

Prevention of Future Deaths Report (Regulation 28): Ofsted's response

19 January 2024

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Introduction from His Majesty's Chief Inspector

As a fellow headteacher, I was shocked and saddened by the death of Ruth Perry.

As His Majesty's Chief Inspector, I would like to express my deepest condolences to Ruth's family and friends and apologise sincerely for the part our inspection of her school played in her death. As the new HMCI, I will do everything in my power to help ensure that inspections are carried out with professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect and with consideration for staff welfare. Such tragedies should never happen again, and no one should feel as Ruth did.

We accept the Coroner's findings. We intend to re-evaluate our internal policies and procedures in light of these findings, so that we can identify where changes need to be made.


And in the weeks and months to come we will listen – to the professionals we work with and to the people we work for. As well as hearing from staff working in education and social care, the 'Big Listen' that I intend to launch shortly will hear from the parents, carers, children, young people and learners whom we serve.

This is important because we must carry out our role in a way that is sensitive to the pressures faced by leaders and staff, without losing our focus on children and learners. Our critical work helps to make sure that children and learners have the highest quality of education, training and care. We cannot afford to shy away from difficult decisions and challenging conversations where they are needed in the interests of children. I am determined that we get this delicate balance right.

Below, we respond to each of the Coroner's areas of concern, setting out what we have already done, what we are doing now, and what we intend to do in the future. We have responded fully to every recommendation. We have already done much – but there is a lot still to do.

The Coroner's findings focused on inspection of schools, which is reflected in our response, but work is underway across Ofsted to make sure the changes we are making are reflected appropriately across the full suite of remits that we regulate and inspect.

As the new HMCI, I can promise transparency and openness as we work to rebuild and strengthen the confidence of professionals and the public. I know how important it is for the sectors we work with, and for parents and carers, to trust the judgements Ofsted makes. To achieve that aim, we must go about our vital work with professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect.


HMCI

Coroner's concerns in relation to Ofsted and/or the Department for Education

1. The first of these relates to my hypothetical schools A and B point, referred to above¹. I am concerned about the impact on school leaders' welfare that this system may continue to have. Transparency and ease of message to parents are not currently weighed against teachers' welfare. The current system allows a school that is inadequate in all areas to receive the same overall label as a school that is good in all areas, but with some safeguarding issues that can be repaired by the time the report is published.
2. There is an almost complete absence of Ofsted training or published policy in the following areas:
 - a. Signs of distress in school leaders during an inspection (this will be obvious to some, but not to all).
 - b. Practical steps to deal with such distress.
 - c. Pausing an inspection by reason of the distress of a school leader.
 - d. Who can attend meetings with the inspectors during the inspection process.
3. Absence of a clear path to raise concerns during an inspection if these cannot be resolved directly with the lead inspector.
4. The confidentiality requirement after an inspection. Some changes have been made already, but this is not yet written into policy. Given how long this policy has been in place, school leaders may fear discussing outcomes with colleagues outside of the school, and mental health professionals, unless this is expressly dealt with in written policy.
5. Timescales for report publication.
6. No learning review of these matters was conducted by Ofsted. There is no policy requiring this to be done.
7. In an Ofsted publication dated 12 June 2023, the Secretary of State for Education was quoted as follows: 'We must ensure our school leaders have the support they need, which is why today we are significantly expanding our wellbeing support. This expansion will help make sure headteachers have access to support whenever they need it'. The Ofsted witness was not able to clarify what form this additional support has taken.

¹ The Coroner defined school A and school B as follows: "Hypothetical school A is good in all areas, but there are safeguarding concerns which can be remedied quickly. Hypothetical school B is dreadful in all respects."

Executive summary

Ofsted accepts the Coroner's findings.

In this document, we address each of her seven areas of concern. We have described steps already taken, measures being introduced now, and considerations for the future. This work will require a sustained commitment to reflection and learning from everyone at Ofsted, which we are determined to make.

We will act with professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect towards those we regulate and inspect – not least because we all share a common goal: to put children and learners first.

In this document, we describe actions related to schools – but it is our intention to also apply these measures appropriately to our work with early years, social care and further education providers.

