



Transformation Through Collaboration

Somerset Association of Primary Headteachers (SAPH), Somerset Association of Secondary Headteachers (SASH) Somersets Association of Special School Headteachers (SEN.se)

Dear Ofsted,

Somerset's Associations of Primary Headteachers, Secondary Headteachers and Special School Headteachers join other associations in asking for urgent and systemic reform of the Ofsted inspection framework for schools, and a review of how inspections are conducted and reported.

SAPH, SASH and SEN.se are a diverse and experienced group of over 230 head teachers and CEO's from across the county of Somerset who have a wealth of participation and understanding of the Ofsted process. We all welcome and recognise the need for accountability within our sector but we are deeply concerned about the damage Ofsted can have upon our colleagues and school communities.

Headteachers from SAPH met on the 27th March, SASH headteachers met on the 24th March and SEN.se on 30th March to discuss their concerns in light of the tragic death of our colleague Ruth Perry. There is strong feeling across the education profession from school leaders, teachers, staff, and parents that the current process of Ofsted inspection is inconsistent, unreliable, damaging, and discriminatory. School leaders are highly trusted within their community, and this is evidenced through national polls, and yet they are subject to an inspection process that many feel could damage or end their career. A negative inspection is not only shaming, but it also creates problems in recruitment and puts school staff under immense mental health pressure. Colleagues in the meeting agreed:

- Ofsted reports negatively personalise and isolate individuals and communities.
- Ofsted's complaints process (which inspectors refer to throughout inspections) is not fit for purpose.
- One-word judgements which are used nationally hang over schools for years even when effective change has been made. Parents are clear they do not pick schools on one-word judgements – but estate agents do.
- Such one-word judgements, and indeed the whole process rarely takes account of the school, local or national context which means that the judgement is very often, far from objective.
- School leadership is context driven and it takes time walking the front face of your school to get to know it enough to make confident fundamental changes to it. Ofsted do this in two days every 5 or so years. Inspection is too infrequent and too short to make such sweeping and powerful conclusions that can have such far reaching consequences.
- School leaders are constantly worried about their next inspection and what it could mean to them and their community. It is unacceptable that we have a national system for accountability that makes school leaders, unwell or want to leave the profession.
- The deep dive process is a completely unfair and onerous accountability measure for teachers – especially in smaller schools. It is based on a secondary structured teaching

model. In Primary schools, subject leaders, who are also full-time class teachers, have the responsibility of teaching all subjects to a class as well as leading a subject and going through the deep dive process. This causes immense pressure and additional workload on teachers who are not necessarily part of the leadership team and can often have little experience in teaching.

- Ofsted are not transparent enough and school leaders feel they have to second guess inspectors from the first moment of contact onwards. The fact that leaders have to sit on judgements without telling staff is a prime example of this. The way in which the Caversham report was callously issued and then redacted is another example.
- Within the current system and framework therefore, it is difficult to see how Ofsted's claim to be a force for school improvement can be properly validated.

In light of the death of Ruth Perry and other often less well reported damage that inspections can cause to individuals health and well-being, our associations are curious to understand the risk assessment processes which are undertaken by Ofsted prior to, during and after inspection. Whether in fact any such processes exist and if so, why they are not shared with the school.

We believe that there is an opportunity to build a better system for national school improvement by putting the trust we have in our school leaders at the forefront of the accountability process. Through working in partnership, we can develop school improvement and tackle many of the huge issues faced in communities through collaboration. It is clear that accountability and judgement alone are insufficient. Our schools deserve accountability that is driven by a need for effective progress, both in terms of children's outcomes and school improvement, trust, and compassion. We need a system that is fair, collaborative, curious, and reciprocal that celebrates the best in our national education system and supports change when and where it is needed, through appropriate challenge. No school leader wants to fail their community and we hope that Ofsted can support us in our aspirations rather than make many of us want to leave, become unwell or resent what the Ofsted organisation has come to stand for.

We look forward to your response.

Combined Headteacher Associations of Somerset

SASH, SAPH and SEN.se