June

Good afternoon everyone. Welcome to the first in a series of events we are holding across the country to share more details of the important changes to inspection that will come into effect in September.

First of all, can I apologise if my voice occasionally breaks. Surgery a few months ago has slightly diminished my lung capacity.

I want to start this important conference by paying tribute to you as the leaders of our education system – people who are making such a difference to the lives of children and young people across our country.

This is not a clichéd bit of idle flattery at the start of my speech but a deeply held belief that great leadership is leading the transformation in standards few would have thought possible only a short time ago - and certainly before the start of the Ofsted era 22 years ago. This transformation needs to be proclaimed much more loudly and much more confidently.

The facts speak for themselves:

- a million more children in good or outstanding schools
- a larger percentage of schools moving to good from Requires Improvement and Special Measures than ever before
- more schools remaining good and not declining
- more youngsters reading by the age of 7 with record numbers reaching the required levels of reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2
- outcomes at KS4, despite the odd blip, continuing to improve with more youngsters pursuing the tougher subjects at GCSE
- many more young people from poor backgrounds going to university than ever before and a much greater focus in schools on closing the attainment gap
- significant improvements in early years, including for the poorest children

I think it's also worth making the point that although many of our international competitors are doing significantly better than us in the OECD tables, England's performance in relation to the other UK countries is good. We are ahead of Wales and Northern Ireland and I know there is deep concern in Scotland over rapidly declining basic skills, particularly for poor youngsters.

Of course, there is much more to do. Regional variation in performance is still unacceptably wide and we are a long way behind the OECD top educational performers, particularly in South East Asia. But the trajectory of improvement is clear and is deserving of celebration, and not the corrosive negativity that we sometimes see and hear.

Good leadership has brought about these improvements. That is why Her Majesty's Inspectors will focus on leadership above all else when they visit good schools and colleges during the new short inspections. Their principal task will be to determine whether the leadership team, including governors, has the capacity not only to maintain existing standards but to improve them further.

So, what sort of questions will HMI ask? Well, they are ones you would expect.

- Have the leaders got a grip on the institution? Do they fully understand its strengths and weaknesses?
- Have they communicated their strategy for raising standards to the key stakeholders?
- Are they focussed on what really benefits children and young people, rather than wasting their time endlessly preparing for an Ofsted inspection which could be years away?
- Do they refuse to accept excuses for underachievement and are they prepared to go the extra mile to compensate for family background?
- Are they simply presiders over the status quo, content to take the path of least resistance or are they prepared to challenge staff and students to do better?
- Have they built, or are they developing, a culture that is calm, orderly and aspirational?
- Are they, for example, people who tolerate scrappy worksheets? Or are they people who insist that children should have good materials to work with, including textbooks, readers and library books which they can use for classwork and homework?

I make this last point because HMI increasingly report to me, and I've seen it for myself, that too many schools, particularly secondary schools, have conceded defeat on this issue. As a senior leader in a secondary school said to an HMI recently, 'we don't allow our children to take books home because they won't bring them back the following day'.

What on earth does that tell us about the culture in that particular institution? What on earth does it tell us about leaders who are not prepared to fight the good fight on this basic issue?

How on earth will we ever begin to address the shocking underachievement of bright youngsters from disadvantaged homes, if we carry on patronising the poor and serving them up with lower expectations?

The latest data from the Sutton Trust should alarm us all. Over a third of 'highly able' boys eligible for free school meals in England fail to achieve a good set of GCSEs despite having thrived at primary school, and the situation for bright girls from disadvantaged backgrounds is not much better.

This is one of the reasons why Ofsted was so concerned about secondary school performance in my last annual report. We must really get this one right and ensure that the huge advances made at Key Stage 2, particularly for the most able, are consolidated at Key Stage 3, particularly in Year 7.

So, we need great leaders in our education system from the early years upwards. Indeed, we need more mavericks, not fewer. And I take exception to the suggestion that somehow Ofsted constrains those leaders who want to do things differently.

