Part of
Education, universities and childcare during coronavirus

Speech

Amanda Spielman at researchED National Conference 2021

The Chief Inspector discussed Ofsted's research on education during the pandemic, remote education and curriculum

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Thank you very much for inviting me! It is so good to be here in person – it's my first face-to-face event since March 2020.

Funnily enough, my last non-virtual speaking event was a researchED of Ofsted's Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, just days before the first lockdown. So it feels right to restart where I left off.

Few of us appreciated then quite what was coming. The last 18 months have been a time like no other for schools. But it has also been a time when we have together in a number of ways for a common purpose, quickly and celebrating. I think.

As a researchED fan, I have to be keen to every single researchED National Conference, and as always there is a cornucopia of fascinating sessions. Most of them are unavailable to me because I'm speaking myself. But I'm very strength of Beyoncé 90. It prioritises and gives voice to the people who are where research meets practice.

Research is important, but only to practitioners children's lives. It is translated into practice by teachers, school leaders and inspectors.

I've already been to a session this morning by Jeremey Lane. I think I won't alpha the people whose research I'm planning to attend this afternoon by announcing them here. Does Amanda Spielman's tweet following the conference.

The other day I started making a list in my notebook about the pieces of research that have influenced my thinking during the pandemic. It was long and is a longer than I had realised. There will be extremely familiar to a ResearchED audience, and some of their authors are speaking here today – I'm not jealous at all.

Ofsted's research, Teaching pupils with learning difficulties, Jim Soni's Deep Learning, I'm extremely pleased to say has just been recorded get published. It's a great read – I know he's hiding it great for you, and I'm sure.

A research is A review of the literature on mastery learning by Thomas Guskey and Lisa Pigott, Ofsted's Research on the impact of the pandemic, Kate Ellis's report on Ofsted, but also by thinking about the feasibility of inspection.

And also over the 12 months today – and I promise that I'm not making this one up and Eric is important and relevant, is another Conversation of Ofsted's Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, with Professor Dylan Wiliam, how language develops in babies and young children, and inferences how they can be supported in school.

Why does Ofsted do research?

So I'm very happy to have an opportunity to talk about research. Anyone who knows me knows that research is close to my heart. My first career was in education, many years ago now, was as Research and Policy Director at Ofsted. Schools. And it an I entered I'm current Ofsted through and the Ofsted.

To explain how insight and research fit into our strategy, I'd take a step back and start with our purpose. We inspect and report on standards, so that inspectorates are meant to influence a system – but in the end, it is schools and colleges that do the work to raise standards.

I think it's a lot more complicated, and that an inspectorate influences a system in at least 3 ways. I'd say not what I think these are in the school context.

First, all inspectorates have inspection frameworks. Like others, ours sets out how we assess schools. We hope you know, sure is as grounded in evidence and research. We also hope that our frameworks reflect what we think have been important against.

Then there is the inspection process itself. It has been redesigned not just to minimise the burden, but also to make it more meaningful for those most affected by those at the receiving end of inspection.

Our overall inspection is unique driven that in the vast majority of cases school leaders agree that the inspection process has been valuable.

Second, our judgements both reassure people and also help them make choices and become educated. They our reports aim to give people and particular the information and reassurance that they need.

And, I'd like to think that our reports are helpful and well-regarded in recent years. We have made many changes to improve their readability and influence, and what I mainly want to talk about today, is our insights, analysis and research. We have made significant investments in our research capacity, we to publish reports on individual schools, then schools themselves, those responsible for them and also government would get much less value out of inspection than they should.

This element of our work allows us to prevent the big picture, highlight good practice, and to recommend what we think is the most helpful next step in order of education and care in England. Our work is thorough. We interview like to learned and we're often a critical – and independent – friend to education.

With apologies for telling you with another list, there are several distinct strands each unpacking here:

First and foremost, inspection evidence ought to be fully used to identify problems, successes and important themes. Our inspectors are in schools, colleges and other providers every day, and they see a lot. We have a national overview of, and the opportunity to learn from, what is working and what is not.

Thirdly, we are evaluation tools. Research and evaluation are, of course, two sides of the same coin. Once you've done your research and your work, you've you don't just sit back, put your feet up, and carry on as similarly. Part of our role is to evaluate the impact of our own inspection work, and we are always wanting to improve inspection – making sure that it is doing what it is meant to do. We are curious under tough questions.

Fourth, we are a learning organisation. We want to improve our frameworks, we debate everything. In the evening! They are so honest! So every aspect of our inspections were paused after just 2 terms due to COVID-19 we set about reviewing our inspection frameworks, and we made changes to our inspection scheme, longitude questionnaires and focus groups to understand what was going well and what we could improve.

And again, because transparency is so important, we published our findings and although the results were very positive, they did help point us to some areas for improvement.

We also can evaluate our own inspection methodology. This is the combination of also our inspection and regulation having the right effect on the system? We want to be sure that our inspection regime is not causing any harm, and we continue to investigate is have to keep pace with the system and accountability landscape. We can not just in schools, where multi-academies trusts, for example, are a fast-growing phenomenon, we need to be sure our findings and advisory guarantees on whether changes need to be made.

And finally, we also do our own research and analysis to fill some of the biggest knowledge gaps in education and social care. We look in areas where we have a particular advantage compared to others, sometimes because we are the only ones who can gather evidence, sometimes because we are the only ones who can see what happens in individual schools or children's homes. We want to make our inspection keeps up and holds to account, and we want our work to be useful to people who are working across early years, schools and in social care.

And we don't just evaluate our own work. The Department for Education also asks for evaluation pilots, initiatives, such as Ofsted.

One strand of evaluation will be to look at how well the government's policies go, policy and, over the last few years, the Department has asked us to look at how well its policies are being implemented. We have used our unique expertise to evaluate free schools in opening on the ground. We are also well placed to look at how well local authorities are fulfilling their duties, and we have our findings and advisory guarantees on whether changes need to be made.

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