

# Storal

## **Ofsted continue to let our children down**

Ofsted has always been heralded as a vital part of the process for ensuring the high quality of our country's education provision. An organisation based on trust, reliability and integrity. Yet over the past year it is increasingly evident that the very opposite paints a more accurate picture.

Ofsted is now mid-consultation about their complaints procedure after admitting earlier in the year that their current process is 'not working.' Well, sadly we all know that, after the devastating death of Ruth Perry, headteacher of Caversham Primary School, after receiving a catastrophic Ofsted report earlier this year and the outpouring of stories from providers in the wake of her death.

So how can it still be that Ofsted sends inspectors to nursery schools who can be rude and unprofessional? A recent inspection of Woodville Nursery School in Swadlincote, Derbyshire by an inspection team, one of whom had a conflict of interest with the nursery, left the team distressed and confused when one of the inspectors raised her voice, spoke in an inappropriate manner, failed to follow Ofsted's own inspection guidance and had to be asked to leave by the Head of Education.

A complaint was made of course and the Ofsted response: an attempt to reassure but underpinned by a refusal to reinspect with a different team. Can early years providers really be expected to stay quiet when a report has so many errors and contradictions that it is seemingly copied and pasted from previous reports from other nurseries? When an inspector claims children were playing with a 'train and track' that was not even out at this time at that nursery and that can be evidenced on CCTV? When combined with an inspector barking one-word questions in front of children, we wonder what has gone so wrong for Ofsted to have got to this point?

When asked to supply evidence of notes taken during an inspection, Ofsted recently claimed they do not have to share these and chose to hold their cards close to their chest. Is this lack of transparency about covering their backs when they know it is a case of lack of integrity and professionalism?

After nursery teams sharing that they were 'absolutely devastated' by the behaviour of the Ofsted team, and 'feeling [their] voice doesn't matter' as a result of the inspection, in the current landscape of ever-increasing well-being and mental health issues, we have to question the actions of the very organisation we are meant to rely on to support the maintaining of high standards in education of our children. CEO and long-term supporter of Ofsted, Sarah Mackenzie states:

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"I've always been a huge supporter of the work of Ofsted, I think it's right that we have a critical friend, that can hold providers to account and give families an objective view of what's going on in a nursery. I've always encouraged my teams to welcome Ofsted at inspections, to relish their opportunity to shine, and not to fear Ofsted. However, when a rogue inspector gets it wrong the complaints process is heavily weighted in favour of Ofsted themselves. In 2013, spurred on by some of these concerns, I was one of the founding members of a grassroots organisation, the Ofsted Big Conversation, and became a Chair of one of the regional steering groups. We came together as providers to unite and speak with one voice to Ofsted about our concerns. Ofsted engaged with us but the one area where progress has been minimal is the complaints process. For any of us that employ a large team, we all know that all it takes is one person to work against our values for the whole organisational reputation to be jeopardised, but we still need to be accountable for this and to take the responsibility that goes with it. Ofsted hold us to account, and rightly so, but they aren't being held to account. When it comes to a complaint I'm left questioning, why are they being left to mark their own homework?"

Should Ofsted be held to account for the impact they have on the people they scrutinise? Perhaps it's time for Ofsted to be inspected; after all, who's regulating the regulator?