

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Accountability hearings, HC 58](#)

Tuesday 22 November 2022

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Members present: Mr Robin Walker (Chair); Apsana Begum; Miriam Cates; Mrs Flick Drummond; Anna Firth; Kim Johnson; Andrew Lewer; and Ian Mearns.

Questions 134 to 222

Witnesses

I: Amanda Spielman, His Majesty's Chief Inspector, Ofsted; and Yvette Stanley, National Director for Regulation and Social Care, Ofsted.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Amanda Spielman and Yvette Stanley.

Chair: Good morning and welcome to this accountability hearing. I believe we are going live now. His Majesty's Chief Inspector, welcome. Would you like to introduce yourselves and then we will head into the session?

Amanda Spielman: Good morning to the Committee. I am His Majesty's Chief Inspector at Ofsted and have been since the start of 2017.

Yvette Stanley: Good morning. I am Ofsted's National Director for Regulation and Social Care. I have been with Ofsted for four and a half years.

Ian Mearns: Just as a matter of public record, on behalf of the Committee can we welcome Robin, the new Chair, to his place?

Q134 **Chair:** Thank you very much. I am delighted to be here and to be chairing my first session with the Committee.

If I can come to Amanda first: what has been your proudest achievement since your reappointment in May 2021?

Amanda Spielman: I think that my proudest achievement in the past year—my extended term started in January this year—would be the return to full inspection post shutdown. Many public services and others have discovered that it is a great deal harder to restart an organisation where activities have been suspended than to stop them. We put a tremendous amount of planning in place to make sure that all our workforce was fully ready. I am very pleased with what we have been able to do over the past year.

Can I speak a little wider? I have not been asked this question about my first term. On the education inspection framework and the shift to testing the substance and integrity of education in a well-balanced overall framework, I was very pleased that coming out of the Covid suspension there were very clear indications from the sector that it did not want radical change and this was seen as a fair and balanced instrument that we should continue with.

I am also very proud of the insights work we have done, making sure that we make the most of our evidence, things like the sexual abuse and harassment review, and also of our Covid response. We published a report yesterday on the deployment of many of our staff while inspection was suspended—a report by Royal Holloway, which is extremely positive about the contribution of our staff.

Q135 **Chair:** What have been the biggest challenges or perhaps regrets about that period? What have you found most challenging in that?



Amanda Spielman: We were all put into doing a rather different job. I think that is true of many people in many places, who found themselves doing a different job, more oriented towards Covid management. We were concerned from the very beginning—I think that I spoke to this Committee in April 2020 about my concerns—about children who were out of school: both the loss of education but also taking them out of the line of sight of all the different people who contribute to safeguarding and child protection. I am deeply conscious that young people in this country carried a very large proportion of the Covid burden on behalf of their elders, so I am extremely concerned to make sure that they get the best possible deal out of the rest of their education.

Q136 **Chair:** When the Committee last saw you in June, you told us that outside of Covid recovery one of the things that you hoped to achieve in the next two years was to make sure that initial education inspections were as good as they can be. Do you feel that they are and how are you assessing that?

Amanda Spielman: I think they are going well. We have designed and consulted on a new framework. We have been inspecting under that for over a year now. The profile of judgments I think is really getting to grips. As with the main education framework, it is getting under the bonnet; it is looking at the substance and quality of what is there, not just outcome indicators. It is throwing up a better distribution of outcomes.

We are seeing, happily, most teacher training coming out good or better, but not so many outstanding. We are seeing opportunities to do better, even in some of the very good providers. We are also picking up more places where the teacher training is not yet as good as it should be.

Q137 **Chair:** Does that imply that for the previous regime there were too many people rated outstanding?

Amanda Spielman: The numbers had got very high, uncomfortably high. It was a framework that perhaps looked more to process than substance. This shift to substance across all our work to make sure that we are not sliding into being more concerned simply about completion of processes than about whether it is actually achieving what is intended I think is very important.

Q138 **Chair:** You also talked in the same hearing about the importance of the work that you were doing on colleges and apprenticeships. How has that progressed?

Amanda Spielman: Again, there has been particularly large disruption to post-16 education with the expectations of the practical elements, the on-the-job elements and the work placements. Post-16 education has had a tough time over the last couple of years. It is heartening to see how much work colleges are doing to make sure the experience gets back to normal as quickly as possible.



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It is tough because those young people have missed not just some of the academic elements of their education up to that point; they have also missed some of their social development. I have had college principals tell me that it is like taking in 14-year-olds, not 16-year-olds, for example. Right through the system we are seeing the impact.

We have done some particular pieces of work over the past year. We have published one report on the first round of T-Level students passing through the system. We have done another on skills boot camps. It is an important area of our work.

Q139 **Chair:** But from what you are saying, there is still further to go in fully covering that piece?

Amanda Spielman: Indeed there is.

Q140 **Chair:** You said last time you were before the Committee that part of the reason for your reappointment was the disruption from Covid and that it had seriously disrupted the progress that you had hoped to accomplish. In terms of that overall 2017 to 2022 strategy, what do you feel you have been able to deliver and are there any aspects of that that you feel you have not been able to deliver?

Amanda Spielman: The new education inspection framework is the single biggest piece of that. It is not just a better framework for getting the insight—not just about schools, but also about childminders and nurseries, colleges and apprenticeships—it is giving parents and students themselves, for older learners, a better insight into what they are being given, a better reference point to help them know whether they are getting the right experience. It has balanced out some of the inevitable undesirable consequences. In any accountability system, you are bound to get some perverse incentives. I think that it is contributing to balancing those out to help create rational overall incentives to do the right thing for children.

I do not want to underplay what we have been doing in social care and early years, where it is lower key, but looking for ways to make our regulation cleaner, sharper, less burdensome where it does not need to be burdensome, simplifying and streamlining. We have also done a lot on unregistered schools, unregistered children's homes, unregulated accommodation for older children and unregistered nurseries. There are many corners, the issues of off-rolling as well, where we have worked systematically to make sure that all the different ways that children—particularly the more disadvantaged children and the children with special educational needs—can get less than a full deal gets paid attention to.

Q141 **Chair:** On that issue of off-rolling, clearly that has been a concern for this Committee for some time. It has obviously been very challenging to measure. What do you think is the most important thing to change that dynamic?



Amanda Spielman: That rather takes us on to the whole area of how we think about and manage elective home education. There is no question but that we have a significant minority of children in our schools who have real behavioural challenges and other special needs that undoubtedly are difficult for schools to find the right way to handle and do their very best for children.

We have a map of alternative provision, some of it very good, some not so good. Sometimes when schools have not found the answer it can be too tempting to encourage a parent to withdraw their child and avoid the slog of helping to find the right alternative placement if a school is not going to be able to manage.

I am particularly concerned about children who are nominally home educated, but in reality have problems that require heavy duty professional expertise and whose parents very definitely do not have it, as well as the children who are nominally home educated but are in unregistered schools and the children, sadly—the small minority—who are simply abused and neglected and being kept out of sight.

At the same time as there are people doing a tremendous job of home education—and I constantly acknowledge that this is a permissive country where parents can educate their children as they choose and can educate their children at home if they wish—we can give credit to those parents, but we also need to acknowledge that the home education label is being used for things that are not something that any of us should be remotely content with.

Q142 **Ian Mearns:** I have a supplementary to that. Is that something that you can quantify, Chief Inspector? We have seen significant growth in the number of youngsters who are being home educated in the last four or five years. When you talk about youngsters who are being home educated but it is not really working for them or they are being euphemistically home educated, is that something that you have been able to quantify?

Amanda Spielman: No, it is not. Like most people, we rely mainly on the annual survey that ADCS do, which is good, but probably not entirely complete information because nobody with a child in this country is obliged to tell the local authority how they are educating a child. There are various ways of putting together administrative records, but we do not have a complete picture of the children in the country and of where they are being educated, which is why I have been saying for many years that a basic register of who children are, where they live and who is taking responsibility for educating them and where is absolutely fundamental, in my view.

Chair: I suspect that you will not find much disagreement around the Committee on that front. Flick, do you want to come in?

Q143 **Mrs Flick Drummond:** You are absolutely right on that. You have set



out eight strategic priorities in your 2022 to 27 strategy, and the first of these is that you are going to raise standards by accelerating the inspection cycle so that all schools are inspected by 2025. How many schools have you inspected since you launched the strategy and how confident are you that you will meet that target?

Amanda Spielman: I am afraid I don't have the numbers that we have done since the strategy was published. I would have to write to the Committee to give you the numbers, but we are confident that we will meet the target. We do very detailed planning to make sure that we have the right inspectors, the right training and the right quality assurance and publication capacity. I am confident that we are on track to meet that expectation.

Q144 **Mrs Flick Drummond:** How are you prioritising or are you prioritising the schools that you are going into?

Amanda Spielman: We do prioritise. We have a risk assessment model that draws on the performance table data and other information that comes to us from various directions. There is a complicated jigsaw of prioritisation that partly has regard to the statutory requirements. With the outstanding schools that are being brought back into inspection we are broadly working from the oldest forward for full inspections, but with some flex where information suggests that they need to be inspected earlier. "Requires improvement" schools and "inadequate" schools are obviously re-inspected much more quickly.

There is a whole team dedicated to inspection scheduling to make sure that we balance the various priorities, and there are continuing conversations with the Department for Education. We have to serve a number of purposes with inspection. We are partly serving parents, we are partly serving schools and their controllers themselves, but we are also serving the needs of Government and the needs of the various intervention mechanisms that Government operates. We have a job. I think it is an optimisation problem in statistical terms—I am not quite sure of the right language—but we pay a lot of attention to trying to make sure that we get the right mix in each period.

