

Speech: Amanda Spielman at National Governance Association

Thank you for inviting me here today. I'm not in the least surprised to see so many governors out at the weekend. I was a governor myself for 7 years and I really understand the commitment, the thought, the amazing energy that goes into the work that you do. I'm looking forward to going back into the world of being a governor one day.

A big thank you for engaging so fully with our recent consultation, and for the thoughtful and comprehensive NGA (National Governance Association) response. Today I hope to expand on some of the issues you highlighted and unpack some of the detail for you.

It's been a few weeks since we published the [final framework and handbooks](#). I hope that some of you have had a chance to look at them, as they lay out how we'll inspect and what we'll be looking at on inspections from this coming September.

This was the [biggest consultation we have ever done](#), with just north of 15,000 responses. I've been greatly encouraged by it, as it showed very strong support for the direction we are moving in.

It also included more than 100 face-to-face events, and I'm grateful to NGA for inviting some of my Ofsted colleagues to talk about what we're doing and listen to the views of governors at the events that you held.

As part of developing the framework, we've also been carrying out pilot inspections – actually the biggest pilot programme we've ever done. By September, we'll have done more than 250 pilots in all kinds of education providers.

And we've been training all our inspectors in the run-up to this framework, building their knowledge and their understanding of what feeds into the new judgements. We've involved them in our curriculum research, we've held training conferences, sent them on pilots, and run workshops. Coupled with the 5-day training package for inspectors this summer, this will equip all of them to inspect consistently under the new framework. I should say here that this is an education framework that goes all the way through – from childminders and nurseries to post-16. But today I know that your focus is schools.

Getting to the heart of it, this new framework is about 2 things: substance and integrity. It puts the real substance of education, the curriculum, back at the centre of inspection and supports leaders and teachers who act with integrity. To put it another way, we want to help people put as much time as possible into the things that make the most difference for children.

And we want governors and trustees to be able to support their schools well,

and to be able to ask the right kind of strategic, big-picture questions without getting dragged down into the weeds.

Four judgements

As I've said before, the new framework represents an evolution, rather than a revolution. But it is rebalancing what we look at on inspection. Let me run through the 4 judgements we'll make.

Quality of education judgement

First, we've introduced a quality of education judgement. This has the curriculum at its core; the education that a school offers to all its pupils. For a number of years, the curriculum had only a very small place, under the leadership and management judgement, and apart from teaching, assessment and standards. Now it is a core part of the first judgement. It's about what the school chooses to teach. And it's about how they teach it; how well this curriculum is ordered and structured. It's also, of course, about standards. Standards matter. So, the quality of education does also consider how well pupils are doing in national assessments and qualifications. These should be the reflection of what children have learned, not the totality.

Personal development

Our second judgement is personal development. It's about what the school does for children's broader development. It's about the school playing their part – along with parents and others – in children learning to be good citizens, confident and resilient, able to take on the challenges of the future. I should say, with personal development, that we're not attempting to judge the outcome. We're looking at what schools are putting in to it and how they're approaching it.

Behaviour and attitudes

Our third judgement, behaviour and attitudes, is about getting the environment right. Is this a school in which pupils can learn? It's about creating a calm, ordered environment where children can flourish and achieve their potential. It's about how the school responds effectively to low-level disruption and bullying. It's essential: if a level of bad or disruptive behaviour is normalised, then children have less chance to learn.

Leadership and management

And our fourth judgement, is leadership and management, essentially the same judgement as it is now. This is about the way that leaders – and of course governors and trustees – support and help their people, and about how they work with them to improve their subject knowledge and their teaching, including the essential behaviour management. And it's about integrity: recognising those who do the right thing for their pupils, and who resist the temptation to take short cuts. It's about doing the right thing.

The role of governance

And that leads me neatly on to where you come in. What do we mean, exactly, by governance and the roles of governors and trustees?

The governance landscape has evolved in recent years. It isn't the neatly defined thing it once was when every school stood alone and had its own board of governors. We have many different structures now, with academies and community schools and voluntary-aided schools and sprinklings of many other types. The split between the roles of the executive and the non-executives can be different in different structures. What's a management task in some schools or groups is part of governance in others. We've bent our minds to this evolving landscape and what it means for inspection.