Our actions can be framed by four key themes:

Training

We set a later start date for school and further education (FE) inspections this term to enable us to provide mental health awareness training for all inspectors, in all the areas we work (inspections continued in social care and early years, where we are also the regulator). This training is not just about spotting signs of distress but also about how we work to reduce anxiety while carrying out our crucial duty. We recognise that any form of inspection is likely to be challenging, but it must be proportionate and carried out with care.

We have made a commitment that all lead school and FE inspectors will have completed the training programme before they lead an inspection. The wider inspection workforce will complete the training before the end of March 2024 – anyone who does not complete the training will be unable to inspect. Going forward, this training will form an integral part of how we induct and develop our staff.

New policies and practices

A number of new policies and practices were introduced last year, and more are being introduced now. These include:

- **Safeguarding:** a rapid return to schools that have been graded inadequate solely due to ineffective safeguarding – allowing them to remedy issues and improve their inspection grade before formal intervention measures take place.
- **Pausing inspection:** a new policy to allow inspectors, or the responsible body for a school, to request a pause to an inspection, for example if it is necessary to provide additional support for a headteacher.

- Confidentiality: a clear policy allowing headteachers to share the outcome of their school's inspection with their personal support network.
- Complaints and communication: A revised, more responsive complaints process that we are determined is trusted by the sector, including enhanced communication between schools and senior Ofsted staff during inspection, if needed.

Learning

We will appoint an independent expert to lead a learning review of Ofsted's response to the tragic death of Ruth Perry. We will respond to the recommendations of this review as part of our response to the Big Listen.

At the same time, we will define clearly the circumstances in which a learning review will be commissioned in future and the procedures to be followed.

The Big Listen

We will undertake a comprehensive listening exercise, making use of independent expertise alongside our own work to seek the views of parents, children, learners and professionals within the sectors we regulate and inspect. This will allow us to explore what further steps can be taken in the future. Nothing is off the table; we are determined to be a modern regulator and inspectorate delivering for children and learners, their parents and carers, and the government.

Underpinning our response to the Coroner is a commitment to transparency and partnership working. We will share more of our material with the education and social care professions, and we will work with representative groups as we continue to improve the way we carry out our important role in the best interests of children and learners. In doing so, we will build an Ofsted that enjoys greater confidence from the sectors it regulates and inspects, as well as the children, parents and carers we are all here to serve.

Coroner's concern number one

The first of these relates to my hypothetical schools A and B point, referred to above. I am concerned about the impact on school leaders' welfare that this system may continue to have. Transparency and ease of message to parents are not currently weighed against teachers' welfare. The current system allows a school that is inadequate in all areas to receive the same overall label as a school that is good in all areas, but with some safeguarding issues that can be repaired by the time the report is published.

Keeping children safe is of paramount importance to Ofsted. We never want schools to fail on safeguarding, but every school must have effective arrangements in place to safeguard children and young people.

We will do everything we can to help schools demonstrate their effectiveness. And we will be clear and transparent about what is expected of schools to help them meet the required standard.

We agree with the Coroner that the same overall grade for school A and school B should not obscure the clear difference between them. We have taken swift action to address this.

Where a school can correct safeguarding issues immediately, we give the school time to do this during the inspection before a judgement is made, so that fewer schools will be in the position of school A. Where the issues are more serious, but leaders have proven capacity to address these with the urgency needed, we have introduced the opportunity of a rapid reinspection within three months. This will allow the school to put matters right and have its grade changed swiftly.

We are determined to explore what more can be done. Through the Big Listen, we will gather views from parents and professionals on safeguarding's place within the inspection framework, including its interaction with other inspection judgements.

Ensuring the safety of children will remain paramount for Ofsted. But we are mindful of the impact of an 'inadequate' grade on a school, its leaders and the wider community. Through the Big Listen's consultation on safeguarding, we will explore alternative approaches to inspecting and reporting on school A, including how we can give more time for school A to resolve safeguarding issues, before any report is published.

Action taken prior to the inquest:

1. The safety of children is our first priority. It is one of the first things we look at on inspection. We changed our handbooks in September 2023 to make it clear that providers have the opportunity to fix minor administrative issues while the inspection is ongoing. This is an important change that makes children safer and reassures teachers and leaders that easily fixable administrative errors will not adversely affect the outcome of their inspection.

