



Permanent Secretary

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Meg Hillier
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

12th October 2020

Revision of target dates for implementing next steps following Public Accounts Committee recommendations 2 and 7 of the PAC Report on Ofsted's inspection of schools - 60th report of session 2017-19

In line with your letter of 12 June 2020, I am writing to inform you of the reasons that the Department for Education has delayed implementing the next steps to the following PAC recommendations:

PAC recommendation: *The Department should re-examine the rationale for exempting schools graded outstanding from routine re-inspection, and report back to us on its assessment in December 2018.*

The implementation date for the next action that relates to this recommendation has been moved from September 2020 to January 2021.

The Department has re-examined the rationale for exempting schools graded outstanding from routine re-inspection. As you will be aware, on 1 September 2019 the Government announced its intention to remove the exemption from routine inspection that applies to schools judged 'outstanding' by Ofsted. A consultation on this matter was published on 10 January 2020 and closed on 24 February 2020.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has since had a profound impact on the education sector as a whole, including the implementation of this recommendation. Ofsted's routine school inspections have been suspended to enable schools to focus entirely on the immediate challenge of responding to the coronavirus pandemic. For state-funded schools, routine Ofsted inspections will remain suspended for the autumn term.

The government response to the consultation was published on 01 October 2020, the regulations have been laid and the parliamentary process is underway. It is intended that Ofsted's routine inspections will restart in January 2021, with that date being kept under review. Inspections of outstanding schools and colleges will begin alongside this, subject to parliamentary approval.



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PAC recommendation: As part of its review of accountability, the Department should make clear where responsibility for school improvement lies. The Department, working with Ofsted, should also assess whether the balance of spending is right between different parts of the system for school accountability and improvement, including between Ofsted and the regional schools' commissioners.

The implementation date for the next action that relates to this recommendation has been moved from September 2020 to December 2020.

The Department has addressed where the responsibility for school improvement lies. The Department published a new set of principles for the accountability system in May 2018 which sets out the roles of different organisations within the system and clearly set out that there will be no more 'inspections' of schools by representatives of Regional Schools Commissioners. Ofsted is the only body that can form an independent judgement about a school through inspection.

On 3 May 2019, the then Secretary of State announced the outcome of the consultation on identifying schools for support. Since September 2019, the Department has no longer published or used the floor or coasting standards, and instead has used a new single, transparent method for identifying schools eligible for improvement support – an Ofsted grade of 'Requires Improvement'. This is an important step in creating a clearer, simpler accountability system to help reduce undue pressure on school leaders, which can lead to excessive workload that distracts teachers from teaching.

The Department is continuing to review spending for school accountability and improvement through the spending review process which is expected to conclude by December 2020. The Department is working with Ofsted to ensure alignment of their respective proposals for expenditure over the next spending review period.

As ever, the department will continue to update the Public Accounts Committee on the progress of implementing these recommendations.

Regards

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