

# Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Accountability hearings](#), HC 82

Tuesday 14 September 2021

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Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Tom Hunt; Dr Caroline Johnson; Kim Johnson; David Johnston; Ian Mearns; Nicola Richards.

Questions 932 - 1025

## Witness

[I](#): Dame Christine Ryan, Chair, Ofsted.

Written evidence from witnesses:



## Examination of witness

Witness: Dame Christine Ryan.

Q932 **Chair:** Thank you very much for coming today to our Select Committee. For the benefit of the tape and those watching on Parliament TV, could you kindly introduce yourself and your title?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I am the current Chair of Ofsted.

Q933 **Chair:** Thank you. You were appointed in July last year. We will come to the effects of the pandemic later, but could you tell the Committee, in your personal experience of the last year, how the governance and accountability of Ofsted works in theory and practice? An essay question to start.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** It works as laid down in the Education Act, which controls the duties and responsibilities, respectively, of the chief inspector and the board. What is in the Act, of course, is minimalist, as usual, and that is interpreted by the Ofsted board in its governance framework. It operates according to that governance framework.

Q934 **Chair:** To make matters clear to our Committee, is the board of Ofsted what members would consider a normal, non-executive board that can hold the management of Ofsted to account or is it not? Do you have decision-making power or do you just have an advisory role? Where in writing are your powers laid down?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** In writing, they are laid down in the Education Act 2006.

**Chair:** Of the chair?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Yes, the role of the chair. Essentially there are three requirements that cover the strategic objectives and priorities of Ofsted, holding HMCI to account for those matters that are within her remit for effectiveness and efficiency, and they are a range of requirements and responsibilities that are peculiar to Ofsted. As with many of the ALBs, they each have their own specification as to what the respective roles of the board and the executive are, and they are clearly laid out there. Then we have the governance framework that unpicks what is in the legislation slightly for roles and responsibilities.

Q935 **Chair:** Do you have decision-making power or are you just advisory, in a nutshell?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** We are largely advisory, and in fact totally advisory for all the powers that are restricted to HMCI only. We have decision-making powers around those specifications that we have already talked about.

Q936 **Chair:** If you are, in practice, predominantly just advisory and our Committee only has accountability sessions every few months with the



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chief inspector, to whom is the Chief Inspector of Schools accountable day to day? To no one, in essence; is that right?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Only as it is laid down in the Act, which is that the chief inspector is answerable to Parliament and that, in the case of Ofsted, means through this Committee.

Q937 **Chair:** We meet the chief inspector only every few months. She is always willing to come, by the way; this is not a criticism in the slightest. In essence, there is no day-to-day accountability.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** The National Audit Office has recently published another report on findings of ALBs and I support its findings and recommendations. I think Ofsted is typical of many ALBs—

Q938 **Chair:** Can you just explain the acronym? People outside will not know.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Sorry. It is typical of arm's-length bodies in that the actual duties tend to be idiosyncratic according to the arm's-length body. In Ofsted's case, a great many of the duties and responsibilities rest solely with HMCI. The board was put in place in 2006.

Q939 **Chair:** But there is no day-to-day accountability?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** There is day-to-day accountability to the board only in the matters specified in the Act.

Q940 **Chair:** Given your impressive background, your huge experience and your knowledge of school inspectorates, how responsive to the board's oversight have you found the chief inspector? Does the chief inspector proactively seek and take your advice?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** One of the key efficiencies about the way in which any organisation works—and I must draw on that experience here—is to establish very early on, through a governance framework, what the parameters are for the executive and the non-executive, where they interact and what the sole purviews of those separate constituencies are. I am very fortunate in that I am working with a chief inspector who is totally committed to delivering the remit of Ofsted in an efficient and effective way, and someone who works constructively with the board. It is also true to say that we keep to our very specific divisions.

Q941 **Chair:** Does the chief inspector proactively seek or take your advice regularly? How responsive to the board's oversight have you found the chief inspector, in a nutshell? Just a simple question.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I have formal meetings with the chief inspector every two weeks and we also have an arrangement that we can pick up the phone to one another. The chief inspector keeps me informed of any major issues that are emerging and will often seek the advice of the board about matters that are coming up on the agenda.

Q942 **Chair:** All right. Does she proactively seek your advice?



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**Dame Christine Ryan:** Specifically, it depends on what the issues are and whatever we are dealing with.

Q943 **Chair:** Do you think that it is worth having a new layer of accountability to review reports directly to look for certain themes and Government priorities and report back to Parliament to guide our questions for HMCI?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I am not sure what you mean by a review of reports separately. Could you just elaborate for me a little bit?

Q944 **Chair:** It seems that the way it is set up, the chief inspector is not accountable day to day. Obviously, the chief inspector comes to Parliament whenever we ask, but it seems to me there is a missing layer of accountability.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** The role of the chair is to make sure that there is good governance and that that good governance is fit for the future. My own view is not that there is anything wrong with the operation and the day-to-day activity of our current chief inspector at all, but the reality is that it is a system of accountability that has not been reviewed in a significant amount of time.

Q945 **Chair:** Should it be reviewed?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** In my view it should be reviewed because governance and what passes as good governance has changed significantly in the past 15 years or so and we need to keep up to date with that.

**Chair:** The accountability of Ofsted should be reviewed?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** We need to keep up to date with changes in what constitutes good governance.

Q946 **Chair:** What do you think—again, as concise as possible—of the relationship between Ofsted and the DfE, how it works in practice and what could work better? Do you think it is surprising that on occasion Ofsted has taken different legal advice to the Department for Education on the same issue? Why would Ofsted do that?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** My understanding of the arrangement is that there is an agreement of working between the sponsor Department, which is the DfE, and Ofsted. Ofsted was set up as an arm's-length body in 2006 for the very purpose of retaining independence from the DfE so that its reports and activities are at arm's length from political influence. Ofsted and the DfE have to tread a very careful line to make sure that that independence is protected while at the same time working in harmony together.

The relationship—as I have seen it operating over the pandemic because, of course, that is the only time I have been in post—seems to me to be a very positive one. There is a great deal of communication and interaction between the chief inspector, the DfE and wider Government.



Q947 **Chair:** I will move on to faith schools, which you know has been a very controversial topic. Many faith schools feel that Ofsted has it in for faith schools, in essence. We questioned the chief inspector about this. You have experience in your previous post of running an inspectorate that included schools with faith designation. How well do you think that Ofsted deals with schools with a religious ethos in inspection, for example Ofsted's inspections of ultra-orthodox Jewish schools, just to take one?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** The same framework for inspection is applied to all the school setting regardless of their faith construction. Everyone is treated equally in that regard. Obviously, I am aware that there have been some tensions with some faith groups and I am reliably informed that nine out of 10 of the Jewish state faith schools in fact are at least "good" in their inspections and reports. I do not think that lends support to the view that in any way Ofsted is singling out faith schools per se.

