

Press release

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New think tank releases policy paper on how to reform OFSTED

“OFSTED has become toxic within the teaching profession. It’s time for a reset.”

A new think tank, The Education Policy Alliance, has released its first policy paper on how to reform OFSTED. In the wake of recent reports by the Beyond Ofsted inquiry and the Institute for Public Policy Research, the EPA report sets out a bold alternative vision for the future of schools accountability which would:

- Improve the quality of information provided to parents/carers
- Provide more accurate, timely information to the regulator
- Prioritise the wellbeing of educators, children and young people

Under the EPA’s plans, OFSTED would be rebranded the Schools Governance Auditor (SGA) and would have three main roles:

- Carry out slimmed-down governance and safeguarding audits of all schools biennially
- Maintain a data dashboard on all schools, updated annually
- Co-ordinate a network of Schools Accountability Partnerships, which would see schools carrying out reciprocal peer review visits each year

The EPA also propose to:

- End the use of one-word judgments – a practice which is “pernicious and without merit”
- Introduce a 28-day grace period, to incentivise schools to respond to recommendations in a timely manner
- Establish an independent body to process complaints and appeals, to stop OFSTED “marking its own homework”

The EPA suggest that implementing these policies would significantly improve outcomes for schools, parents/carers and the Department for Education, within the same budget currently allocated to OFSTED.

Download the report, and the one-page theory of change (see below) [here](#).

About the EPA

Comprising teachers, school leaders, parents and carers and young people, the Education Policy Alliance is an unaffiliated, grass-roots think tank dedicated to crowd-sourcing education policy. For more information, visit educationpa.org.

A NEW ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM FOR SCHOOLS

What do we want to achieve?

- Create a robust accountability system for schools which:
- Improves the quality of information provided to parents/carers
 - Provides more accurate, timely information to the regulator
 - Prioritises the wellbeing of educators, children and young people

Where are we now?

'OFSTED is in need of major reform... it is currently seen as not fit for purpose, and as having a detrimental impact on schools which some perceive as toxic. We need to build trust back into the system... The need for change is compelling and urgent.' (BEYOND OFSTED INQUIRY, 2023)

How can we create a new accountability system for schools?

Establish a Schools Governance Auditor (SGA). The SGA would serve three main functions:

A. Visit and audit the governance and safeguarding of all schools biennially

Visits would be completed in a single day by a team of two on 14 days' notice. This would provide time for an anonymous pre-visit survey to be completed by leaders, teachers, support staff, parents/carers and pupils, and analysed by the SGA team. The aims of the visit would be to audit safeguarding policies and practices; to evaluate school governance, including improvement planning and record-keeping; to explore any issues raised in the pre-visit surveys; and to identify what additional support may be required. An ungraded report would be published, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.

B. Maintain a data dashboard on all schools

A data dashboard, administered remotely and updated annually, would provide parents/carers with up-to-date information on a range of metrics. For schools, this might include progress, attainment, attendance, destinations, breadth of curriculum, extracurricular provision, diversity of intake, staff retention, pupil retention, parent/carer satisfaction and pupil satisfaction. These data would be presented numerically, alongside national averages. The data dashboard should also include links to the school's policies on behaviour and relationships, attendance, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision, etc.

C. Coordinate a network of Schools Accountability Partnerships

This would involve schools working in partnerships and clusters to conduct reciprocal peer review visits annually. These would be carried out over two days by an 'Accountability Partnership Team comprising senior and middle leaders, the SEND coordinator, teachers, support staff and governors. The visits would combine lesson observations, surveys, interviews and focus groups with random samples of teachers, leaders, support staff, pupils and parents/carers. An ungraded report would be written by senior leaders from the reviewing school, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement around key areas such as leadership, curriculum, behaviour and relationships, attendance, mental health and wellbeing and SEND provision.

Why do we need to change?

OFSTED's remit has become so broad that it is unable to fulfil its most important role: to safeguard the wellbeing of children and young people.

A combination of more regular, focused audits, a data dashboard and a national network of Schools Accountability Partnerships would provide parents/carers and the regulator with more timely, high-quality information than is currently the case, within the same budget.