

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector 2006/07: press conference opening remarks

17 October 2007

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE
T 08456 404040

www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown Copyright 2007



Welcome to the launch of the Annual Report for the year 2006/07. For Ofsted the past 12 months have been a time of considerable change. From April this year, the reach of the 'new Ofsted' encompasses the inspection and regulation of the care of children and young people, and of the provision of education and skills for learners of all ages. At any one time, more than one in three people in England now benefit from the services we inspect or regulate. Ofsted is no longer just 'the schools' inspectorate' and I am no longer just Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, though the inspection of schools remains, of course, an important element of our work. Our reach is extensive and provides a unique, evidence-based perspective of life for children, young people and adult learners in England.

The report you now have in front of you is, therefore, our baseline report. It rests on a formidable range of evidence. You will recognise the format of the first part of the report: this is the usual 'state of the nation' report on quality and standards. This is an important section, of course, and I know you will read it with interest. But I hope you will find the second part of the report of equal interest: it breaks new ground for us and draws on what we know about three themes of national importance in education and care. The themes are rarely out of the public eye, and rarely out of the pages of your newspapers or the news and comment that you broadcast.

Making headway in tackling the issues and concerns behind your headlines is complex and demanding; this is not 'quick fix' territory. But we ask three very big questions. First, how can we '**narrow the gap**' in opportunities and outcomes between relatively advantaged children and those who have to cope with the highest levels of disadvantage in our society? Second, what can education and care contribute to young people's awareness of their **personal, cultural and national identity** as they grow up in the early years of the 21st century? And third, how do we best prepare people for **the world of work**?

But let me cut to the chase and first pick out **five key messages**:

- Around 60% of childcare settings provide good or outstanding care and early education for young children.
- We found a similar proportion of schools to be good or outstanding, although the proportion of secondary schools that are inadequate continues to be a concern.
- The majority of children's services are working well together. Where these services are good, they make a real difference to children's lives and their life chances; but you will also read of particular concerns.
- The trend of improvement in further education colleges continues.
- Adult learning also continues to improve, but with some significant and persistent weaknesses.

So far so good, but there remain too many 'buts' and when we drill down, some of the story is less encouraging. Let me highlight three 'buts':

- The proportion of schools – 5% in primary and 10% in secondary – in which provision is inadequate, though lower than last year, is still far too high. In many of these schools pupils' progress is hampered by poor basic skills in literacy and numeracy. It cannot be right that 20% of pupils leave primary school without a solid foundation in literacy and numeracy.
- Not enough is being done to raise the achievement and aspirations of particular groups of children: most notably those in public care. The gap between the outcomes for them and for other learners is too great. Twelve per cent of 16-year-olds in public care achieved five or more good GCSEs in 2006, compared with 59% of all 16-year-olds. And young people in care are three times more likely than their peers to get in trouble with the law.
- Much remains to be done if the workforce in this country is to be equipped to compete successfully in the global economy of the 21st century. It cannot be right that over 10% of 16- to 18-year-olds, young people on the cusp of adult life, are not in education, employment or training. That represents over 200,000 16- to 18-year-olds out of education but without a foot in the world of work.

One of the many privileges of being the Chief Inspector has been the opportunity to pick the brains of those who lead, manage or work in outstanding provision and succeed 'against the odds'. Although this provision may vary in size, complexity and so on, there are common features.

There is an obsession with ambitious outcomes – performance, excellent results of course, or an aspect of a child's development. Linked to this ambition is invariably a very tight focus on each individual's progress, be that a child in care, a pupil in a school or an adult learner. And of course, close attention to what needs to be done to help them accelerate this progress. It can be done; the gap can be narrowed.

I said earlier that there are no quick fixes to the issues I raise, but I have been struck that intervention strategies clearly can make a difference, and we should learn from what works. For example, the London Challenge programme has contributed to significant improvement in pupils' achievement in a number of London schools with a history of poor performance. And we are seeing early signs of a rising trend in the effectiveness of academies, most of which are located in areas of disadvantage. But, there is still a long way to go.

I spoke last year of my intention to use my Office to drive up performance and standards. How are we doing? Most obviously, every provider of care, education and training knows that Ofsted will call. And while 'the call' generally affirms good practice and gives recommendations for further improvement, if there are concerns we say so, and if there are serious concerns, we will be back. This 'calling back' is a powerful instrument: for example, between April and October 2007, 16 children's homes moved from being judged inadequate to be at least satisfactory; we return to schools that have been placed in special measures, for example, and the great majority of these improve strongly within two years; similarly in the adult skills sector, of those reinspected this year, 95% had raised their game.

Ofsted has been inspecting children's social care and adult learning for only a few months. But you will see the potential power of the wider reach in the section on **'Preparing to work: working lives'**. Ofsted has taken a high profile issue of national interest – improving skills and employability in the United Kingdom – and offered an evidence-based commentary on this: what works and what more is to be done.

It is proving a tall order for some schools to embrace the inclusion of work-related and enterprise learning in the curriculum. Indeed, it seems to some inspectors that the students are more enthusiastic about such opportunities than some of their teachers. This is another area in which we again raise concerns about the most vulnerable young people, notably those 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training. The risks to these young people are alarming and unacceptable. The Annual Report does not pull its punches; it is hard to find encouragement on this front from our inspection evidence, and we say so. At the heart of this is the need for each local authority, as the strategic lead for 14–19, to work together with their partners (including employers) to secure high quality learning for each and every young person. Local partnerships of schools, colleges, training providers and the voluntary sector have to be accountable for ensuring that no young person is left behind, ignored or prevented from participating.

Finally, let me say a few words about Ofsted. I have held the reins as Chief Inspector for just a year. I have been encouraged by how much the users of the services we inspect value what we do; we should not forget or underestimate the views held by children and young people, parents and carers, and employers. But this does not mean that inspection will stand still.

I shall continue to put much effort into ensuring that inspections are of the highest quality. Better inspections make more of a difference, and I am convinced that we can make more of a difference. We can act even more potently as an agent for improvement. We can make better use of what we know. And, of course, we shall work to make the best use of the resources we are given. This will mean, quite properly, reducing inspection for high quality services, and bringing our resources to bear proportionately and intelligently where children and learners are most likely to be at risk of failure.

I hope you find the report useful.

I am happy to take questions.

Christine Gilbert