However, there are situations that can arise—and this is quite apart from Ofsted—where legislation itself makes for difficulties for certain faith groups with any legislation that is passed. It is important to remember Ofsted can only work with the legislation that is put before it.

Q948 **Chair:** Some have the view that Ofsted is gold-plating the legislation or the RSHE from the Government and, therefore, launching an assault on faith schools.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I can say from my experience as an inspector, as a chief inspector, Ofsted, like any inspectorate, relies on the interpretation of the guidance from the DfE, from the sponsoring Department. I am assured that the DfE fully supports Ofsted's approach to its inspection of faith schools.

Q949 **Chair:** In May, Ofsted published a research report into how schools deliver religious education. It showed that in secondary schools only 44% met the threshold of curriculum time, with 34% of all academies reporting no timetabled religious education, which is against the law. This has been a particular concern given the intolerance and anti-Semitism exhibited in some schools at the end of the last academic year and the legal requirement of schools in this area and in their duty to teach respect for other religions, which is one of the protected characteristics, as you know. What action has Ofsted taken in response to this report and have any schools been downgraded as a result of their lack of teaching of RE?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** That is an operational question and unfortunately I do not have the operational information before me, but no such concern has been raised with the board as far as I am aware. Certainly, if that is a question you would like me to seek an answer to, I will happily pass it to my colleagues.

Q950 **Chair:** As delivery in RE is a legal requirement, will Ofsted treat schools who do not deliver in this area as it would without delivering adequately in regard to the protected characteristics?



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**Dame Christine Ryan:** Again, I am afraid that is an operational matter for the chief inspector, it is not something that would come to the board.

Q951 **Chair:** All right. The reason why I ask is that clearly Ofsted jumps on schools that it feels are not teaching RSHE, and if there are legal requirements to teach RE and some schools are not doing it, surely it is a matter of balance that Ofsted also makes it very clear that this is not acceptable?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Balance in inspection is what it is all about. These things are often not hard and fast and it is the job of the chief inspector, in creating a framework and guidance for inspectors, to ensure that balance is reached and that things are dealt with in a proportionate way.

Q952 **Chair:** Do you think there needs to be a rebalancing between Ofsted and the faith schools?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Rebalancing?

**Chair:** As I mentioned at the beginning, some faith schools have the view that Ofsted is antagonistic towards faith schools in general.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** That would depend on whether we had support for the view that Ofsted is antagonistic to faith schools in general, and I do not think the evidence I have seen indicates that.

Q953 **Chair:** The Independent Schools Inspectorate regularly examines a wide range of activities in support of personal development. Obviously, you were heavily involved in that organisation. These include things like hobbies, clubs, trips, religious studies and sports. Do you think Ofsted inspectors place as much emphasis on these wider aspects of personal development as the Independent Schools Inspectorate does or are they only trained to ask about protected characteristics?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** No. Although I have not attended their training, I am pretty certain that looking at personal development is dealt with in great detail. It is certainly there in the framework and under the new Education Inspection Framework that is emphasised even further, the broader education of children that goes beyond just the academic.

Q954 **Chair:** Finally, before I pass over to my colleague, weaknesses in careers guidance were reported in two in five providers graded "outstanding" or "good". I want to understand what Ofsted is doing to ensure schools are providing proper guidance on careers. When the chief inspector came to our Committee she said, "What do you want to drop for us to look at this part of the inspection regime?" The response of myself and Ian Mearns was that the law is the law and the Baker clause should be enforced.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** In response to concerns that had been raised about the inspection of careers and as a response to feedback on the small amount of new framework inspections that have been done, I know that there has been a strengthening of the careers section in the



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framework and in guidance to inspectors, and that this has also formed part of their more recent training in preparation for restart of inspections. I think it is refocusing on that.

Inspection is a very dynamic thing. Inspectors have a fixed amount of time and they then must deal with whatever is presented to them in that school. If there are, let's say, serious safeguarding concerns, that can use up large amounts of inspection time. It is a question then of choosing, in balance and proportionality, what you can do with the remainder to safeguard what you are there to safeguard for education.

**Q955 Chair:** If you have two in five providers graded "outstanding" or "good" but still having weaknesses in career guidance, does it not seem that Ofsted will hammer schools for some things but not others, depending on what is the view at the time? Do you agree, as chair, that the enforcement of the Baker clause and proper careers guidance in schools should be a priority for Ofsted?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I think enforcement of good careers guidance is really important, and I say that with great feeling, I have to say, from my own experience and from working with children, but I think the first part of your question was—

**Q956 Chair:** She said that it is weighed up against the other things and that it is given significant weight but it is not set up as a limiting judgment. She also said to the Committee, "What do you want us to drop?" I think that is unacceptable because the law is the law. If you are going to hammer a school on faith issues, which clearly Ofsted see as a priority, why is it that they can spend a lot of time doing that but not give priority to whether schools are enforcing the Baker clause and giving proper careers advice?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I do not think it is in Ofsted's remit to disapply any requirements. On limiting factors though, as you mentioned, from my own experience—not just here but also in lots of other countries—you have to be very cautious about introducing a whole range of limiting factors. It brings in all sorts of unintended consequences. I would be very wary indeed of making more things limiting factors. I am not a great fan of limiting factors because they limit your ability to tell things like they are.

**Q957 Ian Mearns:** Very quickly on the careers education, information, advice and guidance, because all of those things are important, it seems to me deeply unfortunate that Ofsted has taken this almost laissez-faire approach to many aspects of that whole discourse. We are talking about the potential for youngsters to progress to another stage. It seems as though they are limited in the choices that they can make because of the lack of information, advice and guidance that they are getting. Quite often, unfortunately—and of course the Baker clause was set up around this whole issue—schools are often guided in what they provide because of "bums on seats" funding regimes. It is in their own interest to keep their own youngsters within their own confines. That is very sad because



it is not good for the youngster; it is about the interest of the institution. From that perspective, I find it very worrying that Ofsted would not want to focus on that much more importantly.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I am not engaged in operational matters but what I will say in defence of Ofsted, not just on this but on a whole range of other things that might seem, on any given occasion, not to be featuring as strongly as they should—by the way, I do not disagree with anything you have said; I fully support the need for good careers education, information and guidance, and it should be a full broad range—is that over time, inspection has become increasingly squeezed with a bigger and bigger platter of things that have to be inspected. No inspector has superpowers. They cannot magically create time or resource from nowhere. We may be coming to a point where we say, “Just what is it we feel is important for inspectorates to report on?”

