

Raising standards, improving lives: The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) Strategic Plan 2014 to 2016

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361

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Contents

Introduction	4
Our role	6
Inspection	6
Regulation	7
Reporting on our findings and disseminating good practice	7
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector	7
Our structure	8
People	8
Resources	8
Our values	9
Our plans for 2014 to 2016	9
Better outcomes	10
Better inspection and regulation	12
Better public involvement	14
Better ways of working	16

Introduction

Since its creation as the schools inspectorate in 1992, Ofsted has used its power and influence to improve the lives of millions of children and learners. The Ofsted of today has a much wider remit, including childcare, children's social care and further education and skills, but its core purpose and values remain the same. Ofsted is here to raise standards through rigorous inspection and regulation and to report without fear or favour on what it finds. That is why we joined Ofsted and why we are so proud to have led the inspectorate over the last few years.

This Strategic Plan sets out Ofsted's priorities until 2016. As you will see, we are proposing evolution rather than revolution. Our intention is to build on the changes that we have been making to ensure that Ofsted focuses on the best possible outcomes for children and learners, and improves the quality of inspection while ensuring that its reduced resources are used to best effect.

Above all, Ofsted will continue to focus on improving the lives of children and learners, and in particular the disadvantaged and vulnerable. Last year's report 'Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on' was testimony to the fact that Ofsted has always had this concern. But it also served to highlight the changing pattern of disadvantage in England and the need for an independent and watchful eye.¹

The report showed that, whereas in the past England's urban centres were areas of concern, attention now needs to focus on small pockets of underachievement in otherwise affluent areas, as well as underperformance in much of the East of England and many coastal towns. Over the coming years, it is vital that Ofsted is able to identify and help address such variation. Ofsted's regional structure, introduced in 2013, will be key to this. As explained in this Plan, Ofsted's eight Regional Directors will use inspection to highlight underperformance, hold those responsible to account and identify and share what is working well elsewhere. Ofsted will continue to play a vital role as an agent of improvement.

There must be equally high ambitions for children and learners across all areas of the country, something that Ofsted has stressed through its conviction that only a good standard of provision can ever be good enough. We signalled this clearly for schools and colleges in 2012 with the replacement of the 'satisfactory' grade with 'requires improvement'. This had a galvanising effect on these sectors, as shown by the rates of improvement reported in our most recent Annual Report.² As this Plan sets out, Ofsted now needs to make sure that its judgements on early years and social care providers are similarly unequivocal, helping to raise standards in services caring for the country's youngest and most vulnerable children.

¹ *Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on* (130155), Ofsted, June 2013; <http://ofsted.gov.uk/resources/unseen-children-access-and-achievement-20-years>.

² *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2012/13*, Ofsted, December 2013; www.ofsted.gov.uk/annualreport1213.

This Strategic Plan also signals that, alongside this focus on weaker providers, Ofsted intends to introduce more proportionate, risk-based inspections for 'good' services. We want to reduce the burden of inspection on the best providers, while still being able to identify problems before they are crystallised in declining examination results or other performance data. We will consult widely on any changes but whatever shape the arrangements take, we will make sure that they result in parents and learners having access to the information they need.

Any inspection arrangements that are introduced will only be as effective as the quality of Ofsted's inspection workforce. This Strategic Plan points to the important changes that are being made in this area. In May 2014, we announced our intention to contract directly with school and further education additional inspectors from September 2015 rather than continuing to use third party inspection service providers as is currently the case. This may seem a rather technical change but it is an important one, which will give Ofsted much more direct control over the selection, quality assurance and training of the inspection workforce. It will also open the way to increased flexibility, meaning that Ofsted will be much fleet of foot when there is a need to change how, where or when inspections take place.

We are confident that this, along with the increased use of HMI and a greater proportion of seconded outstanding practitioners, will help ensure that Ofsted remains credible. Ofsted needs the wisdom and experience of the very best practitioners and those it inspects need to be assured that the very best are coming to inspect them.