2. Where a safeguarding issue cannot be fixed on inspection, we want to provide otherwise good schools with the opportunity to do so as quickly as possible. This is in the best interest of children, families, and teachers. Since September 2023, our policy states clearly that we return to otherwise good schools (school A) within three months of the inspection report, enabling schools to remedy issues urgently and providing an opportunity for them to achieve a good or better overall grade. The first inspection under the new policy occurred in November 2023. The school's overall effectiveness grade improved to 'good'.
3. No headteacher should feel that the responsibility of an inspection and its outcome falls solely on their shoulders. In June 2023, we announced that we would look at depersonalising language used in inspection reports, the public-facing record of the inspection, so that we refer by default to 'the school' rather than to individuals. We also amended the contextual information within inspection reports to refer to all those with responsibility for a school. We implemented this change in September 2023.
4. We know that providers have concerns about consistency of inspection practice across our workforce. To further support inspectors to be consistent in making safeguarding judgements, we introduced a national safeguarding duty desk in April 2023. Since that time, all inspectors have been required to call the duty desk number if their emerging safeguarding evidence could result in an ineffective judgement, to receive support and challenge. In autumn term 2023, calls were made in relation to 269 schools, with 17 of them ultimately judged ineffective². We delivered national training to inspectors in September 2023 on the changes we made, to reinforce these changes and promote consistency of practice.
5. We understand the importance of being open and transparent about our practices so that leaders and teachers know and understand what to expect when we inspect them. We have published blogs and delivered webinars to explain the changes we made. Our webinar on 'How Ofsted inspects safeguarding' was presented live to 1,036 people in September 2023, with a further 7,007 individuals watching the recording on YouTube. Our safeguarding blog has also been read 6,000 times.

Action taken immediately following the inquest:

1. We acknowledged that school leaders might have concerns about being inspected immediately after the inquest and so we offered schools with a scheduled inspection in the week commencing 11 December 2023 the opportunity to defer. 62% of headteachers opted to continue with their scheduled inspection.

What we propose to do next:

1. We will conduct a comprehensive listening exercise, the Big Listen, across the range of sectors we regulate and inspect. This will allow us to hear directly from children and learners, parents, and professionals about the strengths and weaknesses of Ofsted's

² For transparency: The remaining 252 schools would not all have been deemed ineffective without the existence of the safeguarding duty desk.

current approach to regulation and inspection. We intend to publish details of the Big Listen by March 2024 and aim to complete it by June 2024.

2. We know we need to go further to continue to improve our processes and to rebuild the confidence of the sector in our work. Between January and March 2024, we will conduct a formal internal review of where aspects of safeguarding fit within the individual judgements of the education inspection framework, subject to challenge from an expert group. We will explore having safeguarding as a standalone judgement, decoupled from the leadership and management grade. We intend to complete this internal review in time to consult on options through the Big Listen, with the response to the Big Listen setting out our agreed approach to reform.
3. We will examine whether there are further changes we can make to give more time for improvement for a school with ineffective safeguarding but judged good or better in all other areas (school A). As above, the Big Listen will seek views from parents and professionals, with an agreed approach communicated through our response.
4. We will carefully consider and balance the different demands placed on us as a regulator (such as in early years and social care) compared to where we have an inspection duty only, shaping the most appropriate ways forward for each remit of our work. Similarly, our response to the Big Listen will set out our agreed response, following extensive consultation.
5. Where appropriate, we will instigate changes immediately. We will consult on any major changes that are announced through our response to the Big Listen and instigate changes during the 2024/25 academic year. We will aim to publish this consultation by September 2024.
6. Finally, we will look carefully at how we can better inform the sectors we work across about the regulatory requirements in relation to safeguarding, including highlighting expectations set out in 'Keeping children safe in education'.

Coroner's concern number two

There is an almost complete absence of Ofsted training or published policy in the following areas:

- a. Signs of distress in school leaders during an inspection (this will be obvious to some, but not to all).
- b. Practical steps to deal with such distress.
- c. Pausing an inspection by reason of the distress of a school leader.
- d. Who can attend meetings with the inspectors during the inspection process.

We understand the considerable pressures that inspections can bring for school leaders. The best inspections are those where inspectors work with the provider, making inspection a collaborative process that focuses on the education and well-being of children and young people. We want our inspectors to build positive relationships with leaders and staff, demonstrated through their professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect. Throughout, leaders and staff must be treated respectfully and sensitively even when inspection is challenging.