Q958 **Ian Mearns:** Can I suggest, though, that one of the roles that you should be taking on as chair of the board of Ofsted is being a champion for the organisation to get the resources so that Ofsted can do its job effectively, in the interests of children and young people?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I agree with you and that is exactly what I am in the process of doing. We are, at the moment, looking at the new strategy, which will come into effect early in 2022. That is one of the things I will be dealing with.

Q959 **Ian Mearns:** Secondly, on a point that was raised by the Chair regarding the inspections of faith schools, you said that everyone was treated equally in that regard. From the contacts that I have had from the other end of the telescope, from schools themselves and from the Chinuch group, representing Orthodox Jewish faith schools around the country, many of them do not feel that that is the case. If you want us to believe that everyone is treated equally in that regard, I think you have a public relations job to do with that group because they do not feel that that is the case.

**Chair:** I have been Chair since 2017 and faith school representatives contact me relentlessly to say that their view is that Ofsted has it in for faith schools. That is a problem. You may say it is perception but it is a problem, the fact that these faith schools think Ofsted has it in for them, that there is a culture of support for secular schools and that Ofsted does not like faith schools and would rather they were not there.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** In some ways perception is all, I agree with that. I met some of these groups very soon after I took up my post. Of course, unfortunately, no sooner did that happen and I was going to be paying close attention to the new framework, than we had lockdown and the framework has not operated. The board is aware of these concerns. It has been something that I have discussed at length with the chief inspector. Although operational matters are not the board’s remit, I do know that it is the same framework that is applied.



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I would also want to know, and I think the board would legitimately want to know, once we get the new framework up and running, if it appears it is operating disproportionately on any group, whether it be for faith or anything else. That is something you would want to look at. It may be, of course, that it is not the inspection that is operating disproportionately; it may be that changes in legislation have a greater impact on some constituencies than others.

**Chair:** It may be that you are gold-plating the legislation because of views inside the organisation that are anti-faith schools.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** If the evidence, when it comes through, indicates that there is a disproportionality, that is something that as a board, because of its reputational impact and its potential impact on children, we would seek information on from the chief inspector.

Q960 **Nicola Richards:** A year into your post, to what extent do you believe that Ofsted's priorities and objectives are fit for purpose?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Ofsted is currently running to its existing strategy, which carries on until the end of this year. Everything that I have seen is that operationally it is working exactly as it should, it is delivering against that strategy and it has been delivering against the agenda as agreed with the Department and in accordance with that strategy. Of course, everything has been on hold pretty much since I came into post so I have had a limited amount of direct experience of what would be its normal activities.

Q961 **Nicola Richards:** What changes do you think are needed?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I do not want to pre-empt what are going to be board strategy discussions. One of the things, obviously, is to deliver what we are tasked with delivering through the Education Act and in accordance with the agenda as laid down by the Secretary of State. That would be our first priority. We are all living in a rather different world than we were 18 months ago, and so one of the things the board will want to be looking at is how that is impacting on the organisations that we inspect and how it will impact on our own organisation and the way in which we need to operate.

Q962 **Nicola Richards:** What do you see as the key challenges for Ofsted's work in the children's social care sector and in the education sector over the next five years, and how will Ofsted's new five-year strategy reflect that?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Again, I do not want to pre-empt discussions that have already started on the development of our new strategy, but for social care and education, one of the things I want us to look at is the changing landscape in groupings of providers. That has changed quite significantly over recent years. There are collections, organisations and groups of providers in social care and in education, with multi-academy trusts, for example. The way in which that impacts on inspection of



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individual providers is something that we need to look at carefully and unpick further. That is one of the things that would immediately spring to mind for me.

Also, of course, we are only going to just start getting significant amounts of information about the impact of the new Education Inspection Framework and so we will want to evaluate how that is playing out in practice. I can say, after writing many frameworks, that you can test it to destruction before it goes out there but you cannot predict every single eventuality. You would want to check and modify if necessary when you start to get information on its impact.

Q963 **Tom Hunt:** When was the last time you sat down with the chief inspector and had a proper discussion?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** We have only been able to meet physically once since I took up my post, because of lockdown, and that was at the end of July. In fact, we spent two days with the board and the chief inspector, beginning to look at the new strategy and terms for working out the new strategy. However, I speak to the chief inspector, remotely at the moment, every two weeks at least. Now that things are unlocking rather more, I anticipate that more and more of those meetings will be in person.

Q964 **Chair:** Could I just interject on that? Lockdown restrictions were lifted last year for a couple of months. I know there were the different tiers but why on earth would you not have met her personally, face to face?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I met her once—

**Chair:** When was that?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** —when there was a brief interruption to lockdown.

**Chair:** What about since March?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** July; we had two days.

**Chair:** You have met twice, personally?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** We had two days, yes.

**Chair:** That seems very little.

Q965 **Tom Hunt:** Would you say that the board has teeth? If it were the case that you had concerns about the chief inspector or the way it was operating in an operational sense, do you believe that you have the means and the powers at your disposal to do something about it?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** We have teeth with the powers that are vested in the board. If it was in an operational sense, with the chief inspector that we have, I am sure that I could raise those issues and we could have a very frank and forthright conversation about them.



This comes back to the point I made earlier about how expectations about what good governance looks like have changed over the years. It should not be the case that that dialogue relies solely on the individual personalities of the chief inspector and the chair. I am fortunate I can and do work effectively with the chief inspector that we have in play but I have to be mindful that in two years' time there could be a different chair sitting here and a different chief inspector. For me, these things, in a modern age, should not rely on the chance of personality.

**Q966 Tom Hunt:** I know that with the new inspection framework it has been tricky over the last two years, because of the pandemic, to really form a full view of whether or not it is working in a way you would like. It seems to me that it is changing the focus slightly. It is trying to move away from rewarding schools for potentially teaching to the test and taking greater account of curriculum and everything else. It seems to me, though, that what this is all about is trying to measure the positive difference made by the school in question, also taking into account the fact that different schools operate in different areas, often in very different catchments with different challenges. To what extent are you confident the new inspection framework takes this into account and makes sure that schools are properly judged based upon the circumstances in which they operate?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I have not had the opportunity yet to shadow one of the new inspection framework inspections, although that was on my list very early when I came into post and would have happened by now. However, I am confident, looking at the framework, that that is its intent, I know that that has been reinforced with inspector training and that is how I would expect it to operate, but the detail of those operational questions is obviously not a matter for me.