As you will see from this Strategic Plan, our ambition for Ofsted is great and will be challenging both for ourselves and for those we inspect and regulate. However, that comes with the territory. Ofsted is here to ensure that children, young people and older learners receive the excellent care and education the public has every right to expect. It is right to expect the best of those Ofsted inspects and for these providers to expect the best from Ofsted. Ultimately, Ofsted, like those that it inspects, is the public's servant and stands accountable to them.

Ofsted has an extensive impact that is disproportionate to its limited funding, and we have had significant reductions to our budget over the last few years. It has not been easy, but front-line inspection has largely been protected from cuts by introducing better ways of working in back office support services. If Ofsted's budget is to reduce still further in the coming years, we will have some tough decisions to make about how and who to inspect. The values and priorities set out in this Plan will inform those decisions in order to ensure that Ofsted can continue to drive improvement and fulfil its purpose of 'raising standards and improving lives'.

Sir Michael Wilshaw, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector
Baroness Sally Morgan, Chair, Ofsted Board

Our role

Ofsted inspects and regulates to promote excellence in education and skills for learners of all ages, and in the care of children and young people, thereby raising standards and improving lives.

We fulfil our role by:

- listening to those using services, including parents, and acting on their views when deciding who, when and how to inspect
- collecting first-hand evidence based on what we observe, to inform fair, authoritative and professional judgements
- using expert inspectors who can credibly challenge providers to do better
- reporting on what we find in a clear and accessible way, recognising good practice and being clear about what providers need to do to improve
- publishing transparent and comprehensive information about the quality of individual providers, local areas and national standards to help inform user choice and to support those with governance accountabilities
- publishing what inspectors look for during inspections so that those providing services and those using them know what is expected.

Inspection

We inspect the following services:

- maintained schools and academies
- some independent schools
- early years and childcare
- children's centres
- children's homes
- family centres
- adoption and fostering services and agencies
- Cafcass (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service)
- children's services in local authorities
- school improvement services in local authorities
- initial teacher education
- further education colleges and 14 to 19 provision
- a wide range of work-based learning and skills training
- adult and community learning
- probation services
- education and training in prisons and other secure establishments.

Regulation

We regulate a range of early years and children's social care services by checking that people, premises and the services provided are suitable to care for children and young people. We issue licences to childcare and children's social care providers that meet the required standards. If we find that providers are not meeting the required standards, we use our enforcement powers to ensure that they make the necessary improvements. If they are unable to meet the required standards, we act in the interests of the children and young people in their care and suspend or cancel their licence to operate.

Reporting on our findings and disseminating good practice

We analyse the findings from our inspection and regulatory work and publish reports to highlight areas of strength and weakness in the sectors we work within. We collect evidence in different ways, including statistical analysis, surveys and thematic inspections on specific areas of interest.

We publish sector-specific annual reports that summarise our findings throughout the year. We also publish eight regional reports that comment on our findings in each of our regions.

Periodically, we publish in-depth reports on specific topics, including the quality of provision in some subjects. Where we identify good practice, we publish case studies and share our findings in seminars and conferences.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, is statutorily responsible for Ofsted's inspection and regulatory work. He is able to draw on the full range of our inspection findings to report on the quality of education, children's services and skills, both locally and nationally. He is responsible to Parliament for the organisation, staffing and management of Ofsted, and for ensuring the efficient and effective use of our resources.

Our structure

Ofsted consists of eight regions across England, each led by a Regional Director who is responsible for the quality of inspection and the improvement of providers in their region. Each Regional Director reports directly to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw. The Regional Directors lead teams of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) to promote improvement through inspection.

People

Ofsted's inspection workforce is made up of both employed and contracted inspectors. Around 2,700 individuals are available as contracted inspectors through our inspection service providers and we directly employ 1,274 employees across England. In May 2014, we announced our intention to directly contract with all school and further education inspectors from September 2015.

Ofsted's approach to its people is based on developing skilled and motivated employees who take pride in their work, find new ways of working and take responsibility for their actions. We recruit, train and promote them according to their ability to fulfil the requirements of the post. We are committed to the learning and development of all our staff in order to improve our performance and to make more of a difference for children and learners.

Inspectors are home-based and they receive administrative, professional and technical support from our offices in Bristol, Nottingham and Manchester. We are proud that we are one of the leading employers of home-based employees in the public sector and of the high-quality information technology services on which they depend.