The Coroner's inquest made clear that Ofsted has relied too heavily on custom, practice and inspectors' professional experience and expertise to support leaders' well-being on inspection, instead of providing inspectors with clear, written guidance (2a and 2b).

Inspectors should take steps to minimise stress and anxiety during inspection. They should be able to recognise signs of distress in those they meet and know how to respond. Ofsted will therefore immediately begin developing clear and robust policies and training to improve practice and enable inspectors to identify and respond to signs of distress in leaders and staff (2a and 2b).

We have taken an immediate first step to ensure that every school and college inspection will be led by an inspector that has completed training that helps them understand and recognise mental health issues they may encounter on inspection – including how to minimise additional stress from the inspection process. In order to deliver on this commitment, we have taken the decision not to begin routine school inspections until 22 January 2024.

We know it is important that our entire inspection workforce completes this training. Over the coming weeks, we will ensure that all inspectors complete a full package of mental health training – with all school and FE inspectors completing this before they lead an inspection. All other inspectors will complete this training by the end of March 2024. Any inspector that has not completed training by 31 March 2024 will be prevented from inspecting until the training is complete (2a).

But we need to go further. We will establish a long-term development programme for inspectors that helps them to support leaders' well-being. We will publish our development roadmap for this in spring 2024.

The Coroner is correct that there has previously been no clear, written policy for pausing inspections. Every inspector and every school leader must have clarity about when and how to pause inspections. We also want to give leaders confidence that a request for a pause will not affect adversely the judgements made about a school. In response to our consultation on complaints about inspection, we introduced a new process for pausing inspection in December 2023, using a national helpline. We have since developed and published a national policy on pausing inspections (2c).

Through the Big Listen, we will ask the sector how to make it easier for leaders or the responsible body to ask for a pause to inspection or to raise concerns without fear of the consequences. We need to build the sector's confidence that when something goes wrong or an inspection is not conducted with the professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect that we expect, we want to hear from them. As an organisation, we want to learn and do better. We set ourselves high standards – and we want to be held to these standards. Through the Big Listen, we will work with the sector to ensure our approach to resolving issues reflects our desire to meet the high standards we set ourselves (2c).

Action taken prior to the inquest:

1. Building collaborative relationships based on professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect should be at the heart of good inspection. In January 2023, we trained inspectors on 'Seeing the Big Picture', focused on maintaining an approach to inspection that does not place disproportionate weight on evidence collected from a small number of pupils, parents and/or staff. In September 2023, we built on this training by delivering a session on 'Doing Good as You Go' at our national conference for school inspectors. This session set out a step-by-step model for building positive relationships with leaders and staff. It equipped inspectors with practical strategies to manage anxiety and stress during an inspection (2a and 2b).
2. We have since added training content on 'Doing Good as You Go' into the induction materials for new His Majesty's Inspectors and Ofsted inspectors in schools (2a and 2b).
3. We know that there was uncertainty around who could sit in on meetings between inspectors and school staff. In April 2023, we issued a statement setting out several changes, including that all headteachers and teachers could have a colleague from their school or trust join discussions with inspectors. We changed our handbooks to reflect this (2d).

Action taken immediately following the inquest:

1. To begin the process of better supporting our inspectors to recognise and respond to signs of stress and anxiety, we did not begin routine school and FE inspections in the first few weeks of January 2024. This was in order to deliver immediate training to inspectors. The purpose was to promote consistency and highlight changes to our inspection practice to reduce providers' anxiety and manage any visible signs of stress (2a and 2b).
2. Training alone cannot solve the issues identified by the Coroner. In December 2023, we introduced a helpline for managing concerns about the inspection process. This helpline

ensures that all schools and other providers have an escalation point if they have concerns about the inspection, including if they need to consider a pause. We have shared details of this helpline with professional associations (2a, 2b and 2c).

