

Speech: Amanda Spielman at the Muslim Teachers' Association

It's good to be back at the Institute of Education where I was lucky enough to study myself. I did my MA in comparative education in 2001.

And I am thrilled to be here with you today and to join you in celebrating 40 years of the Muslim Teachers' Association. And indeed to celebrate the contribution Muslim teachers make at every level of our school system.

It is well known that four of the top ten performing schools for progress 8 in the country – Tauheedul Islam Girls' High School, Bolton Muslim Girls School, Eden Girls' School Coventry, and Tauheedul Islam Boys' High School – are Muslim faith schools. But I know that the vast majority of you here today work in non-faith schools.

You are working hard for pupils and parents across the country every day, in local authority schools, academies and independent schools.

That is a point that I know Rukhsana always impresses upon people, and she is right to do so. And I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to her and to the work she has done as your President.

And there are some others that I would like to pay tribute to, as you mark 40 years of the Muslim Teachers' Association: real trailblazers like Nazar Mustafa, founder President of the MTA. He was the first Muslim Inspector for the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA).

Naz Bokhari is another man who broke new ground, becoming the first British Muslim to become the headmaster of a British secondary school. His daughter Hina is here today to speak about his legacy.

And there's Bushra Nasir, who became the first female Muslim headteacher of a state secondary school in the UK in 1993. Bushra is currently CEO of the Drapers' multi-academy Trust. And of course, Shahina Ahmed, Head of the successful Eden Girls' School in Waltham Forest.

While they represent some of the great success stories of Muslim teachers, it's also right to acknowledge some of the challenges that you face.

There is no doubt that while we have come a long way in creating a diverse and inclusive school workforce, we have much further to go. It remains the case that the senior leadership in many schools is far less diverse than the staff body, or indeed, the student intake.

It must sometimes feel as though promotion opportunities are harder to come by for Muslim teachers and indeed, teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds more generally. Ofsted has just advertised a [scheme in our London region to help develop a cadre of future education leaders specifically from minority ethnic backgrounds](#).

The short programme, which is still being developed, is aimed at teachers who have the potential to move into senior leadership roles in the next 3 years. It will give them insight into our new framework and into how we inspect, including a chance to shadow an inspection and attend workshops and focus groups. There is more information on the Ofsted GOV.UK website for anyone here who is interested.

While I would hope that education is generally a supportive environment for people of all backgrounds and all faiths, we know that discrimination is a persistent and insidious threat across our society and the wider world. We see it in the horrific terror attack in Christchurch, in the recent vandalism of mosques in Birmingham and Manchester, and in abuse inflicted both online and on the streets every day.

As teachers, you are in the vanguard of instilling tolerance and understanding in our children. The importance of that work cannot be overstated and I would like to thank you for it.

And we would like to begin what I hope will be a long and constructive dialogue with you. Based on our shared desire to do what is best for children and young people.

The importance of dialogue

I believe constructive, professional dialogue should be at the heart of everything we do at Ofsted.

I know there is an impression that Ofsted can be something of a blunt instrument. That we are too focused on data, facts and figures. That we can be something of an over-bearing 'big brother'. And that we are too quick to judge and pronounce, and too slow to empathise and understand.

But this isn't a picture I recognise, and it's not one I want for Ofsted.

Our purpose as an organisation is to help raise standards and improve lives.

And at the heart of this are our 3 core principles:

1. We always put children and students first, acting as their champions at all times.
2. We cherish our independence, which means we report our findings without fear or favour and only ever with the best interests of children and young people in mind.
3. We operate with transparency and accountability. That means that if you, or anyone else, disagrees with something we say or do then we don't run from that challenge. We embrace it, we talk about it, and we learn from it.

Effective dialogue is an essential part of this approach. We are open to that discussion. But we won't ever compromise on our core principles, including putting children first and foremost.

