

Dear Amanda Spielman, HM Chief Inspector of Education.

I am writing to you about OFSTED's new inspection framework and the ongoing consultations, which began in January 2019. In order to achieve ***“an approach that leaves plenty of space for diversity, but nevertheless makes it possible to recognise and discourage things that just aren't good enough.”*** (A.Spielman 2018) careful consideration must be given to the improvements required in respect of children and young people with SEND (special educational needs and disabilities).

OFSTED's 2018 annual report set out how our most vulnerable children and young people with SEND are being failed at disproportionate levels. Indeed, when discussing your 2018 annual report, you warned that provision for these pupils is disjointed and inconsistent with thousands missing out on vital support to which they are entitled.

Pupils with SEND are seven times more likely to be permanently excluded than those without SEND and pupils with an EHCP (education health and care plan) are 6 times more likely. Your report rightly echoed these concerns along with others. ***“Mental health needs are not being supported sufficiently. The quality of education, health and care (EHC) plans is far too variable. Critically, the gap in performance and outcomes for children with SEND is widening between the best and the worst local areas.”*** (OFSTED 2018)

The National Deaf Children's Society found 9 in 10 parents feared for the future of their children's education. Only 30.6% achieve a GCSE strong pass - Grade 5 or above - in both English and maths, and 57% fail to reach expected levels in reading, writing and maths in Sats tests at the end of primary. More than 70% of autistic children attend mainstream schools. Ambitious about Autism found that 60% of teachers in England do not feel they have had adequate training to teach autistic children and 35% of teachers think it has become harder to access specialist support.

However, Nick Whitaker HMI, specialist advisor for SEND says:
“Children who have SEN and/or disabilities are part of the big picture that makes up a school; there is no division here. Academic excellence, and effective SEND provision, are all part of the same picture and a school cannot be truly outstanding if it’s letting some of its pupils down.” (High Standards and Highly Inclusive 2018)

It is therefore deeply disappointing that of the 321 pieces of research used to inform OFSTED’s new inspection framework, none had SEND as the main focus. Also of concern, is that the only information around inclusion within the draft school inspection handbook is: ***“Schools should have an inclusive culture that facilitates arrangements to:***

- ***identify early those pupils who may be disadvantaged or have additional needs or barriers to learning***
- ***meet the needs of those pupils, drawing, where necessary, on more specialist support, and help those pupils to engage positively with the curriculum***
- ***ensure pupils have a positive experience of learning, and achieve positive outcomes.”*** (S234 draft handbook, OFSTED)

OFSTED seek to inspect how leaders and staff create ***“a safe, calm, orderly and positive environment in the school and the impact this has on the behaviour and attitudes of pupils (S278 draft handbook, OFSTED)”*** however this cannot possibly be realised until the rise in potentially unlawful behaviour policies, which go against the meaning of inclusion are still in force. Placing inclusion at the heart of OFSTED’s new framework, could potentially be the start of real change for our most vulnerable learners.

Inclusion benefits the whole community and will reduce pupils experiencing avoidable mental health difficulties, high rates of exclusion and unacceptably low attainments of SEND pupils. As a result, inclusion would raise academic achievements and outcomes. OFSTED seek to ***“ensure pupils have a positive experience of learning, and achieve positive outcomes.”*** Pupils who are suffering emotionally, those who do not have the vital provision necessary and those who are regularly or permanently excluded from accessing education cannot possibly achieve this aim.

There are highly inclusive schools rated 'outstanding' by OFSTED, who describe their approach as "battering with kindness" and "unconditional positive regard". A Head Teacher of one of these school says, ***"It is my drive to see every child who walks through my doors here at Parklands succeed. I am not talking about exam results; I am talking about contributing to society. Prior to my appointment at Parklands, there had been 150 exclusions in 2014 alone. In 4 years, this was cut to 1. After gaining outstanding; we now take on children from excluded settings, offering a second (and in one case a third) opportunity to succeed. There is another way! As schools we can't be allowed to off role or to exclude just to get behaviour 'good.' Where do these children go? What expectations of contributing to society are we making? Follow positivity and understand the needs of the children so we can make society better for everyone."*** (Chris Dyson)

Inclusion and education in mainstream schools is a right for all, however implemented with the correctly and with the right intent, it benefits, involves and includes everyone within the school community. There are numerous ways Inspectors can encourage and ensure schools are constantly reviewing, adapting, improving their inclusive practice. Many of these are cost free, they simply take a will to listen and adapt.

Parents from all regions are eager for this to become a reality. Will OFSTED meet with a group of us? Will you work with us as partners and give us the opportunity to help shape how the new framework is put into practice in a highly inclusive way?