Far from it. There was no one more maverick than me when I led a school. But doing things differently was for one purpose and one purpose alone - to raise standards for the children in my school. There is no point in being an 'off-the-wall' leader if it does not serve the interests of children. I saw plenty of maverick leaders in my early days as a teacher in the Inner London Education Authority - heads of so called 'flagship schools' interested more in their own reputation than doing good things for the children in their institution.

Greater autonomy and greater devolution of powers to schools, governors and leaders have provided opportunities as never before.

Indeed, when people look back at this moment in the history of English education, they will see this as the age of the great educator – people who are making as much of a mark on society as the great inventors and scientists of the industrial revolution. Those involved in our own 21st century education revolution should be equally honoured and have monuments and statues built to them in towns, cities and market squares across the country.

These are the modern heroes – people who have the courage to not only improve the prospects of children in their own schools but to also transform the life chances of youngsters in underperforming institutions elsewhere, especially in the most challenging areas.

I am determined that Ofsted will recognise these system leaders.

Therefore, from September when inspectors identify a leader who has played a key role in turning around other institutions Ofsted will send a letter to that early years leader, head teacher or college principal to inform them that their leadership has been acknowledged as exceptional. A copy of this letter will go to the Secretary of State and Ofsted's Annual Report will also feature those leaders who have been recognised in this way.

Of course, we need to work out the details of this proposal between now and September. Nevertheless, the principle is an important one. Those who are taking risks, putting themselves out and disseminating good practice beyond their own institutions need to be celebrated as exceptional reformers.

Ofsted will always empathise with those heads who are doing their best. For example, we will always support the head of a Requires Improvement (RI) school who is moving the school forward and affirm that support by letter.

Indeed, in my time as Chief Inspector I have written hundreds of such letters to head teachers whose schools are not yet good but where their leadership is making a significant difference and, within reason, we will always be flexible on the timescales for the re-inspections of RI schools where a new headteacher has recently been appointed to improve standards.

Nine out of 10 senior leaders of schools judged to require improvement say that Ofsted's inspections have helped them improve their institution – and in the majority of instances secure a good or outstanding grade on re-inspection.

Many of the leaders I've just been describing are with us today. Leaders like Kevin Prunty and Peter Stumpf who have transformed Berkeley Primary School from a RI school to an outstanding one and Bella Street, an associate head who has done the same for Ashburnham Community School. Then there is Bob Ellis, who has led Deptford Green School out of special measures and has been recognised for his effective leadership as the school continues its upward journey.

From the early years we have Mark Coles from Curzon Crescent Nursery School and Karen Ashton from Muriel Green Nursery School, who have both led their previously struggling settings to good. And from the FE sector there is Mohamed Ramzen, principal at John Ruskin

College in Croydon who has been instrumental in taking the institution from inadequate all the way to outstanding and fundamentally changing the curriculum on the way.

I know there are many other great leaders here today equally deserving of praise and only time prevents me from naming all of you.

If Ofsted is going to support the reforming leader, then we as an inspectorate have also got to demonstrate that we are capable of change and reform in order to keep pace with higher national expectations. I fully accept this but reject some of the nonsense that I have seen about Ofsted's capacity to reform.

I would urge the people who make these criticisms to open their eyes and ears – we've done nothing but reform over the last 22 years and especially over the last 3. And if you don't believe me, look at the inspection frameworks and guidance documents in 1992 and compare them to now. Look at the recent and most radical changes we have made to inspections across the different remits. For example:

- We don't tell teachers how to teach anymore – there is no Ofsted preferred style of teaching. Our classroom observations are used for only two reasons (1) to check the school's own assessment of the quality of teaching and (2) to identify the strengths and weaknesses of teaching across the school.
- Inspectors no longer grade the quality of teaching in individual lessons and no longer require teachers to produce lesson plans. It should be quite obvious whether the lesson had been planned or not.
- Inspectors do not require lengthy policy documents. They simply want to see whether the school has a concise and accurate evaluation of its own performance.
- Reports are now much simpler, clearer and more readable for parents and families.
- Ofsted has significantly increased the number of serving practitioners from good and outstanding institutions into the inspection workforce. From September, 7 out of 10 Ofsted Inspectors will be serving practitioners. Indeed, I hope by the end of my tenure 100% of all inspection teams will contain a serving leader.
- Lay inspectors with no experience of the classroom have been removed from inspection teams.
- Lastly, and most importantly, we have ended the outsourcing contracts and are bringing all schools and FE inspection in-house to provide much greater quality assurance to the inspection process.