**Q967 Tom Hunt:** You are in a critical position to hold the system to account and form a judgment about whether you think it is working or not.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Yes.

**Q968 Tom Hunt:** My understanding is that it is not possible to be graded "outstanding" unless you have good special educational needs. My understanding is also, though, that you could be rated "good" through Ofsted with there also being concerns about special educational needs provision. Would you agree that it should be impossible to get "good" if there are concerns about special educational needs provision?

Secondly to that, I spend a lot of time visiting schools, talking to specialists in special educational needs provision, and they still often feel that they almost get penalised by getting a reputation for being very good at special educational needs because the better they are, the more parents want to send their kids who might have learning disabilities to that school, which presents certain challenges. None of them ever wants to feel that there is a conflict between doing what they believe is morally right, supporting vulnerable kids who have learning disabilities, but also—not unreasonably—wanting to be professionally successful. Of course,



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Ofsted's judgment—

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Because it will attract more children with special educational needs?

**Tom Hunt:** I would be interested to know what your thinking is in that area.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** All right. There are a few things to unpick and I may have misunderstood you. Please correct me if I have. I have no evidence to indicate—and I would not know without asking for the data because it is an operational matter—whether schools can still get “good” and do still get “good” even if their special educational needs provision is poor. The Education Inspection Framework looks at outcomes for groups of children and special educational needs is one of those groups that as an inspector you would always look at. I cannot say whether or not the assertion you have made about schools being able to get “good” without special needs is accurate or not. I do not know.

Q969 **Tom Hunt:** With the greatest respect, it is not an assertion. I was told that by someone from Ofsted in a previous meeting.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Okay. Thank you. If that is the case, I think what you then went on to talk about was whether I thought it was right that you could get “good” when special educational needs provision is not good. That brings us back to limiting factors again. I would be very concerned about bringing in a limiting factor of that type because of unintended consequences. However, I think looking at special educational needs is really important on inspection and that inspection should be sensitive to the context of the school. That has been the focus in the development of the new framework, to try to emphasise that context matters.

**Tom Hunt:** That is fair. Thank you for your answers.

Q970 **Kim Johnson:** Good morning, Christine. Many teachers and school leaders believe that too many Ofsted inspectors lack the knowledge and professional experience to be able to accurately judge some schools. How are inspectors recruited? Do you believe that the inspectors that we have at the moment represent the communities in which they serve? Do you collect equality data on those inspectors?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** We do collect equality data but I do not have that data in front of me right now. I do not know if you have asked the chief inspector because staffing and recruitment is in the remit of the chief inspector, not in the remit of the board.

I agree with you that it is important that the people who you have inspecting have relevant skills and expertise. That is partly what is behind the thinking of bringing on to teams actual, serving practitioners. When I started inspection way back in 1993 it was the case that many inspectors had not been in a school teaching for very many years. I do not think that is the case at all anymore. I have had nothing in my conversations



with the inspectors at Ofsted to indicate that they do not have the skills and expertise for their brief, nothing at all. Quite the reverse, actually.

Q971 **David Johnston:** I have two quite different questions, but first I declare that I have a family member who works for Ofsted in the complaints handling team.

The first question is about the skills of the board and whether you feel you have the skills you need. Looking at the people on it, it looks quite classic for a board of this sort of body. It is great and good people who are on multiple boards. Given the change in landscape of education, particularly through Covid, do you feel you have the skills you need and what are you looking for where you feel you may be deficient?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** One of my legitimate jobs is to look at the board, and in fact I have already conducted one review of board membership and I will be doing an in-depth review of the board's effectiveness before the end of this year. As with any good chair, I hope that what is important is not thinking about personalities but looking at what is needed on that board for the future. It is not about just the delivery now, it is about how things are going to be different going forward, and I have to try to look forward in that.

I want to make sure that whoever we have on that board has the skill and experience that we will need for dealing with a broad remit and a remit that may well extend into other areas. I will be looking to increase the diversity of the board when change happens. I want greater diversity, but it is diversity of thinking as much as anything else.

Q972 **David Johnston:** What exactly do you mean? This is very general stuff. It is a bit like when you ask someone about how they respond to criticism and they say it is really important but cannot give an example of it. What exactly does the board not have at the moment that it should?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** As I say, I want a board that is going to be fit for the future, so what I am looking for on that board is a better representation of the people who have had experience not just as providers but as recipients of the services that we inspect. That would be an important addition to the board.

Q973 **David Johnston:** What does that mean? Does that mean teachers, young people?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** No, teachers, to me, are not the ultimate customer. I will give you an example off the top of my head. In social care, I think it would be quite valuable to hear the voice on the board of somebody who might have had direct experience of our social care system themselves. I would like to see a greater diversity on the board of people who represent the broader constituency of the population across the country. These are things that I will be looking to do as we bring new people on to the board when existing terms end. For me, it is about



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getting board members who match the skills and expertise I need for delivering what a future strategy.

Q974 **David Johnston:** Is there anybody on the board from the FE sector and skills sector?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** We do have somebody who has experience of the FE sector, yes.

Q975 **David Johnston:** Now quite a different question. Along with Rob and Ian, I am supporting my colleague Jonathan Gullis's Bill for Ofsted to be able to support the boards of multi-academy trusts and look at the role they play in performance, financial management and so on. Is that something you would support?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Hugely. I think it is very important. In my former role we had organisations that operated in a similar way in that they had groups of schools that were controlled centrally for some key policies, for hiring and firing decisions and so on. I always felt it was absolutely essential to carry out inspection activities on the governing area and its interactions with the schools that it owned to give an holistic picture of what was driving outcomes and how the whole system operated together. It is an operational matter for the chief inspector but I will say from a personal view it seems odd to me not to look across the whole piece when you are making judgments about outcomes for children and what drives those outcomes.

Q976 **Tom Hunt:** Are you confident that the board as it stands has enough expertise? Is there anyone on the board with a background in special educational needs who really understands what Ofsted needs to do—going back to my previous question—when assessing the extent to which a school is providing effective special educational needs support? Do you believe that is on the board at the moment? Is there that expertise?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** That is on the board at the moment and the board that we have works very effectively. I hear what David said, that the board looks typical of boards of this type, but I have to say that the board I work with works very effectively. It takes its duties very seriously indeed. Wanting to reshape a board for a new strategy is no judgment on the existing board. It just means that things have to keep pace.

