



The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

22 March 2023

Dear Gillian

As school and college leaders in Reading, we write to express in the strongest terms the need for an urgent and comprehensive review of OFSTED inspections.

As leaders, we have been devastated by the loss of a highly respected and well-loved colleague, Ruth Perry, headteacher of Caversham Primary School. Ruth took her own life, having received a very brutal inspection judgement leaving her family and the whole school community grieving and mourning her loss.

As professionals with many years of experience between us, we fully appreciate the need for accountability and to ensure that children and young people receive the very best education in a safe, happy and stimulating learning environment. We are committed to school improvement and high standards of safeguarding. However, we believe these should be separate processes.

It is our belief that the current OFSTED arrangements, including the framework, and the method by which inspections are undertaken is leading to an ever more punitive environment. We believe that what has happened is a move from justifiable accountability to individual blame. The fact that the headteacher is not permitted to discuss the judgement, with anyone, prior to publication of the report, contributes to a feeling of isolation and is a major cause of stress, in this case, with fatal consequences.

Specifically, we believe that summarising not only a detailed inspection, but also the work of each school over many years, to one of four possible 'grade descriptors' is a gross simplification. Rather than equipping parents with the knowledge of whether the school is right for *their* child, it is a distraction from the detail of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. It is insulting to assume parents cannot read a report without headline words such as 'Inadequate' or 'Requires Improvement'. We call for a balanced report, identifying a range of factors, far wider than those currently captured, which recognises schools as complex organisations. We challenge the idea that the one-off, punitive visit model is the best and would welcome a mature, collaborative relationship with inspectors.

As a community of schools, we want this terrible tragedy to mark a turning point in the way in which school inspections are conducted. To summarise, we need:

- A suspension of all inspections whilst there is an urgent review of the implementation of the current Ofsted framework and the impact of its processes.
- An immediate suspension of **'the effectiveness of safeguarding'** being a limiting judgement for the overall effectiveness of the school and also the judgement on leadership and management.
- The removal of the headline grading system currently used.
- A collegiate approach to the development of the new school improvement framework.
- The development of a programme of support for all headteachers, which they can access to provide supervision, counselling and advice.
- The expectation that headteachers can share concerns and worries regarding the inspection process with their staff and peers. Ruth could not speak to her friends and colleagues and this led to her feeling of isolation, which eventually led to her death.

The role of a headteacher has always brought its challenges, however the pressures we are currently managing around inspection are both intolerable and unsustainable. We are determined to honour Ruth's memory by ensuring this terrible tragedy never happens again.

We await your swift response.

Yours sincerely

Reading Primary Heads Association
Reading Secondary and College Leaders