So, Ofsted has reformed, is reforming and will continue to reform. We will always do our best to adapt to a changing educational landscape. Let me give you two further important changes we're making.

Firstly, today we are launching a common inspection framework. This will encompass registered early years settings, maintained schools, academies, non-association independent schools and further education and skills providers so that common judgements and common terminology can be used across all these sectors. A young person, parent or employer should be able to pick up any of Ofsted's inspection reports and be able to understand them quickly because the format and judgements are the same.

Secondly, I intend to set up a high-level scrutiny committee in each of Ofsted's regions, made up of HMI and senior education practitioners not involved in carrying out inspections for

Ofsted. They will assess and rule on the internal reviews of complaints about inspection. Their decision will be binding on Ofsted.

What we won't change, however, is the rigour of our inspections and our determination to shine a spotlight on underperformance. As Chief Inspector, I will continue to tell it how it is, no matter how many brick bats are thrown at Ofsted and towards me. And because I've done that we are seeing progress being made in previously poor performing places like Norfolk, Middlesbrough, Bristol, Wakefield and Barking and Dagenham.

So, let me now give you a bit more detail on the short inspections – detail which will be expanded on in the remit sessions.

Short inspections

As you all know, we are introducing these new-style inspections for schools and colleges that were judged good at their last inspection. We have been piloting the new approach in dozens of schools for the past three terms.

Make no mistake, this is a very different inspection model to what has gone before – as you will find out shortly in your break-out sessions.

The starting assumption of Her Majesty's Inspectors will be that the school or college remains good. This should engender an atmosphere in which honest, challenging, professional dialogue can take place.

Leaders will have nothing to fear from accurately identifying at the outset any weaknesses in provision and I urge leaders to be honest in the self-evaluation of their institution. HMI will be looking to see that the leadership has a clear understanding of the key areas for development - and a credible and effective plan for how to address these issues.

This opening conversation should set the tone for the rest of the inspection. The purpose of the day that follows will be to validate the leader's own assessment and to test it against data, observation and discussion with staff and students. The mantra of inspectors will be "show me what you've just said".

Inspectors will share their emerging findings with the leaders. They will give clear signals about whether things are going well or not. There should be no surprises at the end of the short inspection.

As I said right at the start, the principal judgement that inspectors will make on a short inspection is the quality of leadership. Although HMI might conclude that particular areas of the organisation and curriculum are weaker than they were before, they will give credit if effective leadership is moving the institution forward.

HMI will report their findings in a concise letter to the head or principal in a language that learners, parents and employers can understand. It will confirm that the provider remains good, explain what inspectors saw, and set out specific areas for future improvement. Much of the letter will be given over to how leadership across the school or institution is maintaining standards and building capacity for further improvements.

So, short inspections will reduce the burden of inspection without losing the rigour that parents and the public rightly expect from Ofsted. It won't be such a cliff-edge experience.

In a small proportion of cases, inspectors will form the view that they have not seen enough evidence during the day to convince them that the provision remains good. In that situation, they will convert the short inspection into a full section 5 and call in a full, comprehensive inspection team to support them.

The same conversion will apply if inspectors feel that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the school or college may now deserve an outstanding judgement.

In either instance, a decision to convert does not mean the outcome of the full inspection is pre-determined. The overall effectiveness judgement may go up or down but equally, the full inspection may confirm that the provider does indeed remain good.

Conclusion

By making these changes, I am confident that Ofsted will be able to have an even greater impact on standards and on the prospects of millions of children and learners who rely on the services we inspect and regulate.

I'd like to end by thanking you again for coming today and to pay tribute for all the great work you do. Each and every one of you should be proud of what you've achieved in improving the life chances of the generation of young people who have passed through your care these last few years.