Q145 **Mrs Flick Drummond:** I would suggest that you prioritise children at the top before that because they are the ones who miss out if the school is not performing.

Amanda Spielman: That is absolutely right and that is why "requires improvement" and "inadequate" schools get much earlier revisits than others. It is also why any data that comes in that gives rise to any concern that children may not be getting the education or that any other aspect may be defective will go up the priority list.

Q146 **Miriam Cates:** I would like to move on and ask you a few questions about Ofsted's role in ensuring political neutrality in schools and safeguarding procedures.



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First, yesterday there were some findings published from a report by Professor Eric Kaufmann showing that about three-quarters of British children report being exposed to critical social justice theories in school: ideas about white privilege, Britain being systemically racist or that there are many genders, for example. Nearly 70% of those children report that when those issues were raised in school it was in a way that there were no competing arguments taught or that they were taught that alternative views were not acceptable.

Clearly this is having a damaging effect on some young people's view of each other in the country and there are a number of incidents in schools that have been reported to me where children holding opposing views or not being willing to adhere to those views have been punished.

I know that in March Ofsted downgraded the American School in London on the basis of its promotion of some of these theories. If this is a much more widespread issue, what is Ofsted's plan to ensure that schools do remain politically impartial and offer balancing views when they do teach about these political theories?

Amanda Spielman: I also saw the report. I think that it was a Policy Exchange report and there did appear to be some concerning findings there that I hope Government will take note of. I talked about the issue of political impartiality at some length in a speech I gave in the summer because it is a real and difficult issue that we should all acknowledge.

Schools are places where children from all kinds of backgrounds, all families, have to be. No parent wants to send their child to school thinking that they are going to be pushed into one set of political views or another. Teachers have to be expert guides through disputed territory.

DfE has published some good guidance on political impartiality with some helpful examples. At the start of the autumn term, we gave all our inspectors full training on recognising the issues when they arise, with case studies on some of the most difficult and contested aspects to help to guide them.

There are two ways in which it might come up during an inspection. One is in the context of a curriculum deep dive. If the curriculum and teaching in a particular subject that we have selected shows signs of imbalance, that is something we would take up and explore in great depth with the school. That is essentially what happened in the inspection you referred to.

The other way is in the context of concerns and complaints that have come to us. We are the place of last resort that people can go to if they complain to a school and do not get satisfaction from the school or the governing body. We filter those complaints. On occasion, they have us go out and inspect immediately. A larger proportion go on file for the next inspection. The inspector's preparation for the inspection will flag up, for example, if there are parent concerns arising and they can then make that a line of inquiry in the inspection.



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Q147 Miriam Cates: That is interesting and that partially answers my next question about parents' recourse to complaint when they do not get anywhere with the school and they do not get anywhere with the local authority. Some local authorities are actively instructing schools to teach some of these theories and then they come to Ofsted and do not hear back. What you are saying is they may not trigger an inspection, but they are held on file for the next inspection and inspectors would be mindful of those when inspecting a school?

Amanda Spielman: Indeed we would. It is a very simple process through the GOV.UK website, which I think also helpfully structures it so that complaints are directed to Ofsted or ESFA or the Department for Education, as appropriate, for the particular nature of the registered entity. There is a complex web of legislation that says who deals with what.

The caveat I should put here is that we do not have, as people sometimes expect, the power to investigate individual complaints. We have the power to inspect, but not to fully go into individual circumstances. I know that it is sometimes frustrating for people that we are not an ombudsman that can take up their case.

Q148 Miriam Cates: What would you recommend to a parent? Let's say they believe that there is a safeguarding issue with the way that schools are teaching certain theories and that children are not being protected from indoctrination. They try complaining to the school; they try complaining to the local authority. Obviously, for the reasons you have just said, Ofsted cannot immediately inspect. They write to the DfE and do not get a reply. What would you advise those parents to do?

Amanda Spielman: I would encourage them to make use of our website if they have exhausted those other avenues. I would also ask them to ensure that other like-minded parents do the same. It is an impossible challenge in the modern world, with a huge range of opinions on almost any subject, for a head to secure total consensus from every single parent in a school. In the context of a school with 500 children, a single complaint about a concern probably will not trip the serious concern threshold.

Miriam Cates: It does not mean a lot, yes—understood.

Amanda Spielman: If there are concerns from 50 parents, that sends a very different message.

Q149 Miriam Cates: Thank you. Moving on to transparency, I think that you will be aware of the case of Claire Page, a mother in London, who was denied access to materials used to teach sex education to her 15-year-old. For the benefit of the rest of the Committee, the lesson was provided by an external charity, which had some very inappropriate explicit links on its website. She made a freedom of information request to see the materials, but was declined on the grounds of commercial secrecy for the



charity. She referred the case to the Information Commissioner's Office, but it upheld the school's choice to keep the lesson secret. She has now lodged an appeal.

The DfE say that parents should be given every opportunity to understand the content of relationship and sex education and schools regularly send home textbooks and worksheets that are written by third-party commercial companies. Do you think that parents have a right to know what children are being taught, particularly in contested areas like RSE?

Amanda Spielman: I am completely with DfE on this one. I do think that in these difficult and contested areas to withhold material from parents is worrying. Commercial confidentiality may have stood up to the Information Commissioner's legal test. Nevertheless, as a matter of principle, I would expect every school to be comfortable showing its parents what it is teaching.

Q150 **Miriam Cates:** You would expect the schools to uphold that important parental authority over being the first teacher of values and contested issues like these?

Amanda Spielman: This is where impartiality comes in. One of the hardest things for an individual teacher, who feels something particularly passionately and strongly, is to distinguish between the things that are universally accepted and the things that are deeply contested in society and taking responsibility for respecting that distinction.

On RSE, one of the things that sometimes creates difficulty is that it is structured—as is the underlying anti-discrimination legislation, for example, that some of it relates to—in terms of the minimum that schools must do. There is nothing in it to help schools understand what the furthest is that they should go. It can appear as though the various mechanisms are encouraging schools to go ever further.

I have advised at least one Secretary of State and possibly more that it would be extremely helpful if the guidance could be iterated to place some limits on what schools should reasonably teach as well, but that conversation was just pre-Covid and I think that it got slightly displaced.

Chair: The words “age appropriate” seem to bear an awful lot of the burden in this space.

Amanda Spielman: Yes, “age appropriate” carries a lot of weight and case studies and examples can do a great deal. I think that the political impartiality guidance has some extremely helpful case studies, for example.

Q151 **Miriam Cates:** I think that is a very good point. On “age appropriate”, that is highly contested and, like you say, there is a minimum of, “You must teach the mechanisms of sexual reproduction” but some schools take that to the nth degree, teaching children as young as year 8 about



all different sorts of sex acts, which a lot of people would think is age inappropriate. However, like you say, there is no ceiling. You would recommend some more rigid guidelines on those things?

Amanda Spielman: I would welcome clearer guidance for schools, in part also simply because the burden on individual heads trying to navigate deeply contested issues is very considerable. If you look at the evolution in the interpretation, for example, of the equality characteristics defined by the Equality Act—the protected characteristics—almost all have become more complicated concepts over the last decade. Schools cannot put somebody full-time on trying to keep up with this. They need real clarity from Government.

Q152 **Miriam Cates:** Finally, moving on to guidance for how schools deal with pupils who present with gender distress, you might have seen a YouGov survey earlier this year that showed that nearly 80% of schools now have at least one trans or non-binary identifying pupil, up from almost zero 10 years ago. There has been a 5,500% increase in girls presenting at gender clinics. I do not need to spell out the long-term irreversible consequences of transition for some girls and boys in terms of loss of fertility, loss of sexual function and all sorts of lifelong health problems. We are seeing the growing rise of de-transitioners.

Dr Hilary Cass's interim report makes clear that socially transitioning a child, changing their name and pronouns and allowing use of opposite sex facilities, is not a neutral act. The former Attorney General also made a speech in August about the legal position of schools and made it clear that schools were on very uncertain legal ground if they do transition a child, particularly without medical supervision. Yet schools are continuing to make this monumental decision for children—there are even primary schools I am aware of that have enabled or encouraged children to transition. Some activist teachers on Twitter have said that they do not intend to follow the Attorney General's legal advice.

I know that the Department is currently writing new guidance, I think based on the Cass review, but how is Ofsted going to make sure that schools do follow this guidance, given, as you have already alluded to, the highly contested nature, even within schools and within school staff, of some of these issues?

Amanda Spielman: The first thing to say is that there is very limited guidance for schools at the moment. The Department for Education is working towards some guidance that has been expected for some time. We are now hoping that it will be published sometime around the end of the year. I have not myself seen the draft, but it is clearly urgently needed. The issues have become way more complicated over the last few years.

I have talked also about the safeguarding issues here. It is very important that parents understand what their child's concerns are if their child is having serious questions or doubts or explorations of gender identity. To keep parents in the dark about that is obviously a



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safeguarding risk. It is very important for all schools to understand that whether or not a child is exploring gender identities, the fundamental principles of safeguarding continue to apply and biological sex continues to be relevant. This guidance to help schools navigate their way through this minefield is—

Q153 Miriam Cates: To pick up on the safeguarding aspect, many of the children presenting with gender distress are autistic, many are same-sex attracted and many have all sorts of different other issues. Like you say, this is a safeguarding issue. How should schools respond when a child presents with distress?

Amanda Spielman: Clearly there is an issue here that usually needs exploring with clinical experts. We know what backlogs there are in CAMHS and other services for children, so I suspect one of the reasons that schools are finding this hard is that there are significant numbers of children beginning to think that they need to explore these issues, but a long delay in getting them to appropriate clinical treatment, which may make schools feel that they need to do something in the meantime. I think that helping schools to manage that matters.

