

House of Common Education and Skills Select Committee

The Work of OFSTED

26 October 2004

1. NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to make a written submission to the Select Committee on the work of OFSTED.
2. NASUWT is the largest union representing teachers and headteachers in primary, secondary and special schools, sixth form colleges and FE colleges throughout the UK.

School Workforce Remodelling

3. The impact of inspection on teacher workload remains a major concern. NASUWT has undertaken numerous surveys that demonstrate that the OFSTED inspection process remains one of the greatest sources of additional workload and anxiety both for teachers and for headteachers. Stress and the workload created by preparing for inspection have a major impact on the professional and personal lives of teachers.
4. It is, therefore, vital that the new inspection regime takes full account of the provisions of the National Agreement '*Raising Standards and Tackling Workload*'.
5. The fundamental principle behind the National Agreement is remodelling of the school workforce to free teachers from tasks that do not require their professional skills and expertise, enabling them to focus on teaching and learning to continue to raise standards in schools. The new inspection

framework must recognise the provisions, aims and objectives of the Agreement and the contractual and regulatory changes that have taken place.

6. OFSTED must ensure that the workforce remodelling agenda and the new statutory duties for schools are firmly embedded in the inspection process. The new inspection framework should require inspectors to make judgements about the extent to which a school is fulfilling these responsibilities and implementing the Agreement. OFSTED also has a key role to play in monitoring implementation of the Agreement.
7. It is essential that all inspectors understand the National Agreement and its implications for the way in which schools are working. Although the National Remodelling Team (NRT) has provided briefings for registered inspectors, OFSTED should provide mandatory training and guidance for all inspectors on the Agreement and OFSTED's role in inspecting it. Without this the confidence of schools to use support staff in the roles provided for in the Agreement will be undermined as they will neither be convinced that inspectors understand the provisions and objectives of the Agreement, nor that they will concentrate only on judging the effectiveness of schools' management of arrangements for raising standards.
8. NASUWT has a fundamental concern that the rationale for and purpose of school inspection remains unclear. These issues must be clarified before the new inspection framework is implemented.

The new inspection regime must:

- place a minimal burden on schools;
- not require schools to do any preparation for an inspection;
- make use of the wealth of data that is already available. Schools should not be required to prepare or collate any data for the purposes of inspection;

- take full account of the requirements and implications of the National Agreement *'Raising Standards and Tackling Workload'*;
- be focused and brief. Inspection should focus on the school's management arrangements and processes, and the outcomes for pupils and staff in terms of efficiency, equity and effectiveness;
- shift from being a punitive regime to one that is supportive and focuses on helping schools to improve;
- provide fair judgements in which the profession and the public can have confidence;
- operate in unity with the other systems of inspection, performance management, advice and support, including those carried out by HMIs and LEAs. To achieve this, the revision of the inspection regime must form part of a wider review and evaluation of the inspection, monitoring and support arrangements for schools;
- not duplicate other systems of monitoring, performance management and support.

School Self-Evaluation

9. NASUWT is committed fully to the principles that underpin the Government's New Relationship with Schools (NRwS) strategy. If implemented as intended it should enhance the professional status of teachers, free schools and teachers from the unnecessary bureaucracy that has stifled their professionalism, creativity and effectiveness and introduce a more sensible framework of accountability.
10. One of the key components of NRwS is the proposal to reduce the burdens of school inspection by placing a greater emphasis on the use of self-evaluation systems in schools.
11. NASUWT supports the DfES and OFSTED strategy to trial changes to the inspection framework and the use of school self-evaluation systems. It is vital, in developing the new arrangements for self-evaluation in schools,

that OFSTED ensures that the new arrangements do not increase the workload burdens on schools.

12. OFSTED will also need to develop confidence in schools that self-evaluation outcomes will be used appropriately. Schools should not be penalised for undertaking honest self-evaluations where they identify areas for improvement. NASUWT is aware of instances where schools have provided inspectors with evaluations of their strengths along with clear plans of action for addressing areas for improvement and some inspectors have appeared to use these as a short cut to making critical inspection judgements about the school.

13. Despite concerns that have been expressed by NASUWT to OFSTED, the inspectorate has remained opposed to the development and publication of a model self-evaluation protocol which could be followed in all schools. This is a particularly unhelpful omission within the current developments.

14. Evidence from the conduct of school inspection under the present framework confirms that many schools' anxieties about the inspection process lead to the establishment of unreasonable and workload-intensive systems during the notice period which detract teachers and heads from their core functions and undermine educational standards.

15. OFSTED has suggested previously that 'much of the bureaucracy associated with inspection arises not from OFSTED's demands but from teachers feeling that they must undertake extensive preparation over the months and weeks leading up to inspection.' This suggests that teachers are responsible for the inspection workload. NASUWT challenges this assertion. Many schools are forced to undertake detailed preparation for inspection because of inconsistencies in the expectations and judgements of different inspection teams. Faced by these uncertainties, heads and governors often require teachers to undertake detailed preparation in the

months leading up to an inspection. The introduction of school self-evaluation may well serve to exacerbate this problem.

16. The new short-notice inspections have the potential to reduce the workload and anxiety of staff, providing OFSTED builds in safeguards to avoid schools being on a permanent 'war footing'. However, schools' anxieties could increase and they will undoubtedly be on a permanent 'war footing' if the proposals which are being trialled by OFSTED currently are allowed to be introduced in their current form without any mediating protocols and guidance to restrict workload associated with self-evaluation systems.
17. Evidence of the operation of self-evaluation schemes in other sectors has demonstrated that such schemes can impose enormous burdens on institutions, whilst failing catastrophically to establish whether or not an organisation is effective.
18. The evidence suggests that where self-evaluation is not developed as a consistent and agreed national model it adds to bureaucracy and undermines educational standards. Therefore, it is vital that the benefits of the self-evaluation arrangements being trialled by OFSTED are evaluated fully before the new arrangements are rolled out across all schools.
19. Schools already manage a whole host of internal systems for planning, target setting, benchmarking, and the review of individual and school performance. The school self-evaluation framework must not become a 'bolt-on' process. There must be coherence and streamlining of arrangements and information. OFSTED should be required to set out precisely its expectations of schools in this regard and how schools' use of self-evaluation systems will be judged. Emerging evidence from the self-evaluation pilots suggests that OFSTED has not as yet addressed these critical issues fully in consultation with the Government's school workforce partners.

20. NASUWT is concerned that there are significant hidden costs associated with the operation of self-evaluation systems which raise important questions about public efficiency and accountability. OFSTED and the Audit Commission should be invited to indicate how the proposed new arrangements will lead to greater organisational efficiency and effectiveness in schools.

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