



New Ofsted Education Inspection Framework: the most positive change for pupils with SEND in a generation

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January 2020

Just before Christmas our North West London Independent School (NWLIS) became one of the first special schools to be inspected under the new Framework.

The experience has convinced me that far from letting down disadvantaged children, the new Framework represents the most positive change for pupils with SEND in a generation; one that could have a huge impact on how their needs are considered and what they can achieve at school.

For context this is at least the 7th major new Ofsted framework and my 15th Ofsted inspection in as many years. I've met with multiple Inspectors as they work to apply the various inspection frameworks to our context, which is that all our pupils have co-morbid Autistic Spectrum Condition and Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs. Most are from disadvantaged backgrounds, may be Looked After and will typically have

experienced between two and five permanent exclusions before they reach us.

As an advocate for disadvantaged children, and an educationalist who refuses to permanently exclude, I'm well used to being mis-cast as an apologist for bad behaviour, or of having low expectations. Nothing could be further from the truth. Ninety per cent of TCES Group alumni are non-NEET up to five year later precisely because we support them to discover their talents and take their next step in life.

What's so encouraging about the new Framework is that it recognises and values the pragmatism, nurture and integrity that must go into the creation of a curriculum and school culture that allows children with SEND to thrive.

For me the significant aspects of the new Framework are as follows:

The focus on building character and resilience, as well as how pupils do in exams. This meant our Inspector was able to recognise that our initial priority with some pupils is to spend curriculum time stabilising them, before we can get them to the seat of learning.

Our Group Process and Young Leaders programme get traumatised pupils to a place where they are ready for success, rather than braced for further failure based on their history of permanent exclusions, mis-managed moves, or simply owing to their SEND.

Value placed on the curriculum for what it chooses to teach and how it teaches it. Our mission to get pupils a smaller number of full GCSEs – often because they arrive to us late in Key Stage 4 with significant gaps in their learning - was recognised for what it was. It is a valid means of re-engaging them in education success, with a clear education pathway to



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college, not a deliberate attempt to narrow the curriculum.

Looking for substance and integrity at the heart of the curriculum. The new Framework's focus on hearing directly from pupils and parents was marked. What struck me was that it wasn't really the governors' or senior leadership's inspection. It was an inspection of the voice and participation of so many previously unheralded voices.

Parents played an important role in helping Inspectors understand how the school was delivering its curriculum and were especially important in terms of their unique and rounded view of pupil behaviour and attitude.

Our multi-disciplinary team of therapists, inclusion staff and social workers was barely met for 15 minutes. The message was that pupils, parents and middle leaders would tell the Inspectors if our integrated services and curriculum were working.

For parents of children with SEND, who often fight hard to be heard, this was especially significant.

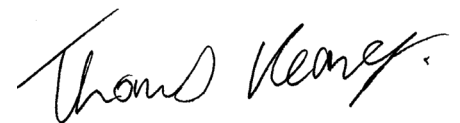
Off-rolling considered highly inappropriate. Schools that have relied on off-rolling in the past – an approach that disproportionately affects children with SEND will clearly need to change. In all but the most complex cases I am sure that the pupils who attend TCES Group schools could have thrived at an earlier point in a mainstream setting with the right curriculum and support.

Ofsted have now published their new judgment on North West London Independent School, and I'm pleased to report that that we retained our Outstanding, something that only a third of Outstanding schools inspected under the new Framework have achieved.

When Amanda Spielman introduced the new Framework at a meeting I attended in 2017 she said: 'It puts the real substance of education, the curriculum, back at the centre of the 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.'

As one of the first schools to be inspected I say that Amanda Spielman has been true to her word.

Now I ask one more thing of her – let the Framework bed in for the next five to 10 years. Give all schools the chance to seize the opportunity to create a new kind of school experience for pupils with SEND.



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