Chair: We have a supplementary on that from Anna and then I want to come to Kim.

Q154 Anna Firth: Thank you, Chief Inspector. I have a very short supplementary. You have explained that Ofsted inspectors are given full guidance on doing a curriculum deep dive that might include the RSE curriculum. Does that extend to looking at the commercial third party-supplied resources? There is obviously a detailed list on annex B on the DfE website of resources that are considered to be appropriate. How does Ofsted cope with a different third party supplier being used? To what extent are you able to look at these resources that are being used in schools?

Amanda Spielman: I think I am correct in saying—and I will have to write to the Committee to correct myself if I am misspeaking—that the curriculum deep dives broadly relate to the national curriculum subjects and religious education in non-faith designated schools. I think that RSE is picked up with, for example, the safeguarding discussions in the other areas of the framework.

More generally, the scale and scope of inspection does not give us the capacity to review all curriculum materials used in every subject. That would require a very different level of inspection resource from what we have today.

Q155 Anna Firth: What would your advice be then to Government? We have this situation where you have a potential Wild West situation with third party suppliers, which are not inspected by you. I understand exactly what you are saying about your resources. Therefore they are inspected, we presume, by the school. Parents are unhappy about the supplier. It is



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not a supplier that appears on the DfE website. Somebody has to be responsible for inspecting those resources.

Amanda Spielman: As I say, if a significant number of parents had expressed concerns about something specific, then that would become a line of inquiry and we would ask the school and expect it to show us. It is not a review by default. There is not the capacity in the system. There are many aspects of what schools do that are not routinely micro-scrutinised, which are tested only by exception or by sample.

Q156 **Kim Johnson:** Good morning, panel. Amanda, in April this year Ofsted published a new strategy with eight key priorities. One of them was about creating a skilled workforce. I want to know what progress you have made in improving the diversity of the training for teachers since 2017.

Amanda Spielman: We have done a great deal of work on our workforce strategy. We have significantly upgraded our inspector training, for example, to the point that I regularly receive compliments at events. People say that our training is some of the best they have had. We take it incredibly seriously for all our staff as part of their development and part of making sure that we do the best job we can.

In terms of diversity, as all public bodies should, we have clear objectives. We put a great deal of effort into our recruitment. We have schemes to develop young leaders. Again, I do not have the details in my head, but we have a specific programme, for example, to bring in young heads from ethnic minorities, to encourage them to become Ofsted inspectors, our part-time serving practitioners and potentially HMI over time. We are constantly looking for ways to build the range and breadth of our staff.

Q157 **Kim Johnson:** You have a number of schemes. How well have those schemes worked in terms of increasing diversity?

Amanda Spielman: That I cannot answer. I will have to write to the Committee.

Q158 **Kim Johnson:** That will be useful, thanks. Since 2012 it has not been mandatory for schools to report racist incidents. Can you tell me what parents are meant to do in terms of ensuring safeguarding issues when their children are being racially abused in school?

Amanda Spielman: As always, the first thing to do is to talk to the school itself, the second is the governing body or governing entity, and then they can come to us. As I say, we take all concerns expressed to us very seriously. I can think of two schools in the relatively recent past that have been judged inadequate because of concerns about racist behaviour. It is something that does not surface very often as a major concern, which I think reflects, hearteningly, that schools overwhelmingly take this exceedingly seriously themselves. Where it does arise, we also take it extremely seriously and have no hesitation in calling it what it is.



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Q159 Kim Johnson: We saw the horrendous incident of Child Q last year being strip-searched in a school without the knowledge of her parents. We know that the incidence of strip-searching is high, particularly for black pupils. What does Ofsted do to address those safeguarding issues in those schools where that is happening?

Amanda Spielman: We look at the wider safeguarding to make sure that schools properly understand their responsibilities to children and to their families. I am aware of that incident. I am aware that this was an incident that took place in a school, but where it was mainly around the actions of the police. Obviously we have no oversight of the police, but I am deeply concerned when there is misunderstanding on anyone's part about how good safeguarding works.

Kim Johnson: You would have expected the teachers to make sure that that pupil was safe and they allowed that to happen, unfortunately. Yvette, do you have anything else that you would like to contribute to some of those questions?

Yvette Stanley: Just to say that there has been a lot of thinking on the policy side at the DfE and it has sought our advice about the guidance to schools on important things like ensuring children have appropriate adults, but also the appropriateness or otherwise of children being strip-searched at all as a safeguarding issue, and certainly on the school site. It is a serious case. It is good that the local area partnership did a serious case review and our job is to work in our advisory role sometimes with the DfE on getting that advice to schools right because we would not want that to continue.

Q160 Kim Johnson: The EHRC has recently provided guidance to schools on black hair discrimination. We know that black pupils again have been subject to racism in schools. Would you support and have you supported that new initiative?

Amanda Spielman: Sorry, you said that the DfE has provided guidance?

Kim Johnson: The EHRC.

Amanda Spielman: We welcome clarification and guidance from all parts of Government again to help schools recognise where, for example, something that may at one level be a health and safety matter—such as having hair tied back in design and technology rooms or science labs—can spill over into having race implications. It is helpful for schools to have clarity about how to handle those matters.

Q161 Kim Johnson: This is my final question. The teaching of modern foreign languages is mandatory at key stage 2, but I am aware that not a lot of schools do that. How is Ofsted looking at supporting those schools to make sure that pupils get access to modern foreign languages in those schools, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas?



Amanda Spielman: It is one of the reasons for the changes we made to the inspection framework. Previously the inspection focus was overwhelmingly on the subjects that were reported through key stage 2 tests, English and maths, with relatively little inspection time given to the other national curriculum subjects. We now do a model where we select a small number of subjects for a deep dive.

In primary schools that would normally include English and maths, but it gives us the space to make sure that we explicitly pick at least one other subject expected of schools, which might be modern languages, science, design and technology or music. We can go anywhere. We are building up a portfolio of insight into what is happening and making sure that schools are aware that they may be tested at inspection on any of the national curriculum subjects.

We are going to be publishing, starting in 2023, a series of curriculum reports. Following the curriculum research reviews covering national curriculum subjects, we are also going to be publishing a report on what is happening in both primary and secondary, subject by subject.

Q162 **Chair:** I will go over to Ian, but on the subject of languages, before we move on, I have a quick supplementary on that. One of the things that has struck me as surprising, talking to language teachers, is the lack of join-up between phases and the information exchange between primary and secondary in terms of even what language children have been learning. Is there anything that you think the system could be doing to respond to that?

Amanda Spielman: It is a difficult one, Chair, as you know. We had a conversation about this in your previous life. It is genuinely difficult, given the permissive nature that we have of allowing secondary schools to choose what language they teach, as can primary schools. There is no clear overarching national strategy to create a structured progression to limit the possibilities at primary school, for example, so that secondary schools can build on what children come from primary school with. It is something that in a dream world we absolutely would have, that clarity, but in reality for whatever languages were chosen it would take a number of years to build that capacity and make it a reality through the system. In the short term, working well within the framework we have really matters.

Q163 **Ian Mearns:** Good morning again, Chief Inspector. Your 2021-22 annual report indicates Ofsted resumed its routine inspections in autumn 2021, but it then goes on to suggest routine inspections did not take place until January 2022.

Amanda Spielman: I am sorry, I missed that.

Ian Mearns: The routine inspections. The annual report indicates that Ofsted resumed its routine inspections in autumn 2021 but it then also suggests that routine inspections did not take place until January 2022.



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Even then, 80% of those that requested a deferral were successful. When did routine inspections resume properly and how much of a backlog is there following the Covid pandemic?

Amanda Spielman: Routine inspection did restart in September 2021. I am wondering whether you have picked up texts from two different places because I think in the social care local authority inspections the mix was a bit different through the autumn.

Yvette Stanley: You will know that through the pandemic we carried on with our regulatory work. We carried on registering childminders; we registered children's homes. Obviously the safeguarding risks are even higher in that area, so we resumed our routine inspections in the autumn.

Amanda Spielman: Coming on to the other parts of your question, you will remember that there was something of an Omicron alert in December that year, as a result of which we suspended inspection one week before the end of the autumn term. We resumed in the spring term, but slightly modified, where essentially we gave deferrals to those schools that requested them. We also did not use our serving practitioner inspectors on the basis that with high levels of staff absence they were likely to be needed in their day job so we should not increase pressure on the system.

The combination of those meant that we lost, I think, about 1,000 school inspections out of the programme. From the spring half-term we reverted to a normal programme. We were hit last year by slightly higher absence among our own staff as well. I think we were about 1,000 inspections behind where we want to be, but that is factored into the planning to meet the spending review commitment. I do still expect that we will meet the commitment and meet all statutory expectations.

Q164 **Ian Mearns:** Across the piece, because obviously Ofsted inspects many different things, how many inspections have you carried out since January this year?

Amanda Spielman: Since January this year? We publish monthly management information and our official statistics for the period from January to August will come out I think either on Friday or next Monday.

Q165 **Ian Mearns:** We will get access to that quite soon?

Amanda Spielman: You will. That report will also be published very shortly.

Q166 **Ian Mearns:** You did refer to inspections of children's homes, but I understand that it has been revealed that Ofsted has asked staff from private care firms to inspect children's homes. That has caused some concern, and certainly the former Children's Commissioner for England said that many would question the wisdom of recruiting private sector managers when there are concerns that some companies are putting profits before high-quality childcare: "It is vital that Ofsted inspections



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are independent, and that confidence in their findings is not eroded by using serving managers from big private provider chains as inspectors”.