Resources

We will continue to take action to achieve better value for money. We have already made significant reductions in our expenditure from £200 million in 2010–11 and are planning to make further reductions to operate within the allocated £142 million by 2015–16:

2010–11 baseline	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15	2015–16
£200m	£176m	£167m	£160m	£162m	£142m

A significant proportion of these savings to date have come from reductions to our back office and inspection support services and we have been able to protect to a great extent our front-line inspection work. However, while we will continue to look for efficiencies, any further reductions to our budget would necessarily mean changes to how and who we inspect and regulate, much of which is underpinned by legislation. When considering where these reductions would fall, we will take into account the values and priorities set out in this plan.

Our values

Our values guide everything we do. They apply to everyone in Ofsted and all those who work on our behalf.

Putting children and learners first

We act in the interests of individual children, young people and learners of all ages, whatever their background and with a particular focus on outcomes for the vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Achieving excellence

We focus on how standards can be raised and outcomes improved. We always try to 'do good as we go', and have high expectations of ourselves and of those who provide the services we inspect and regulate.

Behaving with integrity

We work without fear or favour and report on the basis of inspection and regulation evidence. We listen and respond to what people tell us about the services we inspect and regulate and about the way we work.

Valuing people and their differences

We promote equal opportunities and take action to help ensure that improvement is made where it is most needed.

Our plans for 2014 to 2016

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 requires us to carry out our work in ways that encourage the services we inspect and regulate to improve, be user-focused, and be efficient and effective.

In line with this, over the next two years, we will support **Better outcomes** by focusing on the following **priorities**:

- Better inspection and regulation
- Better public involvement
- Better ways of working.

Better outcomes

We will raise expectations so that service providers focus on delivering the best possible outcomes for children and learners, making the system ever better, safer and more responsive to children's and learners' needs.

What we know

- International tests and measures suggest that the UK's education and care services perform well, but not well enough compared with the world's leading nations. Given the rapidly improving performance of some other countries, our standards need to rise faster if today's children are to enjoy high-quality qualifications and skills that will enable them to compete globally in the future.
- Overall, standards continue to rise across the country, reflecting the growing expectation across the country that 'only good is good enough'. However, we continue to report that some areas and regions lag behind, leading to numerous children and learners not benefiting from an equal footing in life. Outcomes for children from low-income families, particularly those with White British backgrounds, continue to be an issue. More generally, children and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are not receiving all the support they need to break the cycle of disadvantage.
- The education landscape has changed considerably over the last years, notably with the wider adoption of school academies and free schools, as well as the introduction of childminder agencies and the growing importance of nursery and pre-school chains. While we have adapted our inspection and regulation to ensure comprehensive scrutiny of our different remits, the public expects any provider working with children and young people to be robustly held to account.
- There is widespread recognition that strong leadership is crucial in driving improvement in education and care. However, there is too much local and regional variation in the quality of the services provided, leading to difficulties in getting the best people to work in areas that need the most help. Good people do not always stay and the turnover of new teachers and Directors of Children's Services is high.
- Following independent reviews by Cathy Nutbrown and Eileen Munro, there have been long-term commitments to raising the calibre, expertise and prestige of the workforce in early years and social care. Attracting skilled professionals to teaching, particularly in the most deprived areas, is also a focus across the education sector. This means that the education and training of professionals in all these sectors must be consistently good and focused on the right things.

What we will do

We will:

- report impartially on the quality of education, care and skills, and on areas of concern and high public interest, notably regarding demographic and regional variations of provision, helping the government to develop effective policies and use resources more effectively
- ensure that the best possible outcomes for all children and learners, irrespective of their backgrounds, are at the heart of Ofsted's work and that the service providers we inspect and regulate have appropriately high expectations
- adapt our inspection and regulation effectively to the existing and upcoming changes within the sectors and communicate these changes consistently, while maintaining focus on the changing accountability landscape
- provide clear, impartial and comparable information on service providers to assist parents and users with their choices, ensuring that their expectations play a key role in encouraging informed and accountable leadership
- ensure that we consider safeguarding matters as part of all our inspection and regulatory activity, driving further consideration for these matters across all the remits that we inspect and regulate
- continue to monitor, challenge and support providers that are not yet good to ensure that they are improving, ensuring that progress is acknowledged quickly and that action is taken if no improvement occurs.

