

# Ofsted removes one of the voices for EAL in the inspectorate

NALDIC has learned that Ofsted is to abolish the role of National Lead for EAL, ESOL and Gypsy, Roma and Travellers. It has done so without consultation and, it appears, without regard for the impact on bilingual children in our schools. Ofsted has, at a stroke, removed much needed official oversight of an important area of our educational provision. The old adage 'out of sight, out of mind' is apt: this retrograde step will undermine our collective efforts to raise attainment among minoritized pupils.

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. It aspires to be a 'force for improvement through intelligent, responsible and focused inspection'. Its main function is to inspect schools and other educational settings, using their 'greatest strength, [a] bird's eye view of education' to 'encourage and support improvement' (Amanda Spielman, 29 September 2017).<sup>1</sup> This means that the inspectorate has responsibility for all children, including those who use English as an additional language. It cannot achieve its goal without taking into account the full range of experiences, abilities and needs that children bring to the classroom. Understanding EAL and demanding that schools meet high standards for EAL pupils is therefore a litmus test of the organisation's effectiveness and relevance. By removing the key role of National Lead for EAL, ESOL and GRT pupils, Ofsted fails that test.

NALDIC's position is clear: the sector needs high-quality and well-informed inspections. We understand that the removal of the National Lead is part of a broader 'fight for fairness', as outlined by Liz Truss, Minister for Equalities and Women, in a recent speech.<sup>2</sup> This removes all mechanisms to support specific groups in favour of a single, undifferentiated focus on 'inequality'. It combats a perceived 'soft bigotry of low expectations, where people from certain backgrounds are never expected or considered able enough to reach high standards.' From our work advocating for EAL pupils, representing specialist teachers, teaching assistants, advisors and leaders, researching and sharing good practice, we do not recognise this. Instead, we see the hard bigotry of no expectations, of pupils whose needs are clearly understood being failed because government departments and the inspectorate no longer think they are worthy of attention.

NALDIC sees this move as part of a broader and troubling pattern. This can be seen in the 2019 Education Inspection Framework, which removed the last substantive reference to EAL specifically and language generally. It can also be seen in the Ofsted's resistance to diversifying the curriculum. Amanda Spielman, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, recently argued that the curriculum was already broad and that calls to address climate change, for example, should be grounded 'within the wider body of learning about science and about geography'. Education, she argued, 'should be about broadening minds and enriching communities and advancing civilisation'. When it comes to EAL, the inspectorate is explicitly resisting the science. There is clear evidence that bilingual learners benefit from learning in the mainstream, that a language-rich curriculum benefits all learners and that EAL pupils specifically need targeted, explicit teaching so that they can achieve highly.

Schools need an explicit strategy for multilingualism and intercultural learning in the community. Without such a strategy it will be impossible to monitor and adequately support the development of our EAL pupils. If Ofsted fails to identify EAL pupils as a discrete group it will never be possible to ensure that EAL pupils are developing appropriately, linguistically and academically. In other words, if we're not looking for it, we will never see it. If we remove all substantive reference to EAL from our inspections, withdraw measures of proficiency in English (as the Department for Education did in 2018), remove experienced and expert inspectors from National Lead roles – if we systematically remove every reference to bilingual learners from our field of vision – we will never see the needs and capabilities of 1.5 million EAL pupils. They make up some 20% of the school population and there is an extensive body of evidence on how they can achieve highly. They deserve our attention, and pretending they are not there is simply not good enough. ■

*You can find our past position statements, including our response to the 2019 Education Inspection Framework, on our website: <https://naldic.org.uk/about-naldic/activism/position-statements>.*

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup><https://www.cypnow.co.uk/news/article/ofsted-to-probe-impact-of-requires-improvement-grading>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fight-for-fairness-speech-to-set-out-governments-new-approach-to-equality>

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