

16 September 2014

Sir Michael Wilshaw
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector
Ofsted
Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B6SE

Dear Sir Michael,

I note from recent reports that you continue to consider no notice inspections. Ofsted recently announced forty snap inspections - within minutes of the announcement we received calls from worried head teachers. If Ofsted wishes to rebuild its relationship with the profession and to remove the deadening effect of the fear of inspection, this is not the way to proceed.

We have spoken about this topic many times but I want to repeat our concerns. Faced with the permanent threat of inspection, few heads will be able to spend time outside school. The education system now depends on heads helping out in other schools. This will decline, the sharing of best practice will decline, and standards will decline as a result. We can have a self-improving school system or we can have no notice inspection; we cannot have both.

A head teacher needs to be in their school during inspection. It is a judgement on their leadership and they have a right to be present. More importantly, it is supposed to be a dialogue and school leaders must present and justify data and policies. They can never be entirely sure in advance what information the inspectors will demand.

At present, schools receive half a day's notice. If it is possible to hide a long term decline in standards or an extremist culture from inspectors during an afternoon, then inspection itself is clearly pointless.

So much for the logic, but there is a more emotive issue at stake here. This proposal shows a profound lack of trust in school leaders. I believe this latest round of threats is triggered by the Trojan Horse affair. When Ofsted inspected these schools originally it found nothing wrong. It was school leaders in Birmingham who held the line for the entitlements of students and some of them lost their jobs in the process. I find it astonishing that head teachers should be made to pay the price for the failings of Ofsted and other agencies in this affair.

We support the use of no notice inspections where there are serious safeguarding issues (although, without effective local monitoring, I cannot see how any of the proposed triggers would have worked in Birmingham) but we oppose the routine use of no notice inspection. After all the talk of reconciliation and confidence building, it is disappointing that we have again begun the new term on a note of fear and intimidation.

Yours sincerely,



Russell Hobby
General Secretary

cc: Rt Hon Nicky, Morgan, Secretary of State for Education