Q977 **Ian Mearns:** From an information perspective, I helped establish and I still chair an All Party Group for the teaching profession that focuses on teacher training and professional development. I understand that as well as being chair of Ofsted and a board member at Ofqual, you are also on the expert group on International Qualified Teacher Status.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I am.

Q978 **Ian Mearns:** What are the synergies that you personally get from doing those different roles and are there any conflicts in doing those different roles?



**Dame Christine Ryan:** Interestingly, I was a board member at Ofqual before I came on as chair at Ofsted, and one of the things I looked at with colleagues with both groups was whether or not that would present a conflict of interest. Generally speaking, it does not. For me, it is helpful to know what is happening on the qualifications front because that and the data from qualifications will undoubtedly have an impact on what happens on inspection. Having that information is important to me. If I feel there is a conflict obviously I would declare it at the time.

My work on the international teacher qualifications comes from my longstanding interest and mission to make sure that as many children as possible, regardless of where they are, have a good quality education. We are pretty good here at training our teachers and there is a lot of demand from overseas schools for that experience to flow in both directions. We can only benefit from the perspectives of people from other countries, in the same way that hopefully they can benefit from ours. I see the whole thing fitting together.

**Ian Mearns:** I very much note your assertion that we are very good here at training our teachers, but of course we are currently undergoing a review that might mean a complete upheaval for that sector.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** We are.

Q979 **Ian Mearns:** Your most recent annual report notes that due to the pandemic, Ofsted has been unable to collect data for some strategic metrics. Do you think this led to any blind spots in monitoring and assessing Ofsted's strategic performance?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Of course, you don't know what you don't know is the answer to that. The strategic metrics that have been used prior to the pandemic were determined to fit the existing strategy, which pre-dates me. The reporting to the board looks at efficiency and effectiveness. What we rely on at the moment is the close work that is done by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, the internal auditor reports and the external auditor reports for how effectively and efficiently Ofsted has been running during this time. All of those reports give Ofsted a good report and have raised no substantive concerns at all that have been flagged to the board. Quite the opposite, actually, for its work during the pandemic.

Q980 **Ian Mearns:** It seems to me that you are largely dependent on Ofsted providing you with the evidence to look at to gauge how well or badly it is doing. Is there any remit for the board to do its own investigatory work, digging and sampling?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I do not think that is unusual for any organisation. The board would normally rely on the executive to provide the evidence. It is not the role of the board to dig and sample but it is the role of the board to query and question when that information comes before the board, and the board does that quite extensively. As I say, we



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are developing a new framework that will look at the world as it is today, not as it was five years ago when the current strategy was devised, and therefore new metrics will match whatever the new strategy is. That is something that the board will have close involvement in.

**Q981 Ian Mearns:** If there was an independent Ofsted for Ofsted, do you think Ofsted would come out of it okay?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** At the moment I have no reason to believe otherwise.

**Q982 Ian Mearns:** Thank you. What do you see as Ofsted's role and responsibility in supporting a strategy for longer-term education recovery following the pandemic?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** What do I think the strategy should be? I think that the best thing that Ofsted can do immediately is to get back to the job it is tasked with doing, which is to look at schools, to report on them, to advise parents through its reports and to advise Government on what is working and what may not be working so well and, in that way, spread best practice. That is absolutely key for its work now, that is its current focus and ought to be its current focus. I think that is the best way to support outcomes for children going forward.

**Q983 Ian Mearns:** You would like to see a much greater focus on service improvement coming out of the inspections that Ofsted does?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I would like to see Ofsted continuing to do as it was designed right from the very beginning, which is to drive improvement. It cannot do it directly because it is not the front line, but it does it through its influence, through the insights it can generate and through its framework because inspection matters. It drives what happens in schools.

**Q984 Chair:** There is a view that during the pandemic Ofsted was a bit like the hedgehog at the back of my garden, sort of in semi-hibernation, in contrast to the Children's Commissioner—I realise they are very different roles—who was very proactive all the way through in trying to get the children back into school. Ofsted occasionally put its head above the parapet and it should have done a lot more right from the start to monitor the remote education and the work going on in schools during the pandemic. What would you say about that?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I do not agree with the picture that it has gone into hibernation.

**Chair:** I said semi-hibernation.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Yes. Inspections were suspended. Its main job is inspection and what we would see as normal inspections of schools were suspended during that time. However, it continued to do its social care visits, monitoring visits and to visit where there were concerns raised. All of those things continued. Much of the social care work continued during



that period. The Government's Internal Audit Agency carried out two reviews of our emergency response and gave assurance to the board by concluding that the response to the pandemic was swift, decisive, agile and well controlled, and compared well for good practice elsewhere in Government. Ofsted reacted quickly to deploy staff where it could and I think did that effectively. It may not have been big and showy but it did lots of work behind the scenes.

**Q985 Kim Johnson:** Christine, my question follows on from what you have just spoken about. During the lockdown you did carry out emergency inspections but what more could have been done during the pandemic to ensure that education standards were being maintained, particularly for schools with marginalised and disadvantaged intake? What would you say Ofsted has done to reduce entrenched inequalities?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** During the pandemic, Ofsted deployed a very large number of its HMI to individual local authorities. It did that, as I understand it, with a view to giving the support where it felt it was most needed. It did that through local authorities because local authorities themselves have a duty to all the children in their care. I think that work was very impactful on helping to secure outcomes for the children in those local authorities, working through the local authorities. That expertise was used very effectively. I think it was a sensible decision to do things that way. You only have one HMI for roughly 100 schools, so putting them into individual schools would not have been terribly efficient or effective.

What has happened during the pandemic will be part of strategic review. Hindsight is a wonderful thing and I think we should always learn from the lessons it teaches us, but until we do that review and until inspectors can get back out into schools in significant numbers we are not really going to have the data on the ground.

**Q986 Kim Johnson:** Can I clarify whether it was the local authorities who asked for the support or was it Ofsted that identified the need for the inspectors to go into the local authorities?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** My understanding is that Ofsted made the offer, and in fact offered its services to a number of different departments where it felt that its expertise could help them where they had additional pressures because of the pandemic.

**Q987 Kim Johnson:** We know that during the pandemic there were inequalities, particularly with the digital divide. The latter part of my question was about what you believe Ofsted has done to deal with those entrenched inequalities.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** It did conduct visits during the pandemic and it gathered together the data it could collect on those inequalities and reported that back to Government. We are looking to see what the impact has been on the standards of education for those children and



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how great those disparities are. I think it is really important to do that based on actual evidence rather than small sampling.

