

# NASUWT

## The Work of OFSTED

### Submission to the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee

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1. The submission by NASUWT relates to the annual report of the Chief Inspector of Schools on 'Standards and Quality in Education'.
1. NASUWT is pleased to be invited to contribute to the deliberations of the Education and Skills Committee. NASUWT represents the interests of 223,500 members in schools and colleges throughout the United Kingdom.
2. NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to comment on the issues raised as a consequence of the last year of inspection. However, the Association is also mindful that the Chief Inspector has formally invited comments on changes to the inspection framework which could be introduced from 2005. The Association takes the view that notwithstanding the need for interim adjustments to be made to the inspection framework, how inspectors are trained and held accountable, and on other matters, there remains a need for more comprehensive changes to be introduced in the interests of the education system, pupils, parents and the public at large. NASUWT does not comment in this submission specifically on the most recent proposals issued by the Chief Inspector, as a separate consultation process has been identified and since the Select Committee has not specifically sought such comments. However, the Association would be pleased to provide evidence to the Select Committee at such other time as may be appropriate in respect of the recent proposals to change the inspection framework.
3. NASUWT wishes to advise the Select Committee of the following concerns regarding the work of OFSTED in the 2003 period.
4. The new inspection framework appears designed to fail an increased number of schools as a result of the highly regressive and inflexible nature of the targets applied to the percentage of lessons that may be deemed 'satisfactory'.
5. The inspection framework requires that schools provide an honest declaration of their strengths and weaknesses through the pre-inspection review process. This process is designed to target inspection more effectively whilst enabling inspection teams to identify the extent to which schools have in place adequate and appropriate arrangements to address any issues and whether schools are in need of any additional support. However, the pre-inspection self-evaluation process has been misused by inspection teams as a shortcut to judging standards in schools to be weak. NASUWT has learned that data from the pre-inspection school self-evaluation process is used by some inspection teams to target lesson observation in areas where a school has, through the self-evaluation process, identified standards of teaching or learning to be "weak",

resulting in the over-inspection of particular lessons, the over-representation of these lessons in the overall analysis of teaching and learning in the school, and resulting in a negative but misleading judgement applied to standards across the school as a whole.

6. Neither can it be claimed that the process of school self-evaluation has added value to the inspection process. Instead, it has resulted in a more costly and time-consuming process for schools which has resulted in unwelcome and undeserved inspection judgements. The use of the pre-inspection self-evaluation arrangements must be seriously questioned. At the same time, NASUWT strongly cautions against the extension of the self-evaluation element of the inspection process.
7. The section 10 inspection framework has resulted in the skewed analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of individual schools, which is contradicted by other available evidence on the performance of schools.
8. The introduction of the inspection framework has shifted the goalposts for schools by changing the definition of what constitutes satisfactory school performance. This has been compounded by the effect of the Chief Inspector's remarks in 2003 which questioned whether satisfactory is any longer good enough. The Association asserts that these developments have impacted adversely on the manner in which school inspection has been conducted during the period since September 2003, and has contributed to the rise in negative subjective interpretations of schools made by inspection teams.
9. There has been a sharp rise in the number of schools judged to have serious weaknesses or that have been designated as requiring special measures since the introduction of the new inspection framework. The Association recognises that the increase in the proportion of schools in special measures/serious weaknesses began in the term immediately prior to the new framework coming into effect. However, the Association has received feedback from LEAs and schools which suggests that this may be explained by some inspection teams applying prematurely the new inspection standards.
10. Recent comments made by the Chief Inspector have fuelled a moral panic about declining educational standards in schools. This has not helped to engender professional support for the inspection process and may undermine public support for state funded educational provision. Moreover, the overall trend in inspection judgements has been greeted with cynicism and derision from teachers and parents alike.
11. For the first time in a number of years, the Association has cause to express concern about the quality of the relationship between OFSTED and schools which, for many, is, once again, no longer conducive to raising standards in schools.
12. The Association has received considerably increased feedback from schools regarding the adverse workload impact arising from the introduction of the new inspection framework and the Chief Inspector's remarks on whether satisfactory is good enough.

13. The Association has received feedback of highly variable interpretations and judgements under the terms of the new Inspection Framework.
14. There remains a need to improve the quality and scope of training received by inspection teams, particularly in relation to the expectations under the new inspection framework, and the changing expectations of schools arising from the National Agreement on 'Raising Standards and Tackling Workload'. The Association has received no satisfactory evidence of training provided to inspection teams to enable them to address the National Agreement implications in a rigorous and consistent manner. Such feedback as the Association has obtained suggests that many registered inspectors remain unclear about the implications of the National Agreement and a number do not accept that the Agreement is relevant to the conduct of inspection.
15. The effectiveness of the quality assurance processes within OFSTED requires further investigation. The Association does not believe that any inspectors should be on the OFSTED register who do not meet the standards set by the Chief Inspector and who do not conform to the Code of Practice. The Association understands that there has been a significant increase in the number of inspectors who have been deregistered during the course of the past year, confirming our concerns regarding variable standards of inspectorial practice. Nevertheless, it is incumbent on OFSTED to ensure that bad inspectors are not registered in the first place and that they are not placed in a position in which they may inflict untold damage on the schools they visit.
16. There remains a need for greater transparency with regard to how breaches of the Code of Practice are monitored and dealt with by OFSTED, and the reasons for deregistration. This is an essential precondition for raising professional and public confidence in the inspection process.
17. Furthermore, NASUWT recommends that:
  - (i) a review of OFSTED be undertaken to take account of its impact on educational standards and teacher workload in schools and colleges;
  - (ii) OFSTED should identify within the inspection framework how it will reduce workload and bureaucracy in schools and colleges;
  - (iii) workload reduction be included as a specific standard within the inspection framework;
  - (iv) the workforce remodelling agenda be firmly embedded in the OFSTED framework and Section 10 inspection process;
  - (v) the various inspection frameworks that apply to schools and colleges be rationalised;
  - (vi) the private contracting system of inspection be replaced with a smaller, permanent group of professional, qualified and trained inspectors;

- (vii) non-statutory elements be removed from the inspection schedule;
- (viii) the use of surveys to canvass student opinion should be abandoned;
- (ix) the arrangements for ensuring the accountability of OFSTED be strengthened;
- (x) the costs and benefits of school self-evaluation be evaluated in full consultation with the teacher associations prior to any proposal to extend its use across schools.

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