Coming from a MAT background myself, I know how frustrating it can be when the rest of the education system doesn't recognise where responsibilities actually sit. So it mattered to me to make sure we really captured this in the new handbooks. Accountability mechanisms like inspection should match the world as it actually operates, not an idealised world that's neat and convenient but doesn't reflect the way things work on the ground.

So we've changed the handbook quite a bit to reflect the evolving governance landscape. And the feedback from NGA was that you liked this.

And I need to say another big thank you for helping us to train our inspectors on the different leadership and governance models that schools, and especially MATs, operate with. You have certainly helped to bring clarity. But in the new framework, governance is still considered in the leadership and management judgement. Inspectors will still explore how governors carry out their responsibilities, and the contribution you make to the oversight and direction of schools.

You already know the purposes that DfE sets out in its [governance handbook](#). There are 3 of them:

1. Ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction.
2. Hold executive leaders to account for educational performance and staff performance management.
3. Oversee financial performance and make sure that money is well spent.

And, of course, you have to check compliance with statutory and contractual requirements.

But I'd like you to think about that first, really important purpose – ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction.

What is a good curriculum?

It was great to see in the NGA response the statement that a curriculum reveals a lot about a school's ethos, priorities and values.

The curriculum is absolutely something that you as governors and trustees

should be thinking about and talking about with school leaders. As you have that curriculum conversation with them, what do you need to consider? There isn't and there won't be an Ofsted-approved curriculum and indeed, the National Curriculum and Early Years Foundation Stage, as well as the specifications for GCSEs, A-levels and other qualifications, should do much of the heavy lifting here.

So, what do you need to understand about what makes a good curriculum?

We did some of the curriculum research in different phases over the past couple of years. The [second phase of our curriculum research](#) clearly showed that it's possible to educate well with different approaches. Our framework is clear about the need for coherence and good sequencing, putting the right things in the right order. But it doesn't prescribe a model.

What should form the basis of your discussions with school leaders? Well, what does your school want children to know and to be able to do? You may want to think about what fits with your ethos. What is going to help the children in later life – whether that's academic or vocational qualifications, a broad curriculum with plenty of arts education and PE, or something else that helps with their wider personal development.

What will help children develop cultural capital? This is described in the national curriculum as:

the essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said and helping to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement.

When inspectors make a judgement about the quality of education, they'll consider how much schools are giving pupils the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life.

In the [second phase of our curriculum research](#), we looked at a small sample of schools that were invested in the curriculum. We found that leaders in those schools tended to talk about giving their pupils the knowledge and skills that were lacking from their home environments as a core principle for their curriculum.

Crucially, school leaders need to have a good understanding of where children are starting from and a clear concept of what the end point needs to be – for all children. A curriculum that gets them from A to B that is clear, coherent and well sequenced minimises the likelihood of children coming adrift. But we don't believe schools have to start developing a curriculum from scratch. We say that you can “adopt” a curriculum, and many do.

Some the schools we looked at used ongoing assessment sensibly so that they could check pupils' understanding of the main curriculum elements and respond appropriately through teaching. The curriculum, in a sense, was never complete for them, and they recognised the need for continual review and

renewal. But filling those gaps in knowledge, skills and understanding was central to their thinking, because of the aspirations they had for their children. One of my research colleagues observed some girls in a year 7 mathematics class who were struggling to add up in hours and minutes. This had obviously never even been taught by their primary school.

Disadvantaged children

Crucially, the schools we looked at in our sample didn't put disadvantaged pupils onto a stripped-back curriculum. Instead, most of them made strong links between reading and curriculum access. Two secondary school leaders in areas of high deprivation had included Latin and philosophy as subjects at key stage 3. Primary school leaders had also enriched their schools' quality of education with well-planned regular trips to the local area and beyond that were tightly linked to their curriculum.