If someone like the former Children’s Commissioner is concerned about that, and overall we would want to see Ofsted retain its independence and impartiality from any vested interest, have you any concerns yourself about the reaction?

Amanda Spielman: The independence and impartiality are absolutely right and are top priorities. I should say that in at least two other contexts, for both schools and perhaps more relevantly for early years, where much provision is privately provided, we have for a good number of years used a model that has mainly employed inspectors but which uses a proportion of serving practitioners. It has value for making sure that our practice stays current and that we are alert to the changes coming through. It also helps interest people in inspection and its value. We manage these programmes extremely carefully. When we came to testing this in social care—which it is probably best for Yvette to talk about—we brought all the learning from doing this with commercial providers in the past.

Yvette Stanley: As Amanda says, we have hundreds of serving practitioners in both schools and early years. We have gone with a very small pilot. It is literally about half a dozen people. We have overseen the process forensically. They have had training. We have looked at potential conflicts of interest. We will deploy them with great care when we think that they have had sufficient training to be ready and we are evaluating it as we go.

There are challenges of conflicts of interest in our other remits, as Amanda says, with commercial providers. We are not using people high up the management chain in these homes. They are serving practitioners. They are generally managers of children’s homes and we think that enabling them to understand our inspection better takes that learning to the sector. We also learn about the pressures in the here and now.

We appreciate the anxiety in the system. We are doing it with great care. We have already taken action where we felt that there was a conflict of interest and we will continue to do so. At the end of this, we will decide whether it is something where the gain is worth the pain and the additional oversight because of the complexities of social care.

Q167 **Ian Mearns:** Something that happens within the independent sector in children’s homes is that they do change ownership on occasion. Therefore if you have an inspector who is a manager for possibly a competing company inspecting a facility, would you not have to build in some sort of automatic safeguard that there would be a preclusion from the—

Amanda Spielman: That is right. Conflicts of interest matter to us enormously and we expect serving practitioner inspectors to keep us up to date on all their activities. In very rare cases, if they find themselves scheduled for an inspection where there is a conflict, we would expect



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them to tell their manager immediately to ensure they are removed. You are absolutely right.

Q168 **Ian Mearns:** I think that it is possibly something you need to be continually vigilant of because it has raised eyebrows, shall we say.

Yvette Stanley: We agree with that and we are applying our oversight forensically. This is a sector where more than 70% of homes are held in the private sector. We look to the sector to recruit our employed staff as well. We expect all our employees and Ofsted inspectors to act with absolute integrity, to advise us if there is any potential conflict of interest if they are changing to a different employer and so on. We note the concern and we have heard the concern.

Amanda Spielman: It is worth adding that our processes have a very substantial layer of quality assurance that applies equally, no matter who is doing the inspection. Nobody should think that we are testing the model and sit outside the normal framework of control.

Q169 **Ian Mearns:** Changing tack slightly, you will be aware of course that the DfE has been conducting a market review of initial teacher education. Can you explain why some outstanding providers, outstanding on their Ofsted rating, were not successful in gaining accreditation by the DfE's system? Does that cast doubt on Ofsted or does it cast doubt on the DfE's market review?

Amanda Spielman: I am not sure that it does either. It may sound a slightly odd answer, but the accreditation process that DfE has run so far, which I think is the first piece in a multistage process, is essentially a paper-based exercise asking them to explain a number of aspects of their model. One of the questions was about curriculum. We were the evaluator for that question, but only that question, and we received all the information in an anonymised form so that we could not relate it to any of our inspections to protect the objectivity of the process.

We have looked at the places where there are different outcomes. As far as we can see, it is the difference between perhaps how people describe what they do and what it translates into on the ground. The processes are not capturing quite the same thing. We have reviewed our inspections in the light of what we have seen in the accreditation outcomes and we are confident in the judgments we have made.

Q170 **Ian Mearns:** You are confident in the judgment of the inspections, so that to a certain extent casts doubt on what might be a flawed accreditation system, where outstanding providers are being precluded from providing initial teacher education into the future.

Amanda Spielman: I think that is a question for Ministers, who I understand you are seeing over the next few weeks.

Q171 **Ian Mearns:** Of course, but I just thought I would get your opinion on it before we get to that stage.



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You did mention curriculum there and I listened to you on Radio 4 this morning. You were talking about the core curriculum and you were being asked a question about the core curriculum. You talked about our maths, literacy, science, geography and history being up there with the best. The main question from my perspective is the appropriateness of the curriculum for all pupils. It seems to me that from much evidence that we have heard in recent inquiries across a whole range of different things there is a trend of thinking that the curriculum that we are currently providing in our secondary schools is fine if you are on an academic route. If you are not on an academic route, is the curriculum entirely appropriate for your needs, capabilities and aptitudes?

Amanda Spielman: First of all, we have as a matter of Government policy a national curriculum, just like most other developed countries. We have a clear expectation for what children should learn up to the end of lower secondary school.

We have a slightly complicated system because we have a 14 and a 16 cut-off point, but we are in line with the world in thinking that all children should learn not just their home language and maths, but also a range of other subjects through a large part of their secondary education and that there is a point at which choice comes in.

The big issue for me first is making sure that the curriculum is structured and taught in a way that serves the full range of children coming into secondary school. That is part of why the inspection framework places a big emphasis on how the curriculum works for children with particular disadvantages, with SEND, with the lowest starting points, to make sure that it is designed in a way that makes sure that they can make good progress through it, which in turn becomes fulfilling.

Q172 **Ian Mearns:** It is individuals fulfilling their own potential, isn't it, surely?

Amanda Spielman: Absolutely, making progress, and that is what reinforces children's confidence. Doing well reinforces self-esteem and encourages children to make the effort to carry on learning.

Q173 **Ian Mearns:** As His Majesty's Chief Inspector, you do not have a view on the appropriateness of the current curriculum for all pupils in our schools?

Amanda Spielman: I do think the national curriculum is a strong and appropriate curriculum. What I was going to come on to is that the questions often arise about the point at which choices can be made, that children can start on a path that sends them in a particular direction, which begins with GCSE choices and then continues with post-16 choices.

Much more of the discussion and much more of the reform effort in recent years has been about trying to improve the quality of options that we offer at age 14 and age 16, the evolution of the applied general route, that is the level 2 BTECs, for example, and other similar qualifications, the whole range of post-16 qualifications, the T-Levels, apprenticeships,



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applied generals and others. There have been various reviews that have done a lot to try to structure this in a coherent set of pathways.

The most difficult, uncrackable conundrum we seem to have is an ability to bring together the disparate offerings—many of which are excellent in themselves—in ways that help young people understand what is right for them and to choose the right path that will give them both the short-term progression and the best and strongest long-term prospects.

- Q174 **Ian Mearns:** Lastly from me, we have been talking about careers education, information, advice and guidance in recent weeks and looking at what is happening in schools with regards to that. We have heard significant amounts of evidence that quite a number of schools are still not adhering to the requirements under the Baker clause in terms of allowing access from outside organisations, particularly regarding the impartiality and independence of advice and guidance and education that youngsters are receiving. I think that is vitally important in terms of youngsters' eventual progression.

Amanda Spielman: It is vitally important, you are quite right.

- Q175 **Ian Mearns:** Therefore if schools are not adhering to those basic things and providing that impartial and independent advice and guidance, shouldn't that then preclude them from becoming an outstanding school?

Amanda Spielman: I will unpack that; there were several pieces in there. First of all, the careers advice and guidance and compliance with the Baker clause is an important element of the system. That is why it is tested in every full inspection. It is a fundamental thing and the Committee has been right to raise its importance over the years.

Most full inspection reports do mention it, not all because we have had to make inspection reports shorter over the years, partly because parents struggle with too much length and partly because with very constrained resources we choose to put them into the inspection itself rather than write-ups that take more time than the inspection. We do not mention absolutely everything we look at in every report. People sometimes draw from that that we have not, but we do.

Most schools get a more limited inspection as a matter of Government policy. Most schools that are currently graded "good" or "outstanding" get an ungraded inspection and there isn't capacity within the scope of those inspections to look at this area. We do not have a full handle on every school in the sector. I can say that it would be truly exceptional and I am not sure whether there have been any cases of a school being given an outstanding if there is inadequate career advice and guidance. It would not fit well with the framework.

A follow-up letter to the Committee that was written a couple of years ago used the standard phrase "good or outstanding schools" when it was actually referring to a number of schools that were good, while their careers advice and guidance needed to improve.



I have to stress that inspection is a process of an overall best-fit judgment. We set out clear criteria for the expectations at each grade, but at the end of the day the inspector is expected to arrive at the best fit. We do not set a series of hurdles and say, "Good only if all these 57 things" or, "Outstanding only if all these 88 things". That would push us into the box-ticking compliance end, where there is a very clear message that would not be considered valuable or helpful.

Chair: Before we move on to Andrew, I want to bring Flick in quickly, as I know that she was keen to come in on the back of Ian's previous line of questioning.

Q176 **Mrs Flick Drummond:** On Ian's previous question, if the curriculum is so good, why are a third of young people failing their maths and English GCSEs?

Secondly, there have been seven commissions now, I think, on changing the curriculum. I want to know your very quick view on those commissions, particularly ones like the Times commission, which was particularly comprehensive.

Amanda Spielman: "Failing" is a word that always upsets qualification people because GCSEs are not designed to be pass/fail exams.

Mrs Flick Drummond: They have to retake them and retake them.

Amanda Spielman: There is a policy expectation that young people who get less than a four will carry on studying maths. I applaud people being expected to study maths to 18. It is something that happens in virtually every system in the world. We are extremely unusual not carrying on maths and home language to 18.