We all know that with dialogue sometimes comes disagreement. And it can even take us into uneasy territory, where it's easier not to talk about difficult issues. That is particularly true when for some people religious belief comes into conflict with elements of equalities law or the government's approach to British values.

The government sets out the duty of all schools in England, state and independent, to 'actively promote' the 4 British values of:

- democracy
- the rule of law
- individual liberty
- mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs

And I believe this is right. These values make sure that government works for all citizens; they provide for a multi-racial society, building on what is already held in common. They promote both trust and the willingness to contribute to the common good; and create a space in which different beliefs, lifestyles and cultures can exist freely and in harmony.

For us at Ofsted, making sure that the next generation understands, respects and is willing to adopt these values is an essential part of our work. It is about preparing children for life in modern Britain.

Because taken together, these shared values provide a simple message to our young people: in Britain, no matter what your background, you can fit in, you can succeed and you can belong. I know everyone will agree, that is a noble aspiration for our country..

But that doesn't mean that we can't talk about issues and tensions when they arise. I think, for example, of the recent events at Parkfield school in Birmingham where some parents objected to some of the topics that were being taught.

This is precisely where dialogue is essential.

I understand the strength of feeling in that community. But it serves no one well to intimidate teachers and start protesting outside the school gates. All that does is make a difficult situation worse, while setting a terrible example for the children. It is children's voices that always get lost when adults stop talking and start shouting.

It must be better to engage in calm discussions in order to find a sensible middle ground – one that means children are prepared for life in a diverse, modern, progressive country like ours, but it's done in a sensitive and careful manner that respects the concerns of age, religion or any other background or context.

In such circumstances dialogue can be our ally. It is through dialogue that we advance understanding and find common solutions.

The search for substance

Our [draft inspection framework](#) has this concept of 'dialogue' at its core.

It shifts Ofsted's focus away from the interrogation of performance data, towards what I call the 'substance' of education: What are pupils being taught? How well are they being taught it? And how is it setting them up to succeed at the next stage?

It is my view that in recent years the curriculum, the 'what is taught and why', has taken too much of a backseat in inspection. And this has contributed to a gradual erosion of curriculum thinking in early years, in schools and in post-16 education.

But in reality the curriculum should be one of the main considerations that Ofsted inspectors keep in mind, which is why the draft framework contains a new 'quality of education' judgement that looks at how schools are deciding what to teach and why, how well they are doing it and whether it is leading to strong outcomes for young people.

And to deliver this quality of education judgement, we will be exploring 3 core elements of education.

First, what is the framework for setting out the aims of a programme of education, including the knowledge and skills to be gained at each stage? This is the curriculum intent.

Secondly, how is that framework translated into practice, and does the teaching make the intended curriculum a reality? This is the implementation element.

And thirdly, how is the knowledge and skills that students have gained evaluated against expectations and what destinations can students go on to next? This is all about the impact.

This approach will deliver a much more rounded assessment of a school – looking not just at 'what' it is achieving in performance table terms, but 'how' it is achieving it. I think this is both a better – and a fairer – approach. It puts the curriculum back at the heart of inspections and in doing so it helps defuse the pressure to 'game' the system by focusing on performance data alone.

And this is where that concept of 'dialogue' is essential. Because the only way to assess this, and to make the new 'quality of education' judgement a reality is to foster a professional dialogue between inspectors and a provider.

This is not in any way to suggest that performance data is unimportant. Of course not. We continue to need clear and authoritative accountability measures to help us come to our judgements.

But we must increasingly recognise that these only paint a partial picture.

They tell us what has been achieved, not how. And we know that this can lead to some perverse practices, where digging for the right data trumps the search for substance.

So a key principle of the new framework is to put inspection back into its proper place, where it complements published performance data, rather than intensifying the pressure on you to deliver higher numbers each year. And because no data measure can ever fully capture the quality of the education it reflects, we have to put professional dialogue back at the heart of our approach.