Q988 **Chair:** You say that it was not showy. I think Ofsted could have done a lot more to lead the debate on what was going on in schools. We know that particularly during the first lockdown, remote learning was a postcode lottery—in fact, not even a postcode lottery because one street, one school might have been doing it very well, and a couple of streets away the other school was doing it very differently for whatever reason. That is not necessarily to criticise the hardworking staff and teachers. Yet it seems to me that Ofsted was virtually invisible, particularly in the first lockdown, in making it clear what kinds of standards of remote learning there should be and how it should be done, and that you just vacated the field.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I do not agree that the field was vacated.

Q989 **Chair:** The evidence is there in the lost learning of pupils and the very patchy remote learning from school to school.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Yes, and there are lots—

**Chair:** The evidence is clear. If Ofsted had been very proactive doing its job, surely that would not necessarily have happened in the extreme way that it did in the first lockdown?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I am not sure that those two things necessarily coincide. Schools' responses on remote learning are affected by a whole range of things that Ofsted is not at liberty to control. There are all sorts of factors involved. Ofsted did report, it did visit and it did give advice to the Department on the basis of those visits.

Q990 **Chair:** What did the board do to direct or advise, because you only have an advisory role, when the first lockdown happened about the standard that it expected for remote information?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** We asked for and got information from the executive on what the plans were, what was going to be happening, how many visits we were going to be able to undertake and the work we were doing with the Department to try to gather that information.

Q991 **Chair:** What checks did the board do on the quality of remote learning to see whether schools that were not able to do it were able to be supported?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** That is an operational matter and what they ought to do is not in the board's gift, I am afraid.

Q992 **Chair:** Sure, but the board would have been concerned about the quality. Every statistic under the sun was coming out from all kinds of different groups, from the Sutton Trust, to show that remote learning was, as I say, incredibly patchy. One school in one street in one ward would be doing it brilliantly. Another school a couple of streets away would have



significant problems. What was the board doing to monitor the quality of remote learning and the quality of support that students were getting at home?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** The monitoring that it got was the information that came from the executive about what they were finding out in the country on the visits or the emergency visits that they made to schools. That information was gathered and shared frequently with the Department and No. 10 through the channels there, and was used for the executive to know what the next steps of its own work ought to be.

Q993 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** You said yourself that inspection drives improvement. That was what you said a few moments ago. Why could remote learning not be remotely assessed?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** It can, to a degree, but what you really want to do, in my view, for good inspection is to look at outcomes not processes. There is a great temptation to think that if you inspect the process—the delivery—that will tell you all you need to know about how good something is, and that is not true. It is what impact it has on the learner. One of the best ways to find out what impact it has on the learner is to speak to the learner and to see what they can do, what they understand and what they know.

There are some aspects that can be looked at remotely: you can look at the quality of lesson observations if lessons are recorded, you can watch lessons happening in real time, and so on. There are things that you can do but there is no substitute that we have found that works as effectively as face-to-face interaction.

Q994 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** My recollection, and I am sure you will correct me if I am wrong, was that it was fairly explicitly said by the chief inspector that remote education and the provision of remote education during that first lockdown in the spring/summer of 2020 was not going to be assessed. Schools' assessment processes would not be based on whether they had provided good quality, medium quality or no remote learning during that period. Indeed, the assessment of remote learning was not added to the Ofsted inspection until December 2020, January 2021, by which time some children had received excellent, some children extremely poor and some children virtually no remote education over the previous nine months. Do you think that was a failure of Ofsted? Do you think that if Ofsted had said that it was going to inspect that would, in your words, have driven up the standards, effectively?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Again, colleagues will correct me if I am wrong, but I think what the chief inspector said was that remote education would not be graded, and that is not the same as not assessed. On the visit reports there was commentary included as to what that particular school had done to support children during lockdown. Commentary is there in the reports. They are simply not graded because they were not inspections; they were fact-finding visits rather than inspections.



Q995 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** Did the provision of remote education, the lack of it or the quality of it have any impact on whether a school received an assessment of “good”, “outstanding” or “requires improvement”?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** We have only just restarted inspections where that provision of outcomes will be taken into account.

Q996 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** Therefore, the answer is no. To what extent was the schools inspection system used to improve standards in remote education between March and December 2020?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** By its reporting of what it found and by the advice and insights that it provided to Government so that they could then make decisions about what could be done centrally in trying to even out some of those differences that were regionally based and often due to access to IT.

Q997 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** I find it interesting that even within schools I would find comments from students or their parents that one particular maths or history teacher was providing outstanding quality education and perhaps another, even within the same school, within the same department, may have been providing no lessons at all, or very little. To what extent did Ofsted look at that? How many schools did you go and visit? How many schools’ online or remote learning did you access?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** You are asking me operational questions, which I cannot answer.

Q998 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** Are you satisfied as a board that Ofsted inspected enough and saw enough of what was going on with remote education to improve it and to ensure that quality was high?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Ofsted’s response to the pandemic, as I said, will be part of our assessment of the organisation as we come—

**Dr Caroline Johnson:** With respect, that is not quite the question.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** It is, because that is the place and the time in which we will then carry out that review. What did we do during the pandemic? Was that enough? Now that we are back, what lessons can we learn? At the time, while all this was happening, the board had the assurances that I have already indicated. All the information I have had from the DfE and from the internal and external auditors is that Ofsted’s response during the pandemic was good.

Q999 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** Do you think that the remote education provided to children between March and December 2020 was good enough?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I am not in a position to judge that other than from the information that I see, which is there in Ofsted’s reports. I think the chief inspector has said that in some cases it was wonderful, as you have indicated yourselves, and in others it was anything but wonderful. That cannot be good enough.



**Dr Caroline Johnson:** No.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** It cannot be good enough that children's outcomes should be determined by that kind of random lottery so, no.

Q1000 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** Will you be looking at what you would do in the future if something similar happens so that no child will be left in a situation of poor education again?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Ofsted cannot guarantee that, of course, because Ofsted does not do the delivery, but we will certainly be looking at what can be done should this kind of eventuality happen in the future. That will be part of strategy development. We will be looking to the executive to give us their suggestions and their commentary on lessons learned from what they have done during this pandemic.

Q1001 **Chair:** You said that you think things should be based on outcomes. The problem with that—by the way, I am very pro outcomes in normal times—is that by the time you have worked out the outcome, these kids have missed six months of learning.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Yes.