During 2014–16, we will track and report on:

- key issues relating to the remits we inspect, including outcomes for different groups of children and learners, including the disadvantaged and most able
- the performance of our regions, including the delivery of regional priorities and improvements in outcomes at a local level
- matters related to safeguarding, including what we find on inspection and through our regulatory work
- progress of improvement in local authorities who provide services that are less than 'good' to vulnerable children.

Better inspection and regulation

We will continue to improve the way we inspect and regulate to target underperformance and drive improvement for children and learners from all backgrounds.

What we know

- Underperforming providers benefit from frequent inspection and monitoring. Inspectors can support and challenge them both in identifying what they need to do to improve and in checking that they are taking appropriate action.
- Replacing the 'satisfactory' with the 'requires improvement' judgement has focused minds in each of the remits we inspect. It is now clear that only a good or better standard is acceptable. The 'outstanding' rating is highly prized and providers use our brand with pride to promote their services.
- The best providers value inspection as an external challenge that helps to sustain and improve performance. They want to share what they are doing so others can learn from it. They value regular engagement with the inspectorate.
- Inspection and regulation are valued when carried out by skilled inspectors who are clear about where improvement is necessary and who recognise good and outstanding practice. The introduction of increasing numbers of current practitioners into our inspection workforce is having a positive impact.
- Our regional structure means that we are closer to what is happening on the ground. Regional Directors and Senior HMI have clear responsibility for the quality of inspection and Ofsted's improvement work in their region. They are able to gather local intelligence as well as identify and tackle local issues as they arise.

What we will do

We will:

- drive improvement by embedding the 'requires improvement' judgement across each of our remits, with appropriate monitoring activity to ensure that providers are taking the necessary steps to become good
- move towards a more risk-based inspection model to ensure that our efforts are proportionate and that we can identify slippage quickly and recognise rapid improvement in performance
- carry out reforms to strengthen inspection and/or regulation in all our remits to ensure that our standards are high and are consistently applied, and that robust and proportionate action is taken where these standards are not met
- place children and learners at the centre of our inspections and focus on whether they are safe and achieving all they can, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds

- further develop the integrated inspection model for children's services, working closely with other inspectorates, to put the user at the centre of inspection, to develop multi-agency approaches to complex issues and to establish clear responsibility for improvement.

During 2014–16, we will track and report on:

- the volume and quality of our inspection and regulatory activity
- the standards achieved by those we inspect and regulate at a provider level, regionally and nationally
- what those we inspect and regulate tell us about the quality and impact of our work
- the outcomes of multi-agency inspection work.

Better public involvement

We will do more to ensure that users' views and experiences inform how and when we inspect and regulate, and that we provide the information they need to make choices and hold services to account.

What we know

- The public has ever higher expectations of being able to quickly and easily compare services and provide feedback on their experiences, aided by increasingly accessible technological platforms.
- Involving those who use the services we inspect and regulate – children and learners, parents, carers and employers – in deciding when and how we act is vitally important. We need to continue to improve the way we interact with these groups to ensure that we learn from their views and experiences.
- Our online Parent View and Learner View tools have been widely used, but we need to increase their usage and improve the way we engage with employers, including through the development of Employer View.
- Inspection and regulation generate a unique and powerful pool of information and intelligence. Our new online Data View tool has enabled us to provide access to our findings in a more accessible and user-friendly manner. We need to build on this success and on the data dashboards for schools and further education and skills providers to help empower those using services and those holding them to account.
- When developing the way we inspect and regulate, it is important that we work with those providing services to ensure that we act in a proportionate way that targets underperformance and celebrates the best providers.
- Inspection reports help parents and carers, adult learners, employers and local authorities to choose services. However, while we have made our reports clearer, more needs to be done to ensure that they are accessible to the widest audience possible.
- Ofsted's website is one of the most visited of any public sector information services. However, we need to continue to explore different communication channels to make the information that we generate ever more accessible.