Ian Mearns: The number of youngsters passing in a particular level is an accountability measure by the DfE.

Mrs Flick Drummond: Yes.

Amanda Spielman: Again, that is a question for a different person. I recognise the pressures that puts on the system. We have international studies that show the profile. We do have more low achievers than I would like to see in both maths and English. I think the shift away from the five-plus accountability measure—which focused everything on the C/D borderline—to Progress 8, which gives schools a strong incentive to teach children at all levels well and to see that coming through in Progress 8 measures as well as in inspection is a helpful one.

It comes down to making sure that the national curriculum expectations are well translated at the school level for each group of children. That is why we look at how we are making sure that the curriculum is well structured for the children with the lowest starting points, with the greatest difficulties.



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Your ladder has to have rungs that are close enough apart that children who find it hard can get from one rung to another. It is one of the comments I would make. Sometimes when people pilot new ideas in education, they get piloted by enthusiasts working with enthusiastic groups of students. You can see amazing things in the hands of those enthusiasts in high-end schools, but you have to look at translating things into practice to make sure they work everywhere.

Q177 Mrs Flick Drummond: Have you any comments on the commissions? That is a very quick one because we need to move on.

Amanda Spielman: The single most valuable suggestion I saw in that commission was the thinking about extending the scope of post-16 education. There have been a number of explorations of how to round out post-16 education for all young people and of course that would require extra funding. I very much hope that there will be real thought given to building post-16 education in the rest of this Parliament.

Q178 Andrew Lewer: Prior to the removal of the exemption for outstanding schools to have routine inspections, how many schools held outstanding status compared to now?

Amanda Spielman: Before the removal of the exemption I think it was about 20% of schools, roughly. We have only done graded inspections of about 300 last year, but the programme will be accelerating. Given that we have 20,000 schools, the percentage is not going to have shifted very much. We have given some schools new outstanding judgments this year. It will have gone down slightly, but in the course of this one year only very slightly.

Q179 Andrew Lewer: Last year you were reported as saying you expected the number of schools with outstanding status to drop. We have some data showing that 50% of schools lost their outstanding status between 2021 and 2022 compared to 60% in 2018-19. On the other hand, Louisa Clarence-Smith reported in *The Telegraph* this morning that 80% of outstanding schools were downgraded last year. I wondered if you could unpack that.

Amanda Spielman: We have published a report today on the full inspections of outstanding schools, the graded inspections that we did last year. The agreement with a previous Secretary of State when the exemption was lifted was that outstanding schools last inspected before 2015 would receive a full graded inspection and those last inspected since 2015 would get an ungraded inspection, similarly to the normal inspection for good schools. We have a two-track programme of bringing schools back into inspection.

The ones we inspected last year in the main had not been inspected for 13, 14 or even 15 years, a great deal of time, in which all the staff—including the head and all the governors—are likely to have changed, sometimes a number of times. At one level there is no surprise that the profile does not look extremely similar to what it did for those 300



schools all that time ago. We were not looking back over all those years to try to work out exactly what had changed and when. We couldn't. We were just looking at what has happened now and it is important to say that in many cases the downward shift may have happened many years ago.

I should also remind people that "good" means what it says on the tin. Parents should not be anxious about a school being described as good. Where schools have slipped further to "requires improvement" or "inadequate", it should give some reassurance to parents, who will often have sensed that a school is not as good as a very old inspection grade purports to say. It tells them that the weaknesses and any significant problems will be addressed and that the various interventions and programmes that exist to help schools in difficulty are going to be pointed in their direction.

Q180 Andrew Lewer: Building on that, you have been quoted as saying that removing a school from scrutiny does not make it better. Did you have that in mind before the change to more regular inspections was made? How would you counter any suggestion that therefore the number of outstanding schools reducing was not necessarily just a purely inspection result, but something that you wanted to happen to demonstrate the value of doing it?

Amanda Spielman: I will say that inspectors value their independence and impartiality. They guard that fiercely and any suggestion from the top of Ofsted that there should be any kind of quota or push on a particular kind of school would be met with absolute horror. I can assure you that there is nothing of the kind. Each inspection is approached separately, as it should be.

Q181 Andrew Lewer: How do you balance their desire to be independent with your desire for a high level of objectivity and therefore counter any suggestions that within the independent-mindedness of inspectors there is any disinclination towards grammar schools or any other educational setting?

Amanda Spielman: By having a very clear inspection framework that is completely neutral on the type, structure and control of a school and by having a lot of inspector training to help people understand, first, that they are there to apply that framework, not to substitute their own conception of good education, and secondly, a great deal of quality assurance to make sure that that translates in practice into how they do it.

If I can take one step back, when we brought in the new inspection framework we recognised that with the one-way accumulator that had been our operation for a number of years at that point, the number of ostensibly outstanding schools in the official statistics was likely to be higher than the true underlying position.



We also knew that we were raising the bar with the new framework. The default expectation we set without setting quotas was that there was no brief to inspectors to push the bar for the good standard up or down. We were clear that the expectations we had set for outstanding did raise the expectation above the previous level. It is a complicated picture.

On the value of regular scrutiny, I would point at the other end and say that something like 20% of the old outstanding schools re-inspected last year came out at “requires improvement” or below, which is higher than the proportion in the overall set of schools. That for me came as quite a surprise and I think does reflect some of the things that can slip over time without the reminder that you can expect periodic scrutiny to make sure you stay up to date with developments and thinking about the curriculum, teaching, attendance, attendance management, behaviour management, all those things.

Q182 Chair: Of course in some of those cases it is worth bearing in mind that there could have been multiple changes of leadership in the school over that time period.

Amanda Spielman: Absolutely. One of the things that I think we have seen reflected is some heads taking incredibly personally things that I hope they can somehow manage themselves not to take personally and recognise that they may relate to a long-past time.

Q183 Ian Mearns: I have a quick supplementary to all that. Given your experience of inspecting previously outstanding schools, is it your assessment that it was a mistake to allow them to go so long without being re-inspected?

Amanda Spielman: It is, and I think that was fairly widely recognised and was what led the then Secretary of State—I think it was Gavin Williamson—to remove the exemption.

Ian Mearns: I am glad you can remember which one it was!

Amanda Spielman: I am on my eighth or ninth, depending on whether you count the one who appointed me. The consultation that the DfE did on the removal came back with an overwhelming majority, I think, in favour of the removal of the exemption. I think that everybody recognised it was a policy that had outlived its usefulness.

Chair: When I joined the Department, I was very glad to discover that a decision had already been taken, because otherwise I was going to try to take it. Kim, can I bring you in on this?

Q184 Kim Johnson: Amanda, the National Education Union has commented on the report published this morning, saying, “We need to see a root and branch review of the way schools are inspected” and, “ill-informed inspection is an obstacle to educational improvement” and that we need an inspection service that is “supportive, effective and fair”. I wanted to know how you would respond to those comments.



Amanda Spielman: The National Education Union has been campaigning for our abolition for many years. I do think it is important to look at the purposes we serve in the system. One is around informing parents, one is around informing Government and other controllers and operators of schools and one is about being valuable at the receiving end. We redesigned inspection to upgrade that element of being valuable at the receiving end, which had perhaps been slightly eroded over time so that there is tremendous emphasis on the quality of professional dialogue.

One of my regrets is that within the highly constrained model of inspection we operate, a particularly short version of inspection compared with most inspectorates, a small inspection, is that we cannot interact with every single teacher in a school, which is one of the things I know that we sometimes hear.

People want to interact with inspection teams. They want feedback on themselves. We cannot do that with the constraints that we operate within, but we put a tremendous amount into making sure that we provide constructive dialogue and feedback for the leaders in the schools.

I think that what we have published today gives a very clear illustration of the value. We are always open and responsive. Our inspection models are designed to meet the policy purposes Governments set. Many of the concerns that people express about inspection come down to not liking the purpose that Government sets for us and wishing that we could be turned into a school support mechanism.

The policy divide at the moment that has been set by Government for the last decade is that our job is only to diagnose, not to treat and improve, and I have to respect Government policy.

Q185 **Kim Johnson:** You mentioned training inspectors earlier on. There has been a lot of criticism about the lack of consistency in inspections as well. How do you get around that?

Amanda Spielman: Can you tell me what particular criticism you are talking about?

Kim Johnson: I know that some inspectors will deem some things as adequate, whereas some inspectors will not. There is an inconsistent approach to how some inspectors will go into schools and view and respond to certain aspects of the inspection regime.

Amanda Spielman: Our training and quality assurance do a very good job of ensuring that we have minimal inconsistency. In any process of human judgment it is impossible to make sure that every inspection on every occasion is guaranteed the same outcome, no matter who. You could not make that claim for doctors' diagnoses; you could not make it for court judgments; you could not make it for driving tests. There are many processes where we recognise that there will always be some grey



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areas at the borderline. We work extremely hard to keep those grey areas as small as possible.

Q186 Mrs Flick Drummond: I have a quick supplementary. When Ofsted started, it was much more rigorous. You went in between three and five days. It also had lay inspectors, of whom I was one. They were abolished, I think by the Labour Government, which was disappointing because they gave balance and some objectivity as well, which my colleague over there mentioned. Do you think that we should go back to that rigorous longer-term inspection and that schools would then feel that they had a proper evidence base and a proper inspection?

Amanda Spielman: I was not at Ofsted in the period where we did those inspections and nor have I ever been part of the system while it had lay inspectors, so I wish I had direct experience.

