

[Home](#) > [Education, training and skills](#) > [Inspections and performance of education providers](#)
> [Inspection and performance of schools](#)

Speech

Amanda Spielman's speech to the North Yorkshire Coast Opportunity Area

Ofsted's Chief Inspector discussed her visits to 3 schools in the North Yorkshire Coast Opportunity Area and the new inspection framework consultation.

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From: [Ofsted](#) and [Amanda Spielman](#)

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Good afternoon.

Thank you for inviting me to be here today and thank you all for coming. It is great to be part of such an exciting programme of national speakers

and to be in such good company. I know that Alison Peacock, Russell Hobby and Bobby Seagull have all spoken here previously – 3 people who really want to help young people acquire the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in the world.

It is always good to be out talking to professionals about how we can provide the best education for our children. And it is so important that these discussions happen right across the country. The conversation is not the same in every place – the challenges, the difficulties, the priorities. We must make sure that voices are heard from all directions. That is why I try to get out and speak to teachers and leaders working in different contexts, and why I was so pleased to be invited here today.

I spent today visiting 3 schools across the opportunity area.

I went to Gladstone Road Primary in Scarborough: so much going on, though the highlight was the year 4s carried away with enthusiasm about the Greek myths they had been studying.

I went, by way of contrast, from a large primary to a very small primary: Castleton. I learned about the shared leadership the MAT supports to help isolated small schools thrive. An interesting example was the work they were doing on their phonics programme, using a particular programme with real fidelity. And here at Caedmon College, I had an amazing session with Caedmon and Eskdale students. They asked the kind of questions that were incredibly interesting to think about and answer. More generally, there was a sense of a whole new model of partnership between this school and Eskdale.

There is clearly a huge amount happening which has only been possible because of the commitment from you and your schools.

The new inspection framework consultation

Last October, at the SCHOOLS North East summit 75 miles up the coast in Newcastle, [I talked about the reasoning and research behind the proposals for our new framework](#). And the need for inspection to get a handle on the real substance of education. Six months on, and we are almost ready to publish our [new framework](#).

This has been a genuine consultation – by which I mean we have encouraged debate, before and during the consultation and have not closed our ears to contrary and challenging views.

We have held more than 250 events up and down the country and have encouraged as many people as possible to respond online. And this effort has paid off. We have received more than 15,000 responses – both online, via email and from organisations - an Ofsted record.

Thank you to everyone here who responded.

It has been clear from the national conversation that people are very positive about our plans to create a quality of education judgement. This is central to putting the curriculum, the substance of education, back at the heart of professional dialogue in schools and colleges.

I was particularly pleased to read the response from your colleagues in the north east. Schools North East consulted directly with over 300 school leaders and they were 'near unanimous' – their words not mine – in agreeing that overall the new curriculum-led framework is a positive move. More than 90% felt that the new framework will offer north east schools the 'opportunity to give a better account of themselves'.

Disadvantage

And this is a very important point. I said last year that I do not subscribe to the view that schools in the north are somehow disproportionately failing their students. I stand by that. There has been talk over the years of a north/south divide in educational standards that I believe is greatly over-simplified and often misunderstood. I know that you all work extremely hard to give your pupils the best possible education, and that you do it in a complex and challenging environment.

When children arrive at primary school, some are further along than others. You will all know the much-cited findings about language disadvantage for children from poorer families. Pupils with a limited vocabulary are held back not just in English, but right across the curriculum.

Then there's the money pressure – as I said in a letter to the [Public Accounts Committee last October](#), as funding growth has slowed in recent years, school leaders have had to work harder to balance their budgets and we see this necessitating some difficult choices. The fact that we haven't seen the effects flow through into inspection outcomes reflects the efforts you have put in to maintain standards of education.

And there are the wider societal problems – drug and alcohol issues, homelessness and youth violence. Where services from other agencies, such as local authority prevention and early help are reduced, it only serves to increase the pressure on schools and put a further strain on your resources.

These issues will be familiar to schools up and down the country, but weigh particularly heavily in schools that serve disadvantaged communities.

Accountability

Some people ask whether it is fair that schools are inspected against the same criteria, regardless of the communities they serve. On this point I am very clear. Our job is to report on the quality of education as we see it in each school we inspect. The moment we allow for a different quality of education based on demographics is the moment we let go of the idea of equality of opportunity.

That is not the same as saying that teachers in these areas are putting in any less effort or that the leadership is worse. There is no doubt that these schools have a harder job to do than others to achieve an equivalent quality of education. That's why the Pupil Premium exists to direct more resources to the schools with the toughest job to do. I have nothing but admiration for the teachers who make it their mission to tackle disadvantage. But the overall effectiveness of a school is not an effort grade and if it became so, it would be the children who suffer.

The changes that we are proposing for inspection, however, should make it easier to recognise and reward schools in areas of high disadvantage that do the right thing by your pupils.