3. To ensure this change becomes embedded and trusted by the sector, we delivered a briefing to school inspectors in December 2023 to explain the new system and reinforce that they must contact the national helpline to seek further advice from senior colleagues when they are concerned about the well-being of leaders or staff at the school. We are rolling these briefings out to all our inspectors throughout January (2a and 2b).
4. Since December 2023, all lead school inspectors have been required to request the contact details of the person responsible for leaders' well-being and professional oversight – the responsible body. Inspectors must request this prior to the start of the inspection and explain that they will contact this individual if they have concerns so that the headteacher receives swift support (2a and 2b).
5. From December 2023, during notification calls, inspectors have been required to actively remind and encourage headteachers to have someone accompany them at end-of-day inspection team meetings. Inspectors emphasise that school leaders are invited to attend the meeting but are not required to, with no conclusions drawn if they do not wish to attend. We reiterated this in our December 2023 briefing to inspectors, helping to ensure that we see – and schools experience – consistent practice from our inspector workforce (2d).
6. As well as having a process in place when inspectors have concerns, we know we need to do more to ensure our inspectors are well equipped to spot signs of distress and work in a manner that reasonably minimises this. From January 2024, we began delivering a package of mental health awareness training for all our inspectors focused on how to minimise anxiety and stress on inspection, and how to respond to concerns about the welfare of leaders and staff. We have worked with experts to develop this package, which includes training by Mental Health First Aid England. Following the initial training for inspectors on 8 January 2024, inspectors are receiving more in-depth, small-group training, so that inspections can resume on 22 January 2024. All inspectors will be required to attend this training by 31 March 2024. In addition, we have committed to ensuring that no school or FE provider will be inspected until the lead inspector has completed the full initial package of awareness training (2a and 2b).
7. We have published a new policy on pausing an inspection of a maintained school or academy where a serious issue has been identified that requires substantial action to be taken. We have worked closely with the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) and the Confederation of School Trusts (CST) to develop this policy, which will take effect on 22 January 2024.
8. We inspect to make sure that children are safe and receiving a high-quality education, so we will aim to resume inspections as soon as possible when a pause is necessary. This pause will allow the responsible body to put in place support for school leaders and/or ensure the school has alternative leadership in place, where necessary. In developing our pause policy, we were mindful that inspections can – and sometimes must – make difficult judgements where children's safety or education are compromised.

9. We have updated our handbooks and practice to make it even clearer that leaders can, where appropriate, be accompanied to inspector team meetings. Our handbooks now include greater detail about the purpose and nature of the inspection team meeting, and attendance at it. These updates will be published before school inspections resume on 22 January 2024 (2a, 2b and 2d).

What we propose to do next:

1. We know we need to work hard to embed change across Ofsted and throughout the system. In addition to making change happen, we want headteachers to have confidence in our changed approach and to know that inspectors will always treat them with professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect. To aid this, we will develop a long-term programme of training for inspectors on mental health and supporting leaders' well-being. We will publish this development roadmap in spring 2024 (2a and 2b).
2. Taken together, the training, policies and processes we are putting in place will ensure we are better equipped to deal with the exceptional occasions when a school leader is dealing with mental distress and an inspection needs to be paused. It is important that we act to build the profession's confidence in our work. That is why we will create an expert reference group, to look at aspects of training and where well-being might be incorporated more explicitly across the education inspection framework. This group will provide constructive challenge to Ofsted, helping to drive constant improvement in our practices, and delivering better quality inspection for children and education staff. The group will feed directly into the Big Listen and will continue to support and challenge Ofsted as changes are made to the education inspection framework and its implementation (2a, 2b and 2c).
3. We are also pleased that the DfE's Regions Groups will be proactively notifying responsible bodies when a provider receives an adverse inspection outcome. Officials from the DfE's Regions Group will contact the responsible body of the school to check that appropriate support is in place for the headteacher and the wider school workforce. This important change will help to ensure that leaders and staff are supported, if necessary, once the inspection is completed.

Coroner's concern number three

Absence of a clear path to raise concerns during an inspection if these cannot be resolved directly with the lead inspector.

We are committed to making sure that inspection is a professional, courteous, empathetic and respectful process, focused on children, where school leaders feel able to discuss concerns with inspectors openly. We do not want leaders to worry about the consequences of raising concerns about an inspector or an inspection. We need to do more to provide surety for schools and providers on how they can raise concerns safely and have them resolved.

We have taken decisive action to give leaders the means to raise concerns with someone other than the lead inspector. In December 2023, we introduced a national helpline which gives leaders with concerns direct access to a senior leader within Ofsted who is independent of the inspection process.

