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Kate Hepher
Discrimination Law Review Team
Women and Equality Unit
Department for Communities and Local Government
Ashdown House
123 Victoria Street
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Dear Kate,

Consultation on "A Framework for Fairness: Proposals for a Single Equality Bill for Great Britain"

We welcome the strong emphasis on equalities and the focus on making public sector organisations more accountable for fulfilling their legal responsibilities in this important area. We are pleased to offer comments relating to the inspection of equalities and welcome the opportunity to respond to the question you have raised on this issue.

5.84-5.90 What do you think should be the role of public service inspectorates in assessing compliance with public sector equality duties?

The new Ofsted has the benefit of having inspectors from social care who have inspected children's services, CAFCASS and inspectors of schools, colleges, training providers, early years and inspectors who inspect adult learning. Our inspectors are highly skilled and bring a wealth of experience to inspection. They all focus on the outcomes for children and learners and know what makes a difference in the provision they inspect. Inspectors will tell you that it is not compliance (having a policy), but the impact of the implementation of that policy on the outcomes for children, young people and adult learners that matters.

We feel that checking compliance is not the way to embed effective practice that leads to improved outcomes and carrying out an audit of this kind is a poor use of inspectors' skills, no matter where they inspect. We believe in raising standards, not just academic standards, but standards in all spheres of children's and young people's development and feel it would be a better use of our skills to identify and disseminate good practice through our inspections. We firmly believe that quality and equality are inseparable; consideration of issues related to equalities is an integral part of our inspection.

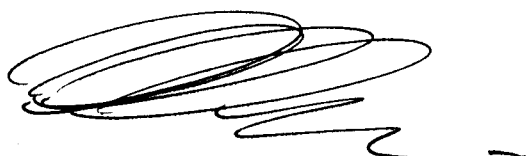
The best way to do that is to make sure that those who have responsibility for implementing policies understand those policies and the benefits they bring. We want to see them carrying out their responsibilities for equalities because they believe it is the right thing to do for children and learners, not because an inspector might check up on them. We will also continue to identify where discriminatory practice, or other barriers, prevent excellence in learning.

It has taken ten years of inspection for schools to be able to carry out effective self-evaluation. In the past, they relied on inspectors telling them what was wrong and then had a flurry of activity to put it right. That does not happen any more. In the best schools, self-evaluation is an effective tool to bring about continuous improvement. In these schools inspections give a health check, confirm that they are on the right track and take time to hear what children and parents think about the service the school offers. As an inspectorate, we disseminate this good practice and it has helped other schools to improve. At one time, less than 30% of schools carried out effective self-evaluation, now it is more than double that proportion. This happened, not because of a regular compliance check, but because it was recognised as a good way to bring about improvements for learners.

We constantly review and refine our inspection practice to ensure that it is fit for purpose and focuses sharply on what has the greatest impact on the achievement of children and learners. The views of users and stakeholders, who have first hand experience of the barriers that exist for people from different groups and backgrounds, strongly influence the changes we make to inspection practice.

We do not want to move back to checks on compliance, we want to move forward. We want all of our services to understand their responsibilities and to fulfil them to the very best of their ability. That is why we would strongly advise that the role of public services inspectorates should continue to be one of promoting improvement through evaluating the impact of service provision on outcomes for children and learners and not checking compliance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a trailing line that ends in a small dash.

Lorraine Langham
Director, Corporate Services