**Chair:** What I do not understand is why the organisation did not do more to look at the huge variance of remote learning from school to school. No one was asking for full inspections, of course not, but to do more to work with those schools that were not doing the remote learning for one reason or another. They may have had lots of teachers or support staff ill. It seems to me that if you look at the outcomes, the outcomes are appalling. If you want to judge it on outcomes, Ofsted have not delivered. The outcomes are the lost learning, especially of disadvantaged pupils in disadvantaged areas. Those students have suffered enormously and Ofsted was seen to be, as I say, in semi-hibernation.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I think its response was to try to place its skilled staff where they could have the biggest impact on the most children, and that was through the local authorities.

Q1002 **Tom Hunt:** It is on this point. I am trying to understand the visits that occurred. Say if there was a school that was visited by inspectors or Ofsted representatives during the pandemic, there were concerns about the provision of remote education and there was a review of that, not a grading or anything like that but an informal sort of judgment that there is a problem in this particular school. If that school was subject to a full Ofsted inspection within the next few months or the next year, would those Ofsted inspectors look back at the response to the visit that happened during the pandemic and allow that response to influence the judgment of that school at a later date?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** You are asking me an operational question and that decision is not in my gift. I can only give a personal view as an experienced inspector. I do not have all the information and operational



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detail in front of me but I would be surprised if any judgments about outcomes for children were not part of an evidence base for an inspection. How that is done and by what mechanisms is really up to the chief inspector through the framework.

**Q1003 Tom Hunt:** There might be a feeling that if a school in question did not provide good enough remote education, ultimately that would all come out in the wash at a later date through a regular inspection because the children would be further behind.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** You would assume that the outcomes for those children would not be where you would expect them to be.

**Chair:** We know that already, sadly. We are going to move on to safeguarding.

**Q1004 Kim Johnson:** In your role as chair, what have you done to support and challenge Ofsted to improve how inspections address safeguarding concerns, including instances of sexual harassment and sexual violence in school?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Ofsted's corporate governance framework says that one of the functions of the board is to have regard to safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of children. We get regular updates from the national director with overarching responsibility for safeguarding and in fact we have often asked for deep dives into some of that information, particularly the impact of the pandemic on some of the most vulnerable children. Yvette Stanley, who is the national director, has been in very close contact with colleagues across the social care sector. The board's Audit and Risk Committee reviews the safeguarding risks held in Ofsted, and it looks at the mitigations in place and offers appropriate challenge and then assurance to the board.

Again, there is an operational question here. As you know, the chief inspector spoke at length about the review, a report that was done on sexual abuse in schools, and I know that it has formed part of update training and so on with inspectors in preparation for restarting main inspections. I think they have done what they can at the moment. One of the important things they have done is they have focused everybody's attentions, not least schools', on the importance of these matters.

However, because I have inspected safeguarding across the world for a very long time, good inspection of safeguarding relies on three main pillars. It relies on the skill and expertise of the inspectors, without a doubt. You need people who know what they are looking for and who can do it well. The other two pillars it relies on are the openness and integrity of the front-line professionals, who are the ones who are operating day to day, and the willingness and even the ability of the children or the vulnerable adults to speak up and to say something. I can tell you from experience—this is not just in the UK but it is across the globe—there is a huge reluctance to have those conversations. We know from the



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Everyone's Invited website, time and again people say, "All this has happened to me. I never said anything". That goes to the heart of a much wider problem than Ofsted could deal with.

Q1005 **Kim Johnson:** One of the other issues is that young people are reluctant to report because they do not feel that it is taken seriously or actioned effectively. They are some of the issues that need to be addressed going forward.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** That is part of it. That has always been part of it.

Q1006 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** The Everyone's Invited website, which you mentioned briefly, has 50,000 testimonies. Not all children have listed the school that this happened at, but there are 58 pages now of different schools that were listed. This is pretty widespread throughout all different sectors of education. Do you think that is a failure of your safeguarding inspection teams?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** No, I do not, for the reasons I have just given. We have much more systemic issues that we have to look at societally. These are about cultural pressures, parental relationships and peer discussions. These things are quite complicated. It would not matter, in a sense, how many inspectors you put into a school or how long you kept them there; there is a limit to how effective they can be when people do not speak up. You can look at the procedural things, you can look at interactions and you can pick up those kinds of things, you can delve and you can sensitively question, but inspectors do not have superpowers. They cannot mind read. My frustration has always been around the question: how do we get to that? How do we tackle that and make children feel that it is an okay thing to talk about, not just in school but generally, to parents and other responsible adults?

Q1007 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** As a wider question relating to that, I have not read all 50,000 of the responses but I have read several hundred of them. One of the things that struck me is that some of these things have happened to schoolchildren in school but the majority, certainly of the ones that I read, have happened to schoolchildren out of school, mostly in parental homes, often associated with parties and drink. To what extent do you think Ofsted and/or schools can solve this issue and to what extent do you think it is for wider society, parents, families and suchlike to look at it outside of school too?

**Chair:** In a nutshell, if you can.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I do not think Ofsted or even schools individually can solve this problem. It is a wider issue and it is a complex issue. What makes it particularly pernicious now for children is that we have social media so these incidents can become much more traumatic on a much wider basis than might have happened in the past. That is a development that we should all take seriously.

Q1008 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** I appreciate that the whole problem cannot be



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fixed by Ofsted or by the Independent Schools Inspectorate, but what are you doing to work together on this issue so that the bits that Ofsted and ICI can influence are being influenced for the better?

**Chair:** To give a supplementary to that, should there be one inspectorate body looking at these things?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Do you mean a separate creation of a safeguarding body?

**Chair:** Either a separate one or that you would not have the ISI anymore, you would just have Ofsted, for example.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I would not support separating out safeguarding from other forms of inspection. I support resourcing it well but, no, I would not support separating it out into separate organisations. Experience tells us that that is the road to disaster, in many ways. I am sorry, I have lost—

Q1009 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** The question was that obviously there are two inspection regimes, one for the independent sector and one for the state sector. They are inspecting slightly different things and, therefore, I support the need for separate organisations, but when it comes to safeguarding, what are you doing to work together to learn things that you have managed to do as different organisations so that you can improve the lot of children?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** They are not different in the inspection of safeguarding. Those regulations are the same across both for independent schools. Obviously, they are slightly different for state schools and that is entirely an Ofsted inspection. There is now much closer working, as I understand it, between the current chief inspector of ISI and the chief inspector of Ofsted and there is a collaboration and discussion about their joint findings.

