

OFSTIN

OFFICE FOR STANDARDS IN INSPECTION

OFSTIN calls for the following changes to the inspection system:

- replace the present unreliable private 'contracting' system with a professional, qualified and trained national inspectorate
- give schools the responsibility for assessing their own performance and progress while inspectors monitor, and report on, their success
- require inspectors to discuss their judgements with teachers and to offer advice and assistance to schools as part of inspection
- restore teachers' professional responsibility for deciding upon effective methods of teaching rather than being told how to teach by the inspectorate
- spend much less taxpayers' money on inspecting schools and much more on helping them to improve themselves, ensuring that the inspection system provides value for money
- make the national schools' inspectorate accountable to an independent body

Ofsted says that it improves schools by inspecting them. Yet it is teachers, working day in and day out, who make their schools better. Inspectors report. Teachers act.

Inspection can help teachers to do their work more effectively. But it can do so only if it is modest and collaborative in the way it operates.

Ofsted draws too much attention to itself. It has made the press, the public and often schools themselves more concerned with occasional inspections than with the continuous, but less newsworthy, process of doing a better job of serving pupils.

Ofsted claims greater expertise and authority than it possesses in reality. Its procedures are distracting. These force teachers to give too much time and energy to preparing for the artificial rituals of inspection. This is time and energy taken from the far more valuable task of improving their own teaching and the quality of their schools.

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Most people with knowledge and understanding of education agree on the need for these six changes. Their importance is shown in the report of a recently-completed independent evaluation of the Ofsted system, led by Professor Maurice Kogan of Brunel University's Department of Government and Professor Margaret Maden, Director of Keele University's Centre for Successful Schools.

Its conclusions include the points listed on the next page on the need for:

● A NATIONAL INSPECTORATE

at least 14,000 inspectors work for over 240 separate 'contractors'
with so many (mostly part-time) inspectors, their procedures and judgements vary significantly
teachers frequently comment on inadequate knowledge, experience and expertise among inspectors
the quality of inspectors is declining

● SCHOOLS TO ASSESS THEIR OWN PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS

Ofsted inspections often distract schools from their own efforts to evaluate and improve themselves
Ofsted reports generally tell schools little or nothing that they do not already know, sometimes miss weaknesses which the school knows about, are usually not very useful as guides to school development - and make little difference to schools' progress
researchers have not found convincing evidence that Ofsted inspection improves schools
self-evaluation (monitored by external inspectors) is proving effective in further education colleges, in Scottish schools and in many other parts of the world
setting their own targets and assessing how well they are meeting these is essential so that schools can :
 recapture their confidence and self-esteem
 reverse their growing reliance on what Ofsted defines as the correct way to do things
 continue to develop fresh and up-to-date ways of teaching and learning that suit our rapidly-changing world

● INSPECTORS TO DISCUSS AND ADVISE

inspectors' judgements are too often based on factual mistakes or on misunderstanding what a teacher is doing in a lesson
teachers are, on the whole, disappointed by the amount and quality of comment they receive from inspectors on their class teaching
teachers want their teaching skills to benefit from inspection and are frustrated that Ofsted prohibits inspectors from giving advice

● RESTORING TEACHERS' RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR TEACHING

the Ofsted inspection system is imposing centrally-dictated ways of running schools and of teaching
Ofsted inspection is hostile to alternative ways of doing things
the system discourages schools and teachers from thinking for themselves; instead it encourages them to become dependent on instructions from Ofsted
as a result, teachers are in danger of losing the confidence and professionalism which makes for exciting schools and good teaching

● ACHIEVING VALUE FOR MONEY

Ofsted appears to be the only public body of its size and importance that is not subject to a rigorous analysis and a report on the costs of its operation
the research team calculates that the true inclusive cost of inspection for an average primary school is over £26,000 and for an average secondary school is nearly £66,000
the money spent on inspection is more than is spent on the in-service training and development of teachers

● MAKING THE INSPECTORATE ACCOUNTABLE

because it is carrying out a duty on behalf of the public, the inspection service should be better controlled by being made fully accountable to an independent organisation respected by government and the public
because it is funded by taxpayers' money, the inspection service should develop a better and more complete system of financial accounting
because of its obligation to natural justice, the inspection service should operate a thorough and credible appeals procedure



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OFSTIN is the name adopted by a voluntary unfunded group of educationists who began to meet in 1996 because of their serious concerns about the Ofsted system of school inspection.

Ofstin aims to secure the highest standards of inspection and support and the most effective methods of school improvement and accountability.

Ofstin provides a forum which keeps the powers and practices of Ofsted under review, enables teachers and others to express their views on inspection and fosters dialogue between inspectors and the inspected.

Ofstin has:

- conducted a national conference and published two reports of its findings
- organised six regional seminars on inspection
- commissioned an independent review of the current inspection of schools with the backing of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, published in January 1999
- given written and oral evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee inquiry into Ofsted
- produced regular newsletters for its subscription members

The inspection of schools is a matter of vital importance. Ofstin invites all those affected by inspection to support our activities and investigations. Membership (for £10 a year) is open to all. For further details, contact the Ofstin secretary: Caroline Westgate, 9 Quatre Bras, Hexham, Northumberland NE46 3JY
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