

# All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education

Co-Chairs - Nic Dakin MP and Andrea Jenkyns MP

Vice Chairs - Emma Hardy MP and Lord Storey

## APPG for Education Meeting Report

### Monday 18<sup>th</sup> December 1pm Room Q, PCH

On Monday 18<sup>th</sup> December, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education hosted Sean Harford HMI, National Director, Education at Ofsted, who presented an overview of their work from the last 12 months, including a summary of their 2017 annual report.

Nic Dakin MP, co-chair of the APPG, opened the floor, and introduced Sean Harford. Sean gave a brief background on the recently published annual report, Amanda Spielman's first as Chief Inspector, before running through the main headlines from the document.

He began by praising the improving education system, with 90% of primaries, 79% of secondaries, and 94% of early years providers now rated as good or better. This comes out as an average of nine out of ten schools providing a good or better standard of education. However, while this statistic should be commended, Sean was keen to point out that there is no room for complacency, as there are still over 2,000 schools in the country that are not providing good enough education. Significantly, there were 125 schools last year that Ofsted inspected that haven't been rated as good for over a decade, which means that roughly 2 whole school populations went through their time at school without receiving a good enough standard of education.

Sean then moved on to the characteristics these schools tend to have in common, including unstable leadership, high staff turnover, problems when it comes to recruitment of effective teachers, and high proportions of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities compared to the national average. He also highlighted that for many of these schools, becoming an academy wasn't necessarily the answer as they had already passed through multi-academy trusts. In addition, he said that good chief executives and leaders were spread too thinly to have a positive impact.

Moving on to Ofsted's work on the curriculum, Sean echoed Amanda Spielman's thoughts on the dangers of schools chasing results. He welcomed the rigour that the qualifications system had brought to English education, but insisted that schools need to focus on the learning of pupils not just pursuing test scores and exam grades. Outlining Ofsted's role in this, he suggested they were now focusing their attention on the wider curriculum, having previously looked mainly at basic, core subjects. He also said that the intent of each school's curriculum, its implementation, and its impact were three factors that must be clear.

**APPG for Education Secretariat**

[www.educationappg.org.uk](http://www.educationappg.org.uk)

Telephone - 020 3642 2754

[educationappg@ranelaghuk.com](mailto:educationappg@ranelaghuk.com)

# All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education

Co-Chairs - Nic Dakin MP and Andrea Jenkyns MP

Vice Chairs - Emma Hardy MP and Lord Storey

Finally, Sean spoke about the curricula for specific year groups, identifying the narrowing of the key stage 2 curriculum approaching SATS as an issue. He also expressed his concerns over many pupils being able to drop certain subjects early during key stage 3. With regard to the early years curriculum, he referenced the recent Ofsted 'Bold Beginnings' report that detailed the importance of balancing learning and play, before asserting the importance of sitting at a table with a proper pencil grip when teaching children how to write. He then finished his presentation by briefly speaking about the dangers of some children falling through the net into unsafe or unregistered education providers.

Nic Dakin then opened the floor to questions.

In response to a question on the advice that Ofsted can offer parents with regard to the breadth of the curriculum at a certain school, Sean said the reports published need to cover a wide variety of areas, and as a result, could not be tailored especially to the needs of parents alone. In an ideal world, such a specialisation would occur, but is ultimately impossible given limited resources.

Sean was then asked what Ofsted's role in relation to multi-academy trusts was likely to be moving forwards. He replied that he was keen to make sure that accountability was set at the right level, and ran through the current process of inspecting the individual schools in a multi-academy trust's jurisdiction and how the relevant detail is gathered from that. However, he said that through this process, Ofsted only has the resources to focus on the worst performing trusts, and said they are working with the Department for Education to figure out how we can better hold MATs to account.

This was followed by a question on what Ofsted can do to break the cycle of poorly performing schools, something that Sean alluded to during his presentation. He responded by saying that the 'unstable' nature of the leadership was the primary factor, with leaders keen to be seen to be doing something about the school's poor performance firing head-teachers before they have had the chance to oversee meaningful change. He said that Ofsted would continue to publish their reports of the schools, but that leaders should not act harshly and should give more time for improvements.

Finally, in response to a question on how technology can help teachers with their workload, Sean suggested that the profession was causing itself more work than necessary due to its own diligence. He expressed admiration for the work that teachers were doing in trying to personalise curricula but said that this was ultimately not possible for whole classes of pupils, and proposed, for example, that multiple choice questions are an efficient way to save time and record data which could then be used to identify areas that need re-teaching.

Nic then thanked the speaker and the attendees, and concluded the meeting.

**APPG for Education Secretariat**

[www.educationappg.org.uk](http://www.educationappg.org.uk)

Telephone - 020 3642 2754

[educationappg@ranelaghuk.com](mailto:educationappg@ranelaghuk.com)