But we need to do more to help the sector feel comfortable doing this. We want leaders to know that, if they raise a concern or complaint, it will be dealt with professionally and swiftly, and that the choice to raise a concern will not impact negatively on the judgements made by Ofsted about their school. Through the Big Listen, we will ask the sector if there are other things they think we might do to improve trust in raising concerns and our work generally. In dialogue with leaders and teachers, we will look for ways to demystify the way schools and providers can raise complaints and concerns.

Action taken prior to the inquest:

1. We took action throughout 2023 to make it simpler for providers to interact with and complain directly to Ofsted, both during and after inspections. The relationship between inspectors and leaders is a vital component of delivering professional, courteous, empathetic and respectful inspections. To promote this, we clarified the purpose and importance of offering regular 'keeping-in-touch' (KIT) meetings in our national training in September 2023. We explain these to leaders during the initial calls and lead inspectors emphasise that these are a good place to raise concerns or issues throughout the inspection.
2. We know that some providers have found our complaints process difficult to navigate. From June 2023, we therefore consulted on changes to our complaints and post-inspection processes. We made four main proposals:
 - a. Enhancing on-site professional dialogue during inspections to help address any issues
 - b. Introducing a new opportunity for providers to contact Ofsted the day after an inspection
 - c. Introducing new arrangements for finalising reports and considering formal challenges to inspection outcomes

- d. Introducing direct escalation to the Independent Complaints Adjudication Service for Ofsted, removing an internal review step in our complaints process.
3. We have decided to implement all of these proposals, as set out in our response to the consultation published in November 2023. Three of the four proposals above attracted over 80% support from respondents. The other (point 2c) attracted just under 80% support. We have piloted point 2b, described above. We have found it provides considerable reassurance for schools but we know we can go further.

Action taken immediately following the inquest:

1. We recognise that schools want to know how they can contact a senior inspector not involved with the inspection if they have concerns. We have introduced a clear and simple process that allows them to speak to a senior Ofsted employee. Since December 2023, at the start of inspection, we have provided schools and other inspected providers with a phone number where they can contact a senior inspector to discuss concerns if they feel that they don't want to raise them during KiT meetings. We explain to a provider that they can share this number with other senior leaders and their responsible body (such as the local authority or multi-academy trust).

What we propose to do next:

1. Going further, we will work with the Confederation of School Trusts, the Association of Directors of Children's Services, the Local Government Association and the National Governance Association to make sure that the roles, responsibilities and process for raising and responding to concerns about leaders' welfare during an inspection are understood clearly by the inspection team and the responsible body.
2. We will also clarify in our handbooks, accompanying guidance, code of conduct, complaints procedures and during stakeholder engagement, how providers can raise concerns about inspectors' behaviour, including any safeguarding concerns. We have already started this process, for example publishing an update to the education inspection handbooks, and intend to complete it by the end of March 2024.

Coroner's concern number four

The confidentiality requirement after an inspection. Some changes have been made already, but this is not yet written into policy. Given how long this policy has been in place, school leaders may fear discussing outcomes with colleagues outside of the school, and mental health professionals, unless this is expressly dealt with in written policy.

We have now updated our handbooks to make it clear that leaders can share the provisional inspection outcome and findings with whomever they deem appropriate. Leaders can share their provisional inspection outcomes with colleagues, family, medical advisers and their wider support group as they see fit.

We recognise that it is Ofsted's responsibility to ensure that this is clear to leaders. We have already taken steps to do this by updating key documentation and briefing inspectors on this approach has already begun. We will make sure we share this message as widely as possible, both on inspection and through other channels of communication.

Actions taken prior to the inquest:

1. In March 2023, we reviewed all our documentation and identified a lack of clarity in key documents about whether leaders could share provisional inspection outcomes and draft reports, and with whom.
2. In June 2023, we made extensive updates to our handbooks, letters and other documents to remedy this ambiguity. We have made it clear that leaders can share provisional inspection outcomes with whomever they deem appropriate, including people unconnected with a school's work.

Actions taken immediately following the inquest:

1. We must have an unambiguously clear policy on who leaders can share provisional outcomes and draft reports with. Following the Coroner's findings, we recognised the importance of explicitly naming mental health professionals. We are therefore updating our handbooks to make it clear that leaders can share provisional outcomes with partners, health professionals and those providing personal support.
2. We acknowledge how important it is to be consistent in embedding a change. We recognise that this is particularly important given that leaders may still think that we have a strict confidentiality requirement. We therefore briefed inspectors on this significant amendment during our 11 December 2023 briefing.

