

# Opinion



Teachers would feel far more liberated under the new Ofsted inspection framework, says Gresham's headmaster Douglas Robb  
Picture: GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

## Shift in school focus may finally celebrate good work

**Douglas Robb**, headmaster of Gresham's school, asks if the new Ofsted inspection framework will finally celebrate the good work taking place in schools across the country.

based on concerns he has about the way a school works, if the data paints a positive picture, their hands may be tied. Schools are incredibly complicated organisations, with an inordinate amount of context to consider, so treating schools as pockets of data was never going to allow Ofsted to fully understand them. Having a system that allows inspectors to make qualitative judgements must be welcomed.

Finally another positive impact we can hope to see is an end to the dire reports of pupils being 'off-rolled' ahead of their GCSEs or A Levels – and in some extreme cases even before Year 6 SATS. It is a complete dereliction of duty for schools to be putting their own league table performances ahead of the needs of individual pupils, and I hope that the new framework will ensure not one pupil is off-rolled in future because of their potential impact on the school's league table position.

So, for schools that have always welcomed children of mixed abilities, and that focus on nurturing inquisitive and happy children, equipped for the real world, the proposed shift in focus may finally offer an opportunity to be celebrated for the good work that is already taking place across the country. I certainly hope this will prove to be the case!

Under the new framework, Ofsted inspectors will be able to make qualitative judgements based on what they can ascertain and understand from their visit, whereas the current situation doesn't provide any leeway to make a qualitative judgement where the data doesn't paint the same picture. The same is true vice versa; even if an inspector wishes to make a qualitative judgement

needed to do the same amount of tracking and measurement for their own internal processes, but that additional investment may need to be made into proving the value of each lesson. However, most teachers I know joined the profession not because they wanted to be part of an exam factory, but because they enjoy igniting a spark of interest in a pupil for their subject; they feel pride when they have enabled a child to grasp a new skill or understand a new theory; and they believe in the value of education to change young people's lives forever.

If the proposed changes truly free schools from an overemphasised scrutiny of assessment outcomes, and instead create greater scrutiny of consistent high quality teaching and learning, then school leaders will need to have the confidence to liberate teachers, to encourage them to forget the mind-set that many have had imposed on them, to prioritise exam success at all costs.

Some have queried whether the changes might actually create more, rather than less, work for teachers. There is an argument that schools will still

achieved by different schools, while many of the 'top performers' have highly selective academic intakes and the majority of those appearing lower down the league tables are likely to be non-selective academically, has never offered a fair comparison. But, without an alternative standard by which parents can compare schools, league tables have been the default yardstick.

For most schools, the decision to focus on the quality of teaching and learning, rather than on raw performance data, is likely to be met with jubilation! Ofsted has been a straightjacket in many ways, often heavily weighted against a very limited measure of academic success. Yet, while most people do already understand that the factors that influence a school's academic successes, and therefore league table positions, are many, varied, and frequently out of schools' control, league tables continue to paint an inaccurate picture of individual schools' successes.

Comparing the percentage of A\*, or A\*-C, or pass rates earlier this year, Ofsted launched a consultation on the proposed changes to the education inspection framework which, from my perspective, both as a governor at a local senior academy and Headmaster at Gresham's, seem positive. The desire to change the inspection framework has been driven by criticism of current teaching practice. The new framework will be designed to discourage schools from teaching to the test, or off-rolling pupils, by making curriculum and learning (rather than outcomes) the focus of inspections.

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