We operate something so different now. I think that the NAO or some other analysis I have seen said that 20 years ago the Ofsted budget was about 0.4% of the expenditure on schools. The NAO report and our own calculations suggest that that is down to about 0.1%. The scale of inspection has had to be reduced by about three-quarters. It is clearly a matter for Government whether to make a substantial change in scope. There are clearly downsides to the limited range and scope of inspection. There are also upsides potentially in terms of the amount of time and resource it consumes at the receiving end.

Again, it is an important policy question how to balance the levers and that is part of why I welcome the regulatory review that is currently being chaired by Baroness Barran within the Department for Education to think more systemically about the levers that Government have and how they are best balanced and deployed.

Q187 Anna Firth: Chief Inspector, you mentioned at the beginning how during Covid when you gave evidence you were very concerned about children being out of the line of sight. I would like to move on to talk about pupil absence.

Pupils who are severely absent, missing over 50%, are obviously out of the line of sight for huge swathes of the year. The figures are quite shocking, as I am sure you are aware, but for the time 60,000 pupils were severely absent prior to Covid and in the autumn of 2021 that figure was sitting at 98,000. That is 40,000 children.

Obviously one might not be comparing like with like, but if you look at the overall absence rate it shows exactly the same picture, from 4.7% in the pre-lockdown to 6.9%, comparing like with like. That is an increase of 47% so the figures tally. This is a huge number of children who are persistently and seriously absent. We know you have been concerned about this and it will be very interesting to hear your thoughts on what you are doing about it and what you think is an effective way of dealing with it.



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Amanda Spielman: I totally share your concerns. The back of the envelope sums I did the other day suggest that compared with just pre-Covid, well over 100,000 more children are out of school every day and getting on for 50,000 of them are unauthorised absences.

There are a couple of fundamental problems here, one of which is the extent to which, through the period of Covid, anxiety built up among children and parents so schools are having to do a two-pronged job, to set expectations and to reinforce confidence at both levels, adults and children.

I describe it as that for some families the social contract has broken down, "You send your child to school and we will take the responsibility for educating them well and effectively" and the idea that, "You did remote education during Covid, so why can't we have a bit of remote education now if we want it?" It is a tough world for schools to rebuild that contract and get attendance back not just to pre-Covid levels, but to where it should be, which is every child who is not genuinely too ill to be at school being in school on the day.

Q188 **Anna Firth:** I totally agree with that, but all local authorities have specifically paid attendance officers, all schools have attendance officers and we have this massive deterioration. You say 50,000 absences are unauthorised, which tallies exactly with the figures. Would you accept that something has to be done to tackle this?

Amanda Spielman: I think a lot of people are doing a lot of things. The single biggest thing we do is to test this on every inspection. We look at attendance, we have a conversation and we don't just say, "What is your attendance rate: good/bad?" We explore, where it is below high levels, why, what schools are doing about it, whether they are taking all the steps, deploying their staff intelligently and effectively and what is happening to address it. We do not see what local authority attendance officers do—that comes outside our inspection remit—but we do test schools on this to see whether they are doing what they can. We also did a thematic review to try to give schools some helpful guidance.

Near the start of this year we visited a number of schools that were doing particularly well at getting children back into school and published a thematic report on the schools that most successfully tackled persistent absence. It was about the high expectations for every pupil's attendance, communicating them clearly and strongly to parents and pupils from the very beginning, from nursery onwards—not just when exams were on the horizon but from the very beginning, and with a lot of explanation about why good attendance is important. Of course education is something that accumulates over the long term and we gave schools the most explicit advice that we could in that report.

Q189 **Anna Firth:** I know that others want to come in on this so a final follow-up from me. One of the previous Secretaries of State for Education, Nadhim Zahawi, made this an absolute priority and formed the



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attendance alliance group, which you sat on. Two questions. We will obviously be seeing the Secretary of State for Education shortly. First, do you agree that this absolutely has to be a priority? Secondly, do you think that the attendance alliance group was effective and should we encourage its continuance?

Amanda Spielman: To your first question, attendance should continue to be a priority. The Department for Education now collects, I think, daily data from two-thirds of the schools in the country.

Remembering that the responsibility for intervention in schools sits with the Department for Education, not with us, I know that the Department has programmes and is developing the capacity to put intervention and support towards schools that need it and that seems very important.

The Attendance Action Alliance was a periodic get-together of people within Government and external stakeholders with potential value to add and I think it did help to crystallise all the angles from which this problem can be approached and provide a periodic check-in on all those pieces in place.

Q190 **Anna Firth:** It met every month for five or six months. Did it do anything that you could say was a clear and effective action?

Amanda Spielman: It was a stakeholder group, not a body with a budget and an executive, so it was more about surfacing and prompting. It was a forum for people to share what they were doing and to think about what more might join up in the light of what they were hearing from others. It is also important of course that we do not have too many things that intersect and push people in several directions simultaneously, so there is a co-ordination function also to make sure that we do not push guidance and direction from seven directions at once because that just exceeds the capacity to cope with it. There is something about making it as simple as possible for schools to do the right thing here.

Q191 **Anna Firth:** It sounds like a nice way of saying that it was desired, not required.

Amanda Spielman: I think it was valuable. I do not believe it has met since the ministerial changes of the summer and I don't know whether the current Secretary of State is planning to reinstate it.

Q192 **Chair:** As Anna Firth prompted, that is a question for us to be asking next week. I think it is also about different parts of the system working together. As you said, there are some that you inspect and some that you don't. I think there is value in bringing together some of the expertise—the police and the local authorities—and taking something forward.

One of the things that the group was doing was keeping up the pressure on Ministers within the DfE to come forward with some legislative opportunities—for instance, the statutory register for children not in



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school, which is something that this Committee has pressed for over a number of years. A vehicle for that within Government is certainly something that we, as a Committee, would want to see.

Amanda Spielman: I am glad to hear that and I agree. One further comment: one of the most illuminating meetings for me of that group was when one of the clinical representatives—I think it was Peter Fonagy—made a particularly valuable contribution: we should not underestimate the association between high levels of persistent absence and the increased levels of mental health difficulty among young children and the delays in their receiving treatment.

Other MPs have told me that a very large proportion of their constituency caseload is of people coming and saying that their child has been bullied or has become too anxious to go to school and that they do not feel they are getting the right help or enough help with that. We know that levels of anxiety and self-harm have risen significantly. It is an important strand. It is not just about attendance officers digging children out of bed. There is a deeper job to do to allay concerns and anxieties and help children to get what they need.

Chair: Of course a lot of that also depends on the outcomes of the Green Paper and the work on high needs and identifying needs appropriately. That will be a significant challenge for the new ministerial team.

Q193 **Mrs Flick Drummond:** The strategy says that Ofsted will be open and accessible and build a greater understanding among parents and carers of Ofsted's role and work. However, it has been reported that staff and parents at some primary schools and infant schools have been demoralised and embittered by the impact of Ofsted's new inspection framework. What consideration have you given to the morale of staff and parents at schools where the new framework is downgrading or has downgraded the school's effectiveness?

Amanda Spielman: I think you are referring to a particular trade press piece from a few weeks ago. I did see that and I was a little bit surprised because we have had no representations made on behalf of this group of schools or by the wider representative associations about this particular sector.

The new framework does get underneath the bonnet to a greater extent. You may be aware that junior schools have for many years been rather concerned about how they look in performance measures and have expressed concerns that the teacher-assessed key stage 1 grades, which are not subject to any sort of external validation such as through a parallel test, may be particularly high for infant and first schools, leading to particularly low key stage 2 value-added for junior schools.

I know that in 2019, just before the new framework came in, the results for infant and first schools were particularly high—there were something



like 30% outstanding at that point—so I think we may be seeing a bit of a realignment through the application of the new framework.

More generally, one of the important things in every inspection is to give parents the opportunity to comment on the inspection of the school, nursery or childminder and have their say about what they think they have and what they are seeing. That is an important part of the evidence that the inspector triangulates.

Q194 Mrs Flick Drummond: Do you think that the feedback needs to be better organised or that there need to be better guidelines on how inspectors feed back to schools and parents?

Amanda Spielman: Our feedback is to schools. The report is the main vehicle for communication to parents. We are not resourced to go back to schools to run parent meetings post-inspection. We try to make all of our processes as open, clear and transparent as possible. We run many seminars and webinars. We take feedback very seriously and we publish an enormous amount so that people can understand what we are doing, how and why.

Q195 Mrs Flick Drummond: Your strategy says there should be greater understanding by parents and carers so maybe it would be a good idea to hold another post-inspection meeting with parents to explain why you have come to that decision.

Amanda Spielman: That is something that we would have to discuss with the Department for Education because it would take another day of inspector time in addition to our existing very tight tariffs.

Things that we do: for example, we have significantly redesigned our reports on the basis of a lot of parent focus group consultation about what they find most valuable in terms of style, depth and areas covered. We want parents to get the most out of what we do.

Q196 Miriam Cates: On early years frameworks, obviously Ofsted has a role in inspecting nurseries, childminders and formal childcare offers, but my understanding is that part of the Start for Life offer, the early years development review that Andrea Leadsom led, was that Ofsted might have some sort of role in drawing together the joined-up thinking between family hubs, early years health professionals like midwives and health visitors and the more formal offer. Has any work started on that? I think 15 areas were chosen to be trailblazers. Has any work started?

Amanda Spielman: There wasn't any conversation with Andrea Leadsom and I confess that I have not heard much about it recently.

Yvette Stanley: We did have a couple of early conversations. There are challenges in terms of the cross-Government initiatives with the pots of money coming from different directions. Many—if not most—of the performance indicators are set in the health domain and there was some discussion about us or CQC having a role.