Fostering dialogue during inspections

In the same vein, our proposals for a 2-day section 8 inspection are designed to make more time to develop an understanding between inspectors and staff. There will be more time for conversation about the strengths of a school, about how weaknesses will be addressed. And more time for staff at all levels to talk to inspectors about what is happening in lessons and in children's work.

Again, this is about giving school leaders and staff time to provide that all important context, without which inspection can be a discouraging experience. The pilots we have conducted of this new approach show that it does make space for constructive professional dialogue between inspectors, leaders and teachers.

School leaders need to be able to provide some human input to this process. As one said to me recently: "If there's a conversation going on about my school, I'd rather be part of it, so that I can put things in context."

At the end of the day, it's about allowing more time for inspection to be done with you rather than to you.

And dialogue is about listening too. We know that teachers are under pressure; we know that levels of stress among teachers are among the highest for any profession and we know that thousands of teachers leave the profession each year.

The reasons behind this are many and complex, but we want to do what we can to reduce the pressure on teachers. That's one of the reasons why we're moving away from using internal performance data in our inspections. We really want to curb any practices that are essentially done for Ofsted's benefit. That defeats the point of inspection and it just creates more work for hard-pressed professionals like you.

We will continue to run pilots through the summer term – more than 200 in total, giving every one of Her Majesty's Inspectors the opportunity to participate in at least one. And we will use these to tweak the model to make sure we get it right.

Greater professional dialogue

To cement this important concept of dialogue and collaboration, we are already doing more to fully integrate Ofsted into the school system. We have been opening ourselves up as an organisation, sharing experiences and best practice with more people across the system, and encouraging more discussion at every level.

As you perhaps know, many of our current inspectors are serving school leaders. That is important because it provides a sense of perspective and shared understanding. But we want to encourage more people to get involved, so we have developed a secondment programme to bring more middle leaders into Ofsted, so that we widen the pool of experience and expertise.

This programme will see more middle leaders coming into Ofsted for a year at a time. They will get access to our training and development, and through inspection they will gain insight into many different schools. We will get their expertise and up to date experience of running a school. And after 12 months they will go back to their school, hopefully having gained hugely from the experience, and benefiting the school in turn.

This approach will be piloted with our current cadre of Ofsted Inspectors so that we can see how well it works. In time, we hope these secondments will be open to any school leader who has had some whole school responsibility. We see this as forming part of the development journey of talented school leaders who are on a trajectory to headship or beyond.

But dialogue doesn't stop at inspection – nor indeed does it stop with teachers.

It's really important to me that Ofsted is not defined solely by what we do, but also by what we know. The work we do also gives us considerable insight into the wider issues that circle education and children's social care. And we want to use that insight to contribute to some important ongoing debates.

Some of you may have seen [our recent research report into the issue of knife crime](#). We did the fieldwork in London and I know many of you here work in London schools.

We found that schools are often quite isolated from wider partnership efforts to tackle the issue. Consequently, the way schools respond can be inconsistent. The need for better partnership working may sound obvious, but unfortunately it's not happening nearly enough – and we hope our voice will help encourage some progress.

It's that theme of dialogue again, and this time it's about having dialogue beyond schools and colleges – and being part of the broader coalition that is needed to tackle the tragedy of knife crime among young people.

Conclusion

So we have a plan to put educational substance and professional dialogue at the heart of Ofsted's work in the years ahead.

And I have to say the dialogue around our new framework is vibrant and popular. We have already received around 8,000 responses to the consultation since it began 11 weeks ago – and I would urge all of you here to have your say before it closes in 5 days' time.

Because your voice matters. Because dialogue matters. Because none of us has all the answers – but together we can always find a way.

That's why I am grateful to be here and to be able to join you in this celebration today.

And that's why I hope this will not be the end of our conversation, but just the start of it.

I wish you all a productive conference, a great day, and here's to the next 40 years of the Muslim Teachers' Association.

Thank you.