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Robert Halfon MP  
Chair, Education Select Committee  
Education Select Committee  
House of Commons  
Westminster  
SW1A 0AA

Dear Robert

Thank you for your letter of 3 December which asks how Ofsted intends to “ensure all children are learning at this time” and what we are doing to “shore up the standard of remote learning provision and safeguarding across schools”.

I will be very pleased to let you know what we have been and will be doing, but I must first emphasise that it is schools’ responsibility to ensure children are learning, and that remote learning and safeguarding standards are met. Furthermore, government policy has for the last decade or so placed responsibility for co-ordinating or providing school support with DfE’s Regional Schools Commissioners. This was a decision made by government to avoid any conflict of interest between Ofsted providing support (as it then did in some circumstances) and then being expected to judge the effectiveness of its work. Ofsted then has an important role in reporting to parents and government on the quality of education and safeguarding in schools, which we are fulfilling in the following ways.

In September we began a new interim visit programme for schools. The vast majority of these visits have taken place on site. During the period of the second national lock down in November we carried out visits remotely, but have now resumed face-to-face visits. By the end of the autumn term we will have carried out around 1400 visits, each resulting in a letter to parents with our findings. We have also published two out of a series of three sets of thematic reports, to share the intelligence that we are gathering back with the sector.

These reports are building up a picture of the impact of COVID-19 on pupils’ learning. In these reports we have highlighted and evidenced the enormous impact that closing schools has had on children and their families. Some children with SEND lost access to essential services and provision, and some vulnerable children were left “out of sight” at home at risk of harm, despite the efforts of education and social care professionals. Our briefings have been well received and we will be publishing further instalments shortly. We know from past experience and feedback that school leaders read our thematic reports and take from them information that helps them improve standards in their own school. We have also made nine emergency inspections this term, in response to serious concerns about safeguarding.

I share your concern about the availability and quality of remote education. Alongside our visits, we are currently undertaking research with schools and families to learn more about effective practice in this area. This includes reviewing visit evidence, survey of parents and teachers and 24 case study interviews. We will publish this research next term and it will be used to inform our spring monitoring visits and pilots for inspections from the summer onwards. In our spring term monitoring inspections, we will consider how school leaders are ensuring that the curriculum is taught well to all children, and the role that remote learning is playing in that process. Remote learning will also be an important area for investigation when we can return to normal inspection.

In line with the Secretary of State's recent decision, next term we will make monitoring visits to the schools that we know need them most. Our plan is to visit all inadequate schools and schools that have received at least two consecutive 'requires improvement' judgements. There are currently around 1300 schools in this position. We will visit as many of these as reasonably possible in the spring term, and we will also inspect some schools with a single 'requires improvement' judgement where inspector availability permits.

In these monitoring inspections we will look at the key areas that schools need to improve. All monitoring inspections focus on progress toward being good, and the steps that are being taken to improve. We will of course consider the impact of COVID-19 on each school's improvement journey. Alongside providing assurance about individual schools visited, this work will also give us deeper insight into impact of COVID-19 on pupils' learning and how they are now doing. Importantly, and unlike the autumn visits, we will be evaluating schools' effectiveness, using the usual inspection techniques.

We will also continue to make emergency inspections (no formal designation inspections) next term if serious concerns are raised about a school; this includes concerns around a failure to provide remote education or failings in safeguarding.

While it is ultimately a decision for DfE, it is my firm hope that routine inspections under the Education Inspection Framework (EIF) will resume in the summer term (April 2021); plans are in place for this. It is essential that normal inspection resumes as soon as practicably possible to allow us to provide full assurance to parents and government about standards.

You ask about how we can evaluate safeguarding practices in the current context. As I said in my recent annual report, too many vulnerable children were left at risk of harm during school closures, despite the concerted effort of professionals to reach them and bring them into school. Our monitoring inspections will give a clearer picture of how well schools are supporting and keeping their pupils safe.

Furthermore, if we receive information suggesting serious concerns about any school's safeguarding we will make an emergency inspection. Nevertheless, as your question clearly recognises, what we will be able to do is limited until we are able to inspect routinely.

While we recognise that attendance is in a state of flux due to the pandemic, this will also be an important area for inspections over the coming months. Inspectors will look at how leaders are making sure that attendance is as good as possible in the current context. Their partnership work with parents is crucial here.

Within our role to report on standards to parents and government, and recognising the limitations imposed by the pandemic, we are doing all we can to achieve our shared aims of having children in school, taught well, and kept safe.

We expect to use most if not all of our inspector resource over the Spring term on inspection and regulatory work. If we do have any surplus capacity we have identified a range of work internally that could be done to help us prepare for the return to full inspection next summer, and are also working with DfE to see if there is any support we can give outside of Ofsted, although we expect the numbers of available staff to be small. We are also continuing to support other government departments with some secondments to Ofqual and DHSC continuing into spring term.

We are making equally strong efforts for all children and young people and others in early years and post-16 education, as well for all children receiving social care support.

Yours sincerely



**Amanda Spielman**  
Chief Inspector, Ofsted