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Just to be clear, some of those hubs and centres have nurseries and childcare in them and we inspect those. Some of them have community health provisions in them and CQC inspects that. What they were looking at was some sort of layer of leadership joined-upness, but I think the priority has been to get the initiative rolled out and get things standing ready. We would be up for a conversation, but I think it would need to be more than just Ofsted because a lot of the success criteria sit in the health domain.

Chair: Kim Johnson, can I bring you in now? I think this connects to your last line of questioning about the complaints process.

Q197 **Kim Johnson:** Education providers who are unhappy about the way an Ofsted inspection has been carried out must participate in a four-stage process if they want to complain, but there have been concerns about the impartiality of the complaints process, with some arguing that Ofsted chooses which points to respond to and that some responses misinterpret the information. What is your response to these comments?

Amanda Spielman: We have very thorough complaints processes and reviews. We start by building into inspections the opportunity to express concerns about the process or the evidence being accumulated at any stage.

The people at the receiving end of any kind of inspection can get in touch with the regional duty desk if they have concerns about a particular inspection team. On occasions where that has happened, sometimes the response will be to send a senior HMI to join the inspection the next day for quality assurance. That can sometimes change the course of an inspection. I don't say every time, but it is used in a very open way. If the senior inspector thinks the inspection has been going in the wrong direction, it will change.

When a judgment is made and a draft report is sent out, there is a factual accuracy check stage where schools can make very full representations of facts and often use that to express wider unhappiness about judgments going beyond strictly factual accuracy. We review those extremely carefully against the evidence bases and any problems that surface at that stage can lead to the regional director saying that the inspection is incomplete and sending another team back in to collect additional evidence to get to a secure judgment.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to get a completely unconnected team from a different region, which is still a team of qualified and trained inspectors who understand how to apply the framework, but sit completely outside the same management line.

Then we have a formal complaints process. We have an external review—the acronym is ICASO, but I can't remember exactly what it stands for—the independent complaints and arbitration service for Ofsted, I think. A small proportion of complaints are taken through ICASO and ultimately I



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think could go to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. We get an annual report from ICASO commenting on what it has seen over the year, which of course is only those complaints that escalated to stage 3.

Q198 Kim Johnson: How frequently would schools contest an assessment and how long would the process take?

Amanda Spielman: For formal complaints, the long run rate is somewhere around 2% to 2.5%. It is important to remember that in some remits—for example, an apprenticeship learning provider—an “inadequate” judgment can mean an automatic loss of public funding if you are a commercial operator. Children’s homes may well have to close. If you are running a chain of nurseries, an “inadequate” judgment significantly affects your market position. In many cases, a provision that is judged inadequate will have an almost automatic challenge to the judgment.

We cannot assume that doing our job well would mean no complaints ever. There will always be contest when there are heavy consequences, but precisely because Government and others hang those heavy consequences on it, we take our responsibility for getting it right incredibly seriously. We have no hesitation in saying we have it wrong and we need to send another team or another inspector. I am totally happy when I get an email—people are required to notify me or the CEO—when an inspection is—

Q199 Kim Johnson: On those occasions where you have to send in another team because the decision has been overturned, what would happen to the original group of inspectors who have deemed an establishment inadequate, for example?

Amanda Spielman: These are very often very marginal judgments, borderlines. In response to your earlier question, I said that it can be pretty hard to work out what sits on one side and what sits on the other. It is not a mechanistic formula that says, “Two points for this, three points for that and overall 67 points means good and 68 points means outstanding”. We cannot reduce inspection to those terms. Sometimes working through those kinds of processes shows a gap in inspectors’ understanding or training and will lead to retraining on those aspects. Sometimes it will be about a very marginal decision where the original inspector is simply carrying through our normal procedures—

Q200 Kim Johnson: Have you ever sacked inspectors for not doing their job properly?

Amanda Spielman: Yes.

Q201 Andrew Lewer: Is there any cost penalty for people appealing Ofsted judgments, just on the basis that people go, “I don’t like that result; I will appeal it”? How do you stop that from happening?



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Amanda Spielman: We can't. We have no power to impose any penalty or charge in relation to appeals and I do think it is right that in a strong democracy there should be space to contest the decisions of Government authorities and that it should not be made too difficult or burdensome for the people on the receiving end.

I would not want to be seen as oppressive by raising obstacles to challenge. It is right for us that we get challenged on a proportion. I pay a lot of attention to the data that comes through from complaints, both about the level and the reasons, to get insight into the things that are causing the greatest difficulty. Sometimes that shows where we may need a bit more training; sometimes it shows where we need to do more sector work; sometimes it is showing the kinds of problems that we need to talk about more widely.

Q202 **Andrew Lewer:** The reassessments and appeals that have been successful have only ever been by one grade. You have never had an inspection that was so disastrously wrong that it ended two grades above what it first came out with?

Amanda Spielman: Not that I can recall. Because we now deal with complaints pre publication of the report and the grade is not formally issued until the report is published, so what is given at the feedback meeting is a provisional grade that is subject to quality assurance and any adjustment if there is a successful complaint. We do not have pre and post data, but I cannot think of a single case remotely like that in the almost six years that I have been doing this job.

Q203 **Ian Mearns:** Before we move on, you have a four-stage complaints process that ends up with adjudication by an independent adjudicator. Do you contend that the four stages would weed out those kinds of disgruntled applications for review, not happy, but without any reason why?

Amanda Spielman: As always, the most disgruntled people are those who tend to push things furthest through the complaints process and it is absolutely their right to do that.

Q204 **Ian Mearns:** Of the number of people making a referral to the complaints process, what is the overall percentage of those who are successful in the review process?

Amanda Spielman: That is very hard to define because until the provisional judgment is made, there is nothing to compare with. For example, there is no way of measuring and capturing the concern during an inspection that led to a senior HMI being sent down to quality assure and having an influence before the feedback meeting at which the provisional judgment is made, but quite a lot of our assurance comes at those early stages. We struggle with how to describe this in ways that give people full measure.



Part of the reason why I find it valuable to have serving practitioner inspectors is they go through these processes as inspectors—they may have a senior HMI brought down, they may have an inspection declared incomplete—it spreads that understanding through the system of how Ofsted operates, what we really do, and it lets people see that we genuinely do respond when people raise concerns.

- Q205 **Ian Mearns:** Given the complaints that led to Kim Johnson's questioning about the potential lack of understanding or the potential perception of a lack of transparency, do you think it might be in Ofsted's best interests to produce some anonymised case studies of how the complaints system works, just to show people some real and practical cases of how the complaint came around, "This is how it was conducted and this is how it was settled"?

Amanda Spielman: That is an interesting suggestion that I will take to my policy director. We try to make sure that the documents about the complaints procedure that we publish are as clear and straightforward as possible, but I will see if they think what you suggest might be helpful.

- Q206 **Ian Mearns:** Changing tack somewhat, in 2021 your budget was £137.7 million but you had an underspend of £11.9 million, about 8.6%, by my rough calculation. However, in the 2022-23 financial year, you have had an increase in revenue spend of £18.1 million, so you have had an £11.9 million underspend and an £18.1 million uplift in the budget. What is the grand plan?

Amanda Spielman: The underspend is pretty much entirely around the suspension of routine inspection because inspectors were not travelling; they were not staying in hotels. That is overwhelmingly the reason for that underspend. Of course that went back to the Treasury, as it should have done, and inspectors were deployed to other work, as they should have been. I mentioned the Royal Holloway report earlier on all the different places inspectors went to. That year is an entirely abnormal year.

We have had no real-terms increase that I am aware of to our core budget. The additional money entirely relates to the additional things Government wants us to undertake, such as the acceleration of the inspection cycle for schools, taking on inspecting supported accommodation for older children and funding the new area special needs inspection framework. If it would be helpful to have that spelt out, I can write to the Committee, but it is entirely attributable to specific pieces of work that we have been asked to undertake.

- Q207 **Ian Mearns:** In answer to a number of questions today, you have gone into other aspects of inspection regimes and talked about the potential for lack of capacity. Rather than returning the £11.9 million to the Treasury, could that not have been an opportunity to fulfil some of those gaps in capacity?



Amanda Spielman: I think if we had set out on a major inspector recruitment exercise while inspections were suspended, eyebrows would have been raised. We did renew our staff; we did make sure our training kept going. We knew that at some point we would be restarting and that we needed to make sure that inspectors were prepared for that. Some of the difficulties with training may be to do with it not having been possible to sustain training at the same level online.

Q208 **Ian Mearns:** You could have been preparing for the end of the pandemic by having some training in process for the shortages that the organisation was aware of and then, like a coiled spring, you could have leapt forward.

Amanda Spielman: Perhaps, but for much of that time we did not know when routine inspection would return and we would have laid ourselves open to criticism from this Committee, not to mention the PAC, if we had hired a large number of people for whom we did not at that point have any work and it would have been frustrating for them too.

We constantly have to manage the balance between the very short term, where we are capacity constrained, and the medium term, where we can respond to whatever expectations the Government sets because it takes roughly 18 months to get a lead inspector to full confidence, about three months to recruit them, three months for the initial induction and training period and then a year to get them to full capacity. We have a lead time.

If people ask how many inspections we can do in the next year, there will be a clear answer. If people ask how many inspections, "Can you do this many inspections in the next three or four or five years?" the answer is nearly always, "Yes, provided there is the money to recruit and train the people we need to do them".

Q209 **Ian Mearns:** If you are going to write to us about the additional things that the DfE is asking you to do, could you do that in a timely way so we can raise some of those issues with the Secretary of State in a couple of weeks?

Amanda Spielman: We have an admirably efficient finance director and I am quite sure we could have that information with you by tomorrow.

Chair: That would be very helpful and much appreciated. You mentioned the point of this Committee being responsible—

Amanda Spielman: Actually, may I say this week? A little bit more breathing room.