**Dr Caroline Johnson:** So that lessons can be learned?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Yes.

Q1010 **Chair:** If you do not think there should be a separate body, should there be just one inspection body? Why does there need to be two?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** The decision to have two is an historical one. It happened shortly after the time of Ofsted being created. I can see the reasons for it and I am not sure that those reasons have changed. I will not take up the Committee's time with that history lesson but I will discuss it at greater length if you want to.

Q1011 **Chair:** You think it is worth keeping with the two inspection systems?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** For the time being, yes. They bring different perspectives and I am always in favour of greater perspectives.

Q1012 **Ian Mearns:** I have to say I am not surprised at your answer there given



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your previous role at the ISI, where I think you were the chief inspector for a number of years. Therefore, I wonder if that is colouring your judgment in some way that is not necessarily in the interests of Ofsted or the children themselves in either the state sector or the independent sector. When HMCI was asked about the problems that have been highlighted regarding sexual abuse and harassment, she said that Ofsted had only had time to scratch the surface of the issue. With regard to the ISI, she had asked for more power to monitor independent schools. Do you agree with that in Ofsted having more power to monitor what happens in inspections of independent schools?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** There are two questions there and the first one was a question to me as to whether or not I think it is colouring my judgment. We need to be really clear that my background is in the state sector. I have never taught in an independent school. As chief inspector, I was not a representative of the independent sector. I was taken on because of my experience as an Ofsted inspector. I wish there were no differences in educational quality in any school across this country. That has always been my desire.

Q1013 **Ian Mearns:** You want all schools to be better than average.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I want all schools to be delivering the absolute best education that we are able to deliver to children. I do not think it should be a lottery. While we have the systems that we have, there is something valuable in seeing things from a different perspective, seeing what is possible, but making sure that the standards to which those schools are held to account are at least equivalent, without any question. That is in answer to the first part of your question and now I have forgotten what the second part was.

Q1014 **Ian Mearns:** It is about the attitude of the chief inspector from Ofsted, saying that she would welcome more power to monitor independent schools. Do you agree with that?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** That is a matter for the chief inspector in the current context.

Q1015 **Ian Mearns:** That is not an operational issue. The chief inspector has outlined an aspiration in wishing for more power. Surely, as chair of the board, you must take a view on that.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I would like to know what the reasoning is and then on that basis we would have a view, but it is a matter for the chief inspector and the Secretary of State. There are monitoring provisions and they have been in place since ISI was an approved inspectorate.

Q1016 **Ian Mearns:** I would guess that one of the rationales or issues for the chief inspector in that is that it does not matter whether it is the state sector or the independent sector, this is regarding the welfare of children, who are part of the citizenry of the United Kingdom. Why wouldn't the chief inspector in a Government agency want to have oversight to make



sure, from the Government's perspective and the perspective of wider society, that all is well and that children's welfare is being safeguarded?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** They do have that oversight. The ISI has to produce that evidence to the DfE and it is scrutinised by Ofsted.

Q1017 **Ian Mearns:** The chief inspector has suggested that she wished she had more power to monitor independent schools.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** If that is what she thinks would be the right thing to do, that is a considered professional decision.

Q1018 **Tom Hunt:** I think in 2014, when you were in that role with the independent inspection sector, you are reported to have said that you were concerned that the Government were trying to bring in Ofsted-style inspections and that the independent sector was under significant and immediate threat. Is it right that you said that? Is that reporting correct? I would like to understand some of the arguments for why that would be a bad thing. I do not particularly have a view at this time but I would be interested to know what some of the arguments are against Ofsted-style inspections for independent schools.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I think it is not accurate reporting. It is a summary reporting out of context. No, I do not have a problem with Ofsted inspections within their context. It is a question of people making decisions about what they want to have. If you have an approved inspectorate that the Secretary of State deems is appropriate to be independent, it should be independent.

Q1019 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** Are you aware of any evidence that the ISI are running deficient inspections or that independent schools are delivering, on average, a poorer quality education than the state sector? Given that the purpose of the inspection is to ensure the standards are good, do you have any evidence that the fact that you have an independent inspector for the independent schools is ensuring that they have a worse education? My impression has been that in most cases they are delivering a better quality education standard.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I do not have any contact with the ISI now and have not done since I left the inspectorate. I have nothing to indicate what is happening operationally there or otherwise, other than the reports that come out via their own publications and what is said by the Secretary of State. I do not have any insight into what is happening at the ISI.

Q1020 **Chair:** I do not know if you have seen the *Times Educational Supplement* report about offrolling that came out yesterday. The chief inspector has made great play about dealing with offrolling. I find it unacceptable that it still goes on, given that it is supposed to be illegal. Why is it that you are not going to call out offrolling in school inspection reports?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** My understanding is that it is going to be called out in inspection reports. The latest information I have had from the



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executive is that one of the adjustments that has been made to the guidance for inspectors is that they should all refer to any offrolling instances in a consistent way so that it is easily identified.

Q1021 **Chair:** Ofsted itself, again looking at the *Times Educational Supplement* report, said last week that in some cases it has found the practice of offrolling taking place in schools but has not described it as offrolling. Why is that?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I think they have described the fact that children are not attending but they have not used the phrase “offrolling”. That is my understanding.

Q1022 **Chair:** The problem is the schools then feel that they are not being called out for offrolling. What I don’t understand is that you were talking about not being showy and actually doing stuff, and she has made huge play—rightly, in my view—about offrolling, and when it comes down to it, has chickened out of calling it what it is. It should be a Ronseal issue: offrolling does what it says on the tin. It is offrolling and schools should be identified—

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Yes. I think that is what is behind the latest guidance for inspectors, that it will be referred to in a consistent manner.

Q1023 **Chair:** It is not, though. It is not being referred to consistently. If you have a look at the *TES* report, it is clearly not being referred to.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** I do not know how old those reports are. I have no idea whether they are written under the current guidance.

Q1024 **Chair:** I would be grateful if you or the chief inspector could write to the Committee about it and explain why offrolling is not being called out, given that she has made such a big thing about it.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Sure. Yes, I am happy to do that.

Q1025 **Chair:** You mentioned at the very beginning that you believe that perhaps Ofsted should be more accountable and that you need to look at new measures of accountability. If you have any thoughts about that or how that would work, we would be grateful if you could write to the Committee as well. It would be really helpful. Is that agreeable?

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Yes.

**Chair:** Thank you. Thank you for your public service and thank you for coming here today. Our job is to scrutinise, hence the questions. Thank you for sustaining us for quite a while. It is really appreciated.

**Dame Christine Ryan:** Thank you for inviting me.

**Chair:** I wish you well in all that you do.