

## **Welcome to what's the future of school inspection hosted here in Suffolk.**

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Firstly, can I say how refreshing it is to have an organisation such as NET with its aims of being independent, innovative and challenging given orthodoxies. This is desperately needed at a time when educational policy is often handed down and expected to be implemented without debate with those whose lives it directly affects.

In answering the question "what's the future of school inspection?" we have to ask ourselves some more fundamental questions. Firstly, what do we want from education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for our children and young people – How do we really equip them to enjoy and achieve? Secondly, how do we build capacity in the system in order to develop effective schools (or is it learning centres)? Thirdly, how can school inspection be configured to support improvement as well as accountability?

In answering these questions, it is important to understand the historical and developing social and political context of our National system. National policies have pushed us through some distinct phases. Whilst looking at these it is interesting to note that the first DFES business plan had just two aims: Social inclusion and a competitive economy. Whilst this is not an aim to be dismissed, we have to ask ourselves, is this the only aim of education?

Over the last 10 years those aims drove national developments and approaches. Phase 1 was characterised by strong national prescription and a focus on attainment.

- Key stage tests for public accountability
- Published Ofsted inspections
- National literacy and numeracy strategies

### Second Phase

Broadened the first phase, but expected schools had the capacity to manage their own self improvement (though intervene for those that cannot).

- Primary strategy
- Curriculum breadth
- Excellence and enjoyment
- Key stage 3 Strategy
- Specialist schools
- 14 – 19 provision
- Inclusion

### Third Phase

- Integrating services around children, young people and families
- Early and earlier intervention
- Eradicate variation in performance between groups
- Equity as well as standards
- Relevance of curriculum
- Extended Schools
- Children's centres

- Personalisation
- Participation post 16

In answering the question “What do we want from education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for our children and young people?”, we might do well to consider what are some of the key interests. The following is not an exhaustive list but contain some of the essential ingredients that we might want to build an effective learning system around.

- Provide a secure environment
- Respect
- Develop high self esteem
- Listen to
- High expectations and achievement
- Equitable and inclusive
- Pupil performance and wellbeing go hand in hand
- A relevant, engaging curriculum

What is the fourth phase?

The fourth phase needs to take account of the developing agenda.

- Closing achievement gap
- Partnerships are necessary for effective delivery
- Self evaluation needs to be at the heart of the inspection process
- Inspection needs to engage and add value not be a threat
- Schools need to see total responsibility for the child / young person from pre-school to post 16

That would mean inspection needs to move to a contribution individual schools make in partnership with others to the achievement, progress and wellbeing of every child. If inspection merely becomes an industry to confirm effective self-evaluated knowledge, it will become an expensive bystander. If it however, illuminates, asks appropriate questions as an advocate for children and young people’s best interest and importantly gives appropriate relevant feedback to schools on effective models of delivery then it will gain credibility.

And just remember, people will over achieve targets they set for themselves. A system predicated on targets which are not owned and individuals / organisations do not see the value in, will lead to chasing targets for fear of public castigation and the narrowing of the curriculum / learning experience. No inspection process should produce this even as an unintended consequence.

It is interesting to look at the O.E.D definition of firstly education, which is the process of nourishing or rearing, and secondly inspection, the action of inspecting or looking narrowly into. How revealing is that!

So where does that all leave us? What about if a new inspection framework tested the following schools as a totality in an area and their partners in delivering progress attainment and wellbeing from preschool to post 16 through effective self-evaluation from a) leadership of the schools, b) all staff, c) pupils, d) parent carers and e) community links and partnerships for children, young people and their families. It would test the following were in place and evaluate them.

- Staff and pupils demonstrate faith in the schools ability to improve itself
- Priorities are clear and the reasons for them are understood
- Staff have faith in the pupils and high expectations

- Staff take openness and consultation seriously
- Plans are practical and simple enough to be clear to all
- Roles and expectations are clearly defined
- Rigorous monitoring and evaluation are maintained
- The implementation of plans is not left to look after itself
- There is consistency between the values the school claims to espouse and the working realities it demonstrates; in other words the leaders live what they believe.

Guess what? This was written by Ofsted in 1994 in their improving schools booklet.

In answering the question “what’s the future of school inspection?”, we have to rigorously link it to the interests of children and young people and ask the question, how do we organise to deliver and test the quality of our efforts to align with their best interests and build in effective public assessments of our success.