That said, our research also found that in a few schools, the local context appeared to lead to low expectations about what leaders believed their pupils could achieve. For instance, in one school with a large cohort of pupils from deprived areas, leaders were more concerned with 'pupil engagement' than with curriculum content and so they'd chosen English texts that they thought catered to pupils' interests, rather than deepening and widening their knowledge and so enabling their progression through the curriculum. That just isn't the right thing to do for children.

I know from the NGA response that many of you have raised concerns about providing a range of rich experiences because of money pressures. Schools are not all equally funded. As I said in a [letter to the Public Accounts Committee last October](#), school leaders have had to work harder to balance their budgets in recent years and we see this leading to some difficult choices. The fact that we haven't seen the effects flow through into inspection outcomes, or not yet, reflects the efforts your schools have put in to maintain standards of education. And of course, I am aware of the wider context of cuts to local authority children's services.

But our quality of education judgement will make it easier for us to recognise and reward the good work done by schools in areas of high disadvantage, by tackling the perverse incentives that we know can undermine schools. Rebalancing inspection so that it complements performance tables – rather than intensifying pressure on them – means we can really look at how results are being achieved. Good results should flow from strong education for all children. This will empower schools to put children first always and actively discourage negative practices like 'off-rolling', teaching to the test and narrowing the curriculum.

Special educational needs and disabilities

While it is for school leaders to make sure that good teaching is happening every day, the governing body has a strategic role in making sure the curriculum meets the needs of all children in a school. That obviously includes children with special educational needs and disabilities.

This idea and our approach to evaluating the quality of education are so important for these children and young people. It is this group of pupils, perhaps more than any other, who need the curriculum to be sequenced coherently and taught well. The decisions leaders make about what is taught and how it is taught have a profound impact on them. For many, learning can be really hard and they simply can't afford for leaders to get it wrong.

That's why the curriculum conversation needs to be about all children, not just the ones who will move smoothly through. Inspectors will be considering very carefully throughout inspection which children benefit from the school's curriculum and which children miss out. Is it always the same children?

Data

I'd now like to move on to thinking about your second purpose – holding leaders to account for educational performance. And of course, this is one that can happen in different places with different structures.

We've talked a lot over the past 6 months about data and our plans to shift the focus on inspection away from it. We found in our curriculum research that an over-reliance on data was bending things out of shape and driving some unhelpful practices in some schools: cramming, teaching to the test, narrowing the curriculum. We received a mixed response to our proposal not to use internal progress and attainment data on inspection, with 42% of respondents in favour and 43% against. Headteachers were somewhat opposed whereas teachers and parents were in favour.

Some of the concerns really don't stand up to close examination, like the idea that this would have inspectors put more weight on SATs or GCSE results when the core principle of this new framework is that we are thinking about what pupils have learned and how they have achieved high standards – or not.

That's not to say that we'll ignore external exam results. External exams are rigorously developed, tested and moderated and therefore comparable across schools. At secondary, GCSEs obviously matter a lot to children themselves. We'll continue to consider outcomes, but in the context of what is being taught. It's worth asking yourself this: are these the results of a well-taught curriculum or the result of cramming, teaching to the test and a narrowed curriculum? If a broad and balanced curriculum is well taught, the exam results should almost take care of themselves.

Other concerns are more understandable, and some of you may share them. Let me put your minds at rest. Even though we won't be looking at it, schools can still collect and use assessment information – that's up to your school – but it should be done for its value for education, not done for Ofsted.

Assessment of course has many uses, but it doesn't have to result in mountains of data in order to have value. Regular low-stakes testing, like quizzes, can be helpful for consolidating learning without any need to record scores or report them upwards. Knowing how well pupils are understanding and remembering what they are taught is also helpful for teachers in planning and adapting their lessons, for leaders reviewing the curriculum more broadly.

Internal data that your school uses certainly shouldn't be collected in a way that puts undue pressure on teachers' time. If someone shows you a great big spreadsheet, you might want to ask who pulled it together and for what purpose. Who does the data help? Does it add value beyond what you'd get from talking to a teacher or head of department? Was it worth the time taken out of the teacher's day to enter all those numbers?

You may be aware of the DfE's Teacher Workload Advisory Group report, ['Making data work'](#), published last November. It recommends no more than 2 or 3 data collection points a year and recommends that data collected should be used to inform clear actions.

