Ofsted written submission (SHW0076)

1. The Committee has asked Ofsted to provide written evidence to explain how, during our inspections of schools, inspectors gather evidence and information relating to the harassment of teachers or other school staff. Our submission addresses that specific line of inquiry.

Ofsted’s inspections of schools

2. Inspection provides independent, external evaluation that includes a diagnosis of what should improve in a school. It is based on gathering a range of evidence that is evaluated against an inspection framework¹ and takes full account of Ofsted’s policies and relevant legislation in areas such as safeguarding, equality and diversity.

3. Inspectors have a limited amount of time on inspection and their focus is to meet the statutory requirement to report on the quality of education provided by a school, as set out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

4. In doing so, inspectors are required to make four key judgements:

   - effectiveness of leadership and management
   - quality of teaching, learning and assessment
   - personal development, behaviour and welfare
   - outcomes for pupils.

They will also make a judgement on the overall effectiveness of the school, taking account of the four key judgements.

5. Inspectors must also consider:

   - the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school
   - the extent to which the education provided at the school meets the needs of the range of pupils, including pupils who have a disability and pupils who have special educational needs.

6. Ofsted’s work on the curriculum over the past year has shown how important the curriculum is to pupils’ broad personal development, preparing them for life in modern Britain and supporting the development of their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. This includes effective teaching about positive models of sexual behaviour through sex and relationships education and PSHE; this is particularly important in addressing situations where sexual harassment of staff is originating from pupils.

7. Inspectors have a duty to ensure that schools safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of children. In doing so, inspectors make a written judgement on the effectiveness of safeguarding pupils in the school.

*Obtaining evidence and information relating to the sexual harassment of teachers and other school staff*

8. The focus of Ofsted’s inspection is primarily on the education and safety of pupils, but inspectors also have regard to the Equality Act 2010.

9. Inspectors are trained annually on safeguarding, and specifically how schools identify and help children at risk of, or subject to, neglect or abuse, including sexual abuse. They consider how schools manage their statutory obligations, including responding to allegations.

10. Gathering evidence or information relating to the sexual harassment of teachers or other school staff by pupils or by other teachers or school staff is not a specific focus for inspectors when inspecting schools.

11. Sexual harassment of staff is not an issue that arises commonly on inspection, but wherever it does arise it will become a priority area for inspectors to pursue through the inspection.

12. Where such evidence or information should come to light, either before or during inspection, inspectors will seek to assure themselves that appropriate action has been taken. They will address the issue with school leaders and look at what procedures the school has in place and identify what, if any, action the school has taken. The evidence gathered by inspectors, along with a range of other evidence, will assist in informing their judgement on leadership and management.

*Gathering evidence directly from teachers and school staff*

13. Inspectors gather a wide range of evidence on inspection to make their judgements. This includes discussions with leaders, governors, staff, parents and pupils, observing lessons, scrutinising pupils’ work and looking at documentary evidence produced by the school, as well as responses to staff, pupil and parent questionnaires. Inspectors will also consider any evidence the school holds from regularly surveying the staff and how leaders and managers have responded to concerns raised by staff or parents.

14. Inspectors hold face-to-face discussions with staff and pupils. In addition, inspectors receive and review staff views through the voluntary, anonymous inspection questionnaires. These questionnaires ask whether leaders and managers are considerate of staff well-being and whether all staff are treated
fairly and with respect at the school. Staff can add responses in free text. If significant issues are raised through the staff questionnaire, they will always be followed up with the school’s leadership.

15. Where inspectors encounter cases of sexual harassment or violence they will take immediate action. However, there is a significant interval between inspections; for example, the interval for ‘good’ schools is approximately four years, and most ‘outstanding’ schools are exempt from routine inspections, so are generally not visited by inspectors. As such, there are those better placed on the ground and throughout the system to address these serious issues when they emerge: primarily the leaders and managers of schools, professional associations and the police. Inspections are not the primary answer to ensuring that immediate action is taken to address these concerns.

16. Ofsted does not record evidence centrally on how many issues of sexual harassment of staff have arisen on inspection. However, in this academic year, Ofsted has judged safeguarding to be ineffective in 31 schools, and our safeguarding criteria includes matters of sexual harassment and violence relating to pupils.

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