

A Happy New Year from Ofsted

Roy Blatchford drafts HMCI's New Year Message

Dear Colleagues

January 2019

An important tipping point in this country has now been reached. In 2018, approaching 90% of state-funded schools were judged good or better at their most recent inspection. That should be recognised as a fair achievement for the nation.

How then can Ofsted nimbly avoid becoming a spectre at its own feast of 'all schools good schools'? I'd like to signal seven points for our direction of travel, set against a backcloth of school improvement being *school and system-led*.

1. The term 'outstanding' has served its purpose. Let not the public purse waste money on judging whether schools are grade 1 or grade 2. From September 2019, Ofsted will judge in published reports whether schools are good and fit for purpose, or still working towards that level. Let the *Good Schools Guide*, the *Woodhead Gazette* or the *Wilshaw Echo* pronounce locally on excellence of provision, rooted in pupils' and parents' honest experiences.
2. There remain across the country a small but significant number of primary and secondary schools, often renamed and rebadged, which have ill-served generations of disadvantaged families. Thus there is a role for a crack unit of HMI to ensure that we squeeze the last residues of failure out of the school system. Such a highly experienced and practised team, working powerfully with headteachers, academy groups and governing bodies, *can* deliver this ambition within the next three years.
3. From September 2019 Ofsted will say to the majority of the school system: on a four-yearly basis we shall have a look at your data dashboard and other relevant local contextual details. We shall not disturb you if all is well. If the patient is poorly we shall inspect for a day, with a bespoke HMI team, and for a further day if 'inadequate' could be the overall judgement.
4. With *all* schools, we are interested in your sharing with the inspectorate excellent examples of peer-to-peer review, within school clusters and academy families. If you stand alone, we'd like to know how you keep yourself wisely and skilfully under review. Our research will focus here.

5. In the best traditions of Her Majesty's Inspectorate, Ofsted will continue to produce high quality thematic reports on aspects of teaching and learning, curriculum and leadership. Our organisation must champion excellence and challenge weak provision where we see it. The Chief Inspector's Annual Report to Parliament, an influential and accessible report on the nation's schools, will continue with a spotlight on how well the self-reviewing school system is doing.

6. Safeguarding is too important to be left to Ofsted. In common with financial well-being, safeguarding needs to be audited annually, led by local authorities with their democratic responsibility for all children, whether in local authority schools or academies. Directors of Education remain legal advocates for every child in their county, borough or city.

7. The school system risks being strangled by accountability measures, regulation and compliance at all levels. To give meaning to a school-led system, the profession has to shape the style and standing of the regulator, not the other way around. It is my intention to work further with the profession and the DfE to realise this ambition.

At a time of shrinking budgets, politicians, civil servants and the teaching profession continue to debate the future of Ofsted in relation to schools.

It is for the profession to show that it can be self-improving in a sustained way. School leaders have had three decades now of good practice at self-evaluation. *Excellence* must be the common denominator, eminently achievable by most if not all schools given the wealth of our democracy and its sustained investment in the school system.

Everyone remembers Mark Twain's famous quip: 'The reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated.' My money is on politicians wishing to keep some kind of national inspectorate for many years to come, perhaps a common inspectorate for all state and independent schools - that's a debate for another day.

In the meantime, Ofsted will continue to report, without fear or favour, and to maintain its reputation as a trusted brand for parents and the profession alike.

Happy New Year!

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector.

Roy Blatchford CBE is founding director of the National Education Trust and was formerly an HMI. His latest collection of essays is 'Success Is A Journey', available from the John Catt Educational bookshop. He currently chairs ASCL's Commission 'The forgotten third'.