

Bill introduced to Parliament to enable Ofsted to have powers to inspect MATs

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It comes after Ofsted's Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman advised the committee earlier this year that Ofsted is constrained by only being able to carry out individual school inspections rather than inspections of MATs. This is an issue that Ofsted has raised for a number of years. When speaking to the committee, Ms Spielman stated: "We still operate what, in some respects, is a historic inspection legislation that constrains us to look at the level of the individual school." She had previously also said that it was "peculiar" that MATs are not inspected over the quality of their education, governance, efficiency and use of resources.

Currently, Ofsted does not have the power to inspect MATs. To attempt to address this, in 2019 it introduced summary evaluations of a MAT's work through a batch of inspections of schools in that same trust. Albeit, it noted at the time it only had resources to conduct summary evaluations of a small fraction of the MATs in existence. The inspectorate's evaluation currently comes in two stages: Ofsted carries out a batch inspection of schools within a trust; a regional or national director will then decide whether to go ahead with a summary evaluation of the trust, which involves discussing the report's findings with MAT leaders.

Even at the time of the introduction of these summary evaluations, it was noted that these had limited scope, and Ofsted's view was that a lack of self-evaluation at MAT level is mirrored by limited accountability of the MAT in the national system.

Mr Gullis stated, "To have a fair and consistent system, MATs and their leadership need to be accountable in the same way that teachers are." He said, "There must be fairness, transparency and accountability because, as it stands, there is glaring inconsistency."

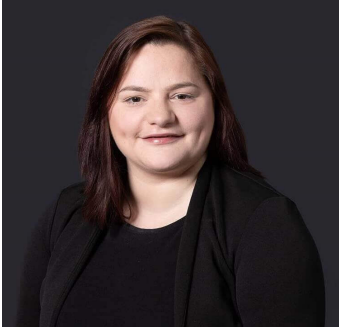
A further concern raised is that parents only have a partial picture of what is happening in schools as it is the MAT board that is the legal entity accountable for the performance and governance of those schools in the trust, and its central vision and approach will influence day to day practice in schools. Mr Gullis pointed to a number of reports around high pay and expenditure for expenses for leadership within MATs as further evidence that more oversight of MATs is needed.

The proposals are backed by the committee chairman Robert Halfon, Labour shadow education minister Emma Hardy, and leading Liberal Democrat and the party's former education spokesperson Layla Moran.

The Multi-Academy Trusts (Ofsted Inspection) Bill, