

INSPECTIONS FOR TOP-RATED SCHOOLS TO BE REINSTATED



Schools rated outstanding will no longer be exempt from inspections by Ofsted, under new plans announced by the Department for Education (DfE).

The move is part of proposals to help struggling schools in England.

The government stopped inspectors from carrying out routine inspections of top-rated schools in 2011, but the DfE said bringing them back would ensure parents had up-to-date information.

Ofsted called for their reintroduction after concerns about falling standards.

It highlighted the issue last year, saying that as some schools had not been inspected for a decade or more, there was a chance their ratings no longer truly reflected standards at the school.

The exemption, introduced when Michael Gove was education secretary, aimed to focus resources on the worst-performing schools but was criticised at the time.

A National Audit Office report in 2018 found 1,620 schools, most of them outstanding, had not been inspected for six years or more, and 290 for a decade or more.

Earlier this year, England's schools standards watchdog re-inspected 305 schools rated outstanding that had specific issues, and 80% lost their top-level rating.

'Completely different schools'

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), which represents leaders in the majority of schools in England, welcomed the announcement to reintroduce inspections for outstanding schools.

"Many of these schools are completely different places now to when they were inspected, with changed cohorts of pupils and different staff teaching a dramatically different curriculum," he said.

However, he added that the NAHT remained concerned about Ofsted's ability to judge a school, saying "in the past outstanding judgements have been largely data driven".

As part of the plans to tackle underperformance, the DfE also announced:

- more funding to help top performing academies to expand to support other schools
- a new specialist academy trust will be set up to turn round the most challenging schools - it will be piloted in the north of England
- a programme giving hundreds of schools consistently rated "requires improvement" more help from experienced school leaders

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said he was determined to make sure those schools leading the way were "sharing their expertise and lifting up others" so every child had the best possible start to life.

The latest plan follows the government's announcement of a multi-billion pound cash boost for schools in England over the next three years.