There are 2 linked themes that run all the way through the [draft framework](#): the substance of education, and integrity. We are proposing to remove the current 'outcomes' and 'teaching, learning and assessment' judgements, and replace them with a new 'quality of education' judgement. This should rebalance inspection to look more closely at the substance of education: what is taught and how it is taught, with test and exam outcomes looked at in that context, rather than in isolation.

Outcomes clearly matter and will of course continue to be considered, but in the context of what is being taught. We all know that too much weight on performance measures alone can lead to a degree of distortion, both in what is taught and not taught, and in other aspects of how a school is managed. We also know that those who come to education with a disadvantage of any kind are more likely to be affected when these distortions happen.

Focussing on the substance of young people's learning and putting the curriculum back at the heart of our inspections will change that.

Our [curriculum research](#) did not show any clear link between the deprivation levels of a school's community and a school's curriculum quality. And by the way, I wasn't at all surprised by that. This suggests that removing the very data-driven outcomes judgement and emphasising overall quality of education will help us to reward schools in challenging circumstances that are raising standards through strong curricula, with real equity. Internal data and short inspections

I know that there are some concerns about our proposal to stop using schools' internal attainment and progress data as evidence during inspections. There are some who feel this will place more weight on historic results. This really isn't right.

Remember, we are proposing to take out the outcomes judgement, so that historic performance data will already carry less weight. If your previous results were disappointing, but you've already started to make your curriculum more coherent, to increase your teachers' subject knowledge, and to assess and refine your curriculum and teaching as you go, that may be more important than what happened a year ago. Schools can still collect and use assessment information – that's up to you - but this should be done in a way that has real value to you as teachers and leaders, and not to satisfy Ofsted.

We also consulted on increasing the time for section 8 inspections of good schools to 2 days. We have had a lot of questions from the smallest schools about this, saying it feels like overkill. For them, it would be almost the same as a full section 5 inspection. And so we are thinking carefully about that feedback as we put the final touches to the new framework.

Workload

On the subject of teacher workload I am conscious that any change of emphasis from Ofsted gets a lot of attention and can lead to speculation about what Ofsted really wants.

So, let me take this opportunity to put a few things straight.

There is no need for anyone to think they must develop a new curriculum, or design everything themselves from scratch. The early years foundation stage framework, the national curriculum and the specifications for GCSEs, A-levels and other qualifications can carry much of the load. And there are many other options out there. So, for example, if you are implementing the national curriculum, across the full range of subjects, in a well-structured programme of work, you are already in the right place.

Similarly, there is no Ofsted approved curriculum. The [second phase of our curriculum research](#) showed quite clearly that it's possible to educate well with different curricular approaches – approaches that cross any perceived ideological divide. The framework has the clarity about the need for coherence and good sequencing, but doesn't prescribe a model.

Finally, there are people who make their money from telling schools that they know what it is that Ofsted is looking for. You should not have to hire consultants to help you prepare for inspection under the new framework.

I am firmly of the view that a focus on substance will help to tackle excessive workload. It will move inspection more towards being a conversation about what actually happens in schools. Those who are bold and ambitious, and run their schools with integrity will be rewarded as a result.

High expectations

A high-quality education, built around a rich curriculum, is a matter of social justice. And I know that's at the centre of the work that you are doing in this opportunity area.

Under Sir Martin's leadership, you have chosen to focus your efforts on a small number of goals. In your choices, there are clear parallels with our renewed focus on the curriculum. For example, you have identified early years education and literacy as priority areas. I've just been hearing about embedded speech and language therapists in schools. We know that time in nursery and primary school is the best opportunity to tip the educational playing field back towards the level. That is why we have emphasised, in the [draft schools handbook](#), the importance of reading frequently to young children, and of introducing new vocabulary in contexts that stimulate their understanding and thinking.

I've heard a lot today about the things that you are proud of. The fact that you have already achieved your 2020 target for pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics screening check, which is encouraging you to raise your sights. The large number of events that took place in and out of schools for Maths Month. As a mathematician myself, this is music to my ears. Too often we allow the 'I can't do maths' mentality to prevail: it would be wonderful never to hear that phrase uttered as if it were a badge of honour again. And I heard about your creative approaches to addressing recruitment and retention, including helping your existing talented leaders to develop further, your campaign to attract people to the area and your partnership with Teach First.

There is so much to be positive about. You understand the context in which you work, but you know that what all children need, regardless of their background, is a good curriculum and good teaching. I hope that you feel that the new framework will help you to focus on what matters.

Conclusion

I want to leave some time to get to your questions, so the last thing I'll do is to thank you again for inviting me here today. Thank you to so many of you for showing me the work of the opportunity area, and also thanks to all of you who have already helped us shape the [draft framework](#) through

your engagement.

And if we get this right, we'll be fulfilling a goal of our own, which matters enormously to me: carrying on the long HMI tradition of being a real force for improvement.

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