What we propose to do next:

1. Throughout 2024 and 2025, we will use sector-facing webinars, events, communication with and through professional associations and unions, blogs and other channels to communicate the message that leaders can share provisional outcomes and the draft report with those they deem appropriate, including partners, health professionals and those providing personal support.

Coroner's concern number five

Timescales for report publication.

Publishing reports in a timely way is important. Whether the outcome of an inspection is favourable or not, school leaders, staff and parents should not be left waiting too long for inspection reports to be published. Inspection reports are an important source of information for parents about the education and care their children are receiving. We announced changes to our post-inspection and complaints process in November 2023 that will allow us to publish reports more quickly.

We are now going further by carrying out a review of our quality assurance processes to see if we can shorten further the time between inspection and publication of the report. Our goal is to produce reports that leaders and parents agree are accurate and coherent, as quickly as possible.

We will use the Big Listen to help explore proposed changes with leaders, parents and others. As we do so, we will remember that inspection judgements and subsequent reports can have significant consequences for leaders and schools. It is important they undergo thorough quality assurance checks to ensure that the evidence base supporting the judgements is robust and the findings proportionate. We want to strike the right balance so that providers feel that the process is fair and swift, but not rushed, and that any challenges to findings are considered thoroughly.

Action taken prior to the inquest:

1. In November 2023, we announced changes to our post-inspection and complaints process which we anticipate will allow us to publish reports more quickly. These changes are outlined further in response to concern three and in full here.

What we propose to do next:

1. During the first half of 2024, we will review our quality assurance processes to see if we can make further changes to reduce the amount of time between an inspection and the publication of a report. Our findings will feed into the Big Listen and will be part of the proposals we will put to the sector and parents for their views on balancing the need for robust findings with providing timely reporting.
2. In some inspections, the complexity of the findings requires more time than the norm before an outcome is made public. We know the sector understands that these exceptional cases do occur from time to time. But we also know that the anticipation of a result from the school community can add to the pressure felt by leaders and staff. That is why, where reports do take longer to be published, we will endeavour to explain why. We will consult on how to do this through the Big Listen.

Coroner's concern number six

No learning review of these matters was conducted by Ofsted. There is no policy requiring this to be done.

Ofsted has learned many lessons following the tragic death of Ruth Perry, including from the inquest. We made changes to inspection practice in March, June, September and December 2023. We are determined to take further action and to learn the lessons from this tragedy.

However, the Coroner is right that Ofsted has not yet conducted a formal learning review. That is why, by March 2024, we will appoint a recognised expert from the education sector to lead an independent learning review of Ofsted's response to the tragic death of Ruth Perry. The independent expert will consider whether Ofsted's internal policies and processes for responding to tragic incidents need to be revised. We will publish the recommendations of the independent expert and formally respond to these recommendations as part of the response to the Big Listen.

In tandem, we will draw on existing practice in the sectors we regulate and inspect to define clearly the circumstances in which a learning review will be commissioned, who will conduct it, how it will be carried out and arrangements for publishing and disseminating the lessons learned. Ofsted will establish a culture of challenging processes, policies and procedures to ensure that we meet the high standards we set ourselves, embedding critical reflection in what we do. The things we learn through this process of reflection will help us better serve children, learners and professionals.

Coroner's concern number seven

In an Ofsted publication dated 12 June 2023, the Secretary of State for Education was quoted as follows: 'We must ensure our school leaders have the support they need, which is why today we are significantly expanding our wellbeing support. This expansion will help make sure headteachers have access to support whenever they need it'. The Ofsted witness was not able to clarify what form this additional support has taken.

We recognise that the DfE has ownership of the support available to headteachers, but we do believe that our inspectorate can play a positive role in ensuring support is known about and taken up when necessary. We have engaged closely with the DfE on this and recognise that inspectors should be conversant with this support and ready to remind leaders that it is available. Through our ongoing inspector training, we will reinforce the expectation that they share this information with leaders at the beginning of an inspection. We will make sure that this information is contained within documents we share with providers on inspection. We will also use our other existing channels of communication to share information about the support available to leaders, which will not only help them but also increase their capacity to support the children in their care.



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