Q210 **Chair:** Probably wise. You mentioned the point of this Committee being here to hold you to account as well as the DfE and of course that is correct. Can you explain to us the information about losses in your accounts where it reports that between April 2019 and March 2022, Ofsted reported 1,213 cases of losses totalling £1.29 million? It is not quite clear from the accounts what those losses are or what they cover.



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Amanda Spielman: I apologise for that if it is not sufficiently clear; I thought there was quite a lot of explanation about the Covid losses. In mid-March 2020, the world suddenly shut down. We do two main rounds of inspector training conferences every year in spring and autumn. The spring ones happen in the Easter holidays and were due at the end of March and we had to cancel all the conference bookings and arrangements, hotels for the inspectors who had to travel, and in some cases their travel plans at very short notice. From memory, something over £0.5 million was unavoidably wasted cost, which I regret, but there was absolutely nothing we could do about that.

There is another thing that I think would have been in 2021. There was a weird anomaly. About £20 million of our income every year comes from billing the providers we regulate and inspect for registration and other fees. In the case of independent schools, they are billed for inspection. Of the total £20 million in fees every year, we have to write off a fraction of 1%, say because a provider goes bust without paying—it is a very small figure.

The other one-off lump that came up sometime in the last three years was due to a weird error in the legislation that restricted us to invoicing independent schools only once a year. Even if, for example, DfE commissioned another inspection, we could not charge them for it or could not charge them for it immediately. In this way, over more than a decade about £0.5 million of unpaid fees built up, which the Treasury accepted it was going to be completely impossible for us to recover and permitted us to write off in one of those years.

Q211 **Chair:** Is that not something that could be relatively straightforwardly corrected by an SI?

Amanda Spielman: The legislation has now been corrected, I understand, so it will not happen again, but we do not control the timing of those kinds of corrections. Very roughly, I think we would have between £50,000 and £100,000 of bad debt and inevitably cancelled bookings would be the typical reason for losses in a given year.

Q212 **Chair:** Of the sheer number, 1,213 separate instances, much might be made up of cancelled travel as a result of inspections being cancelled and that side of things?

Amanda Spielman: Within Covid, I think we had several hundred serving practitioners and non-serving Ofsted inspectors contracted for the week before lockdown; we had contracted with them. Each inspector's contracted fees will have been counted separately in those numbers.

Chair: That is helpful.

Amanda Spielman: The typical profile is that any one amount in there is small. There are no big items lurking in there.

Q213 **Chair:** One other noticeable thing in the accounts over time is that the



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cost of consultancy and agency staff has gone up since 2018. I think consultancy spending in 2021-22 reached £474,000, a 77% increase from the previous year, and almost four times higher than it was in 2018. Do you expect that to continue or is some of it also related to the one-off impact of the pandemic?

Amanda Spielman: Taking the two things separately, consultancy is much the smaller amount and I think is generally pretty small for us in the context of the overall budget. We use consultants very sparingly when we need specific expertise. I think we have used some consultancy in the call centre; I think we have used some digital consultancy.

The much bigger numbers are those around agency spend. We have quite uneven work in our Manchester call centre throughout the year and we use some agency to manage fluctuations rather than having people sitting twiddling their thumbs at other times.

We also use some digital contractors. There are some areas of big national shortages in digital skills where the only way we can get the skills and capacity we need is through contract arrangements. We work hard to keep that to a minimum and to grow and develop our own staff as much as we can, but do unavoidably have to use contractors sometimes.

Q214 **Chair:** Are you saying that the vast majority of the £5.5 million agency and temporary staff costs is within the digital and support space or is some of it among your inspectors?

Amanda Spielman: The Ofsted inspector cost does not appear in that agency or consultancy line.

Q215 **Ian Mearns:** We had a discussion earlier about using private sector and independent home contractors to do inspections.

Amanda Spielman: I am fairly certain that would not appear in that line. I think the inspection costs are reported in a different line. From memory, the Ofsted inspector cost is something like £12 million a year. It is definitely not in that consultancy or agency line.

Chair: We are running down the clock and you have given very fulsome answers, so some quite quick questions now. I will bring Apsana Begum in on tutoring.

Q216 **Apsana Begum:** I have a couple of questions about catch-up tutoring in schools. Ofsted recently published phase 1 of the independent review of tutoring in schools, commissioned by the DfE. You concluded that, "tutoring cannot really work—without a well-considered and constructed curriculum in place". Can you expand on that and outline some of the key findings of that review so far in phase 1?

Amanda Spielman: Yes, of course. The point we were making there is that sometimes people talk about tutoring as if it is a separate thing that you can think about completely detached from what you are teaching



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children in the main classroom. This is a point that I have made many times over.

Most of what children learn, including children who have suffered loss of education through Covid, is in their main classroom with their main teacher. Tutoring needs to fit well with that main classroom. For some children, it is helping to bring them back into the range of that teaching to be able to cope with it. If it cuts across or duplicates or leaves gaps between, it will not be as effective as it should be. That makes it slightly different from some of the ways that tutoring is sometimes deployed in the pre-Covid world where, for example, it might have been used for parents to prepare children for a grammar school selection test. That is not something that the primary school will do; it is an unrelated activity.

Here schools were having to do the wider job of working out what children's starting points were, what the gaps were, what they needed to fill, what was going to be picked up in the adjustments they made in the main curriculum and what needed to be picked up by tutors. That message about the importance of integration and alignment comes through strongly—perhaps even more strongly than in research on wider uses of tutoring to date.

That is part of why we have found that schools in the main, not exclusively, seemed to prefer school-led tutoring and to use their own staff, who were already managed within schools, who know the teaching staff, to get the best alignment to make sure that tutor attention was going into the right areas and that there was rapid and effective communication with teachers. I think it helps to minimise the job for schools. It does not mean that there isn't excellent tutoring through other routes as well—I do not mean to disparage them—but we are reporting on what we found schools preferred.

Q217 Apsana Begum: Of 63 schools, the report highlights 10 where the tutoring provided was hazardous and poorly planned. How indicative do you think that is of schools across the country and does it differ in terms of areas of disadvantage and deprivation?

Amanda Spielman: The numbers are not large enough for me to be able to give a segmented analysis in that way, by disadvantage. It was disappointing that there was a minority of schools where the funding really was not being used well.

Q218 Apsana Begum: Of the three areas of tuition partners, academic mentors and school-led tutoring, would you say the poor planning—

Amanda Spielman: That I can't answer, I am afraid. I would have to refer back to the report and write to the Committee. I would be happy to tell whether there are specific findings. Did you say "haphazard" or "hazardous"?

Apsana Begum: Haphazard and poorly planned.



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Amanda Spielman: Yes. I was going to say that we didn't find hazardous tutoring. The point about us not yet having found ways to assess pupil progress, there is a big attribution problem here. At a system level, it may be possible to compare schools with and without tutoring and see whether tutoring has had an impact, but within a school and certainly for an individual child, it is extraordinarily difficult to say, "This much of their progress is due to tutoring and this much of their progress is due to the in-class lessons" so we need to be careful not to try to over-attribute where that cannot responsibly be done. That is part of why we do not attempt to make a definitive claim about whether tutoring is leading to improved outcomes for the children being tutored.

Q219 **Apsana Begum:** I think you did say as well that where schools tended to provide tutoring before or after school, attendance was a problem.

Amanda Spielman: Yes. It is clear from our work that both schools and many parents preferred tutoring to happen during the school day, which obviously has implications for taking children out of other lessons sometimes or for missing breaks.

There are some trade-offs here. There is no perfect choice in this situation. You know which children need it and if they are the children who are least likely to come early or stay after school and you obviously cannot compel them to, you may, as a pragmatic matter, say that it is better to do it in the school day.

Q220 **Apsana Begum:** How responsive have Government been to the report?

Amanda Spielman: We are doing a further report next year. I do not think we put things in that required a direct response. I have not had a direct conversation with Ministers about how they are proposing to respond.

Q221 **Apsana Begum:** Do you have any views about what Government could do in this area to make the tutoring programme more effective?

Amanda Spielman: I think I will have to write to the Committee because I don't have enough context on this particular report to know what discussions have been had. I am sure there will have been extensive discussions between our officials and officials at the DfE, but I am afraid I simply do not know where those discussions are at.

Q222 **Chair:** I realise we are reaching the end of our allotted time. Thank you very much for the evidence you have given.

Is there anything that we have not asked you about that you would like to take the opportunity of the last two minutes to put on the record? Perhaps to Yvette Stanley as well, having sat patiently through the meeting and not having much opportunity to come in: is there anything from your end of things that you would like to draw to the Committee's attention?



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Amanda Spielman: Very briefly, I would like to say that it is about getting the balance right going forward, on the one hand recognising how much children and young people still need and that we are not through the business of catch-up and recovery yet, but at the same time I think it is important to recognise that the vast majority of schools, colleges, nurseries and social care providers have, as far as we can see, been doing an intelligent, well-structured job over the last year. We should not attribute the fact that there is still a way to go to any deficiency of the system. I want to send an overall positive message that I think that the system as a whole is doing a good job of moving children forward in the way they should.

Yvette Stanley: I look forward to coming back one day to talk about children in care and care leavers; I have had that opportunity in the past when Ian was chairing. We have focused on schools. Local authorities are struggling with the rise in early help and the slightly higher needs. We do not have enough children's homes in the right places.

I think all of these things are located now in a range of reports. You have the independent care review, the work done on the private sector from the CMA and we have a couple of national panel reports. I think there will be an opportunity going forward for us to come and talk about our role in supporting those changes.

Chair: Thank you very much.