

2015/6

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Pocket Watch – Ofsted ring the changes to inspections

Introduction

So full steam ahead it is for changes to the inspection system.

This follows the announcement this week by Ofsted confirming widespread support for the changes listed in its recent '**Better inspection for all**' consultation. Nearly 5000 responses were received offering broad support for the three core proposals of shorter but more frequent inspections for 'good' providers, the use of a Common Inspection Framework and for a full round of inspections for non-association independent schools over the next three years. Coupled with some other previously announced changes, it means Ofsted can now go ahead and plan to implement from this Sept what it describes as '*some of the most significant changes in its history.*' The longer-term issue of where Ofsted sits within a self-improving system remains, as the Education Committee discussed in a witness session with the Chief Inspector last week but for the moment, this is how things now look.

What are the main changes?

1. Ofsted will introduce shorter but more frequent (every three years) inspections from this September for schools, academies and FE providers judged 'good' at their last inspection. The key issue here is 'proportionate,' so not subjecting proven providers to full inspections every five years, six for FE, but using an approach that is more, well proportionate to the level of risk. Concerns had also been voiced that a gap of five or six years between visits was too long, things could change in the interim which might only be picked up when problems had set in, so more regular monitoring should help here too. Short inspections would also allow for what the report calls '*greater professional dialogue*' between inspectors and institutional leaders, in other words more meaningful conversations on strengths and weaknesses, given that these occasions would not be mini full inspections. This new system will also apply to other providers rated good, such as special schools and pupil referral units but not yet to early years' providers. And although it remains subject to parliamentary approval, the aim is to pilot some short inspection visits between now and the summer and to introduce the new approach fully from Sept 2015
2. Inspections will be carried out using a uniform Common Inspection Framework. The key issue here is consistency of judgements, let alone better coherence and comparability which along with the new contracting and training arrangements for individual inspectors, should be greatly improved by the use of a common approach. There was some worry that a 'one size fits all' model covering everything from early years to academies to skills provision might not be appropriate but Ofsted intends to overcome this by producing separate handbooks. The new Framework will also see some new emphasis placed on areas like the quality of assessment which has been added to the quality of teaching and learning, pupil welfare, learner outcomes, the effectiveness of leadership and management and the appropriateness of the curriculum generally. In addition grades may be given for some specific areas of post-16 activity such as study programmes and traineeships
3. And already announced. From this Sept, Ofsted will no longer sub-contract inspections but bring the whole process in-house. Second, the separate graded judgements for early years and school sixth form provision introduced last Sept will remain and third, the position on no-notice inspections is unchanged: it will only be used when safeguarding issues are raised

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Better inspection for all Feb 2015