What we will do

We will:

- ensure that our publications, especially inspection reports and monitoring letters, are clear, concise and published without delay, and that these publications reach as wide an audience as possible
- make the wide-ranging information we hold about the quality of the services we inspect and regulate ever more accessible, by improving and extending successful systems, such as Data View and the Schools Governors Dashboard

- make our inspection and regulation ever more relevant by seeking the views of all those we inspect and regulate and by increasing the involvement of those using services during inspections
- further enable users to provide feedback on the quality of providers between inspections by strengthening our digital platforms (Parent View, Learner View and Employer View) across our remits
- make better use of online technology and social media when making information available and engaging with people about our work
- communicate effectively about how we inspect and regulate so those that provide services are clear about how we work, and any inspection myths or misconceptions are quickly resolved
- act swiftly and in accordance with legislation when a member of the public makes a formal complaint about a school or a service that we regulate or raises a safeguarding issue affecting children and vulnerable people.

During 2014–16, we will track and report on:

- what users of the services we inspect and regulate tell us about how we work
- the usage of different aspects of our website, including our social media presence
- the accessibility of information on providers
- engagement through consultations on our work, including reference to views on our regulatory impact.

Better ways of working

We will use resources in an effective, efficient and sustainable way, with a focus on improving our front-line inspection and regulatory work and providing value for money.

What we know

- The regional structure we introduced in 2013 means that our Regional Directors and HMI are closer to what is happening in their local areas. We have been quicker to identify and tackle issues in both the quality of our inspections and the local services we inspect. We now need to build on this work to further embed its benefits.
- Continually improving our inspection workforce is fundamental for Ofsted's success. We need to continue to improve the quality and credibility of our workforce, as well as ensure that all inspectors continue to meet high standards. We have also taken action to improve the performance of additional inspectors, and have announced plans to bring the selection, training and quality assurance of school and further education additional inspectors under our direct control. We are also continuing our efforts to increase the proportion of inspectors who are currently practitioners and to end the practice of using inspectors who are not qualified teachers.
- We have made significant reductions to the cost of inspection and regulation, while protecting our front-line inspection services wherever possible. We have streamlined our processes throughout our corporate areas, introducing a leaner structure with fewer layers of management and empowering employees to make decisions. We have also worked hard to improve staff attendance and productivity. However, like all government departments, we need to continue to review our work to make sure we provide the most efficient service possible.
- Effective management and development of our people is at the heart of our work. Our continual drive to improve is recognised by our Investors in People silver accreditation. We are committed to promoting equality and valuing people's differences, and have made real improvements in the way we work, in line with our Equalities Action Plan. We are also a leading employer of home-based workers. All our inspection workforce and increasing numbers of our support employees work from home and are supported by effective information services.

What we will do

We will:

- embed Ofsted's regional structure, to galvanise and expand on early successes and to build greater local intelligence and strengthened relationships with key partners in the regions

- regularly evaluate the way we inspect and regulate, learning from and sharing best practice domestically and internationally
- promote innovation through the introduction of more streamlined processes and making better use of technology to develop high-quality services
- strive to attract and keep the best people in their field, and review our contracting arrangements, operating model and People Strategy, focusing on recruiting people with the right experience, skills and competencies and from a range of diverse backgrounds
- develop the skills and knowledge of all Ofsted employees through highly effective and tailored training programmes and internal communications to ensure that our inspection and support functions have the capability to carry out their roles efficiently and effectively
- develop and promote a new range of flexible career pathways, working in partnership with the sectors we inspect to increase our use of secondees as an important part of our inspection workforce, ensuring that the organisation benefits from their recent experience and that they are able to share their knowledge of inspection on returning to their employers
- consider how we should operate as an organisation to both promote a positive and professional culture where engagement, accountability and a willingness to challenge are encouraged, while delivering value for money and ensuring that we put the best interests of children and learners first.

During 2014–16, we will track and report on:

- the make-up of our inspection workforce, including the proportion of inspectors who are serving practitioners
- our costs, including against relevant benchmarks for business support teams
- human resources information, including information from the Civil Service People Survey and our progress on meeting our Equalities Action Plan targets
- our progress against the government's sustainable development targets.