So, if your school is using more than those 2 or 3 points each year, they should set out clearly how they will interpret the data they have collected, and what actions will flow from it. If we find that a school's system for data collection is disproportionate, or inefficient or unsustainable for staff, we'll reflect this in our inspection report, and it could affect the grade that is given. But we are certainly not prohibiting the use of data.

Predicted grades and pupil premium

And please tread carefully with predicted grades. You need to think about how, and on what basis, they have been compiled. Has the school made these predictions based on a careful understanding of where a child is with a particular subject – what they know and what they're able to do? Or has the school just pulled through the SATS results from primary school? And is it even helpful to be asking schools to predict? An overblown interest in predictions can drive schools away from the substance of education. I can understand the superficial attraction, but it's sometimes allowing the wrong things to happen.

As [Professor Becky Allen says in her blog](#), "there isn't any research out there that can tell you the impact of using target grades, predictions or flightpaths."

And just because a number is written on a spreadsheet doesn't make it gospel, and predictions are at least as likely to be wrong as they are to be right. So please let's put a little less faith in them. We're not saying you can never use them, but do remember they can do more harm than good. It is possible to do them well, but what purpose do they serve, and where else could that time and effort be used?

I have similar misgivings about flight paths. The progress children make when they learn a subject is not necessarily linear. Progress should be measured by how much a child has learned of the curriculum, rather than when or whether they are hitting a particular target.

Similarly, with the pupil premium, we know that you have a responsibility to oversee how it is spent and we'll certainly look at your rationale for how it's spent and what your school wants the impact of that funding to be. But all we're doing is making sure you do what the DfE is telling you to do.

We won't be asking for any specific document or plan other than looking at your school's pupil premium strategy. And we certainly won't need any further school-generated data relating to individual students or to closing gaps within classes or within the school. The data just isn't particularly helpful here because the numbers of pupils are usually too small – another point made in ['Making data work.'](#)

So instead of looking at spreadsheets, inspectors will go into the classroom, talk to pupils and teachers and look at examples of work to see the impact of assessment on the curriculum.

For those charged with overseeing strategic vision and ethos, and holding schools to account for education performance, it's about having the right conversations with school leaders. These conversations should encompass the themes of substance and integrity – which means looking at the curriculum and doing the right thing for children. And please do speak to parents and pupils.

I hope the new framework will enable you to lift your eyes up to the big, strategic picture that you need to be involved in, rather than drawing you down towards reams of data, or thinking you need to spend time in the classroom observing individual lessons or looking through books.

Inspector training and MATs

There's another matter I'd like to pick up on – how and when inspectors will speak to governors and trustees on an inspection.

As we know, MAT trustees sometimes delegate some of their powers to a local governing body or committee at school level. If inspectors are told that a local governing body has delegated responsibilities, they will establish clearly which powers reside locally, which sit with the trustees, and which are with the leaders of the MAT, and make sure that their inspection activities and reporting reflect this.

Inspectors need to speak to those responsible for leadership and governance during an inspection and the lead inspector will confirm arrangements for those meetings. They'll be guided by the school as to who they need to meet in the structure of a MAT. They'll arrange a meeting with the chair of the governing body, or the chair of the board of trustees and as many governors or trustees as possible. Inspectors will also ask the school to invite governors or trustees to attend the final feedback meeting.

Safeguarding

We have had some queries from NGA members on safeguarding, which is the responsibility of governors. Let me reassure you again. As governors and trustees, you are responsible for making sure that safeguarding procedures are properly followed in schools. But that doesn't mean you have to go through your school's central record yourself. You need to make sure the overarching culture is right. What is your school doing to identify children

that may be at risk of harm? How is your school helping those children and fulfilling its duties? This, too, is when it's more helpful to look up at the big picture, rather than down into the detail.

So finally, I commend the work that you do. You are all volunteers who give up your time, your energy and your skills to help schools and to give back to your communities. But you also, through the NGA, influence and improve the way we work, and you have a voice at the heart of government. We are all part of education – not outside of it. We're in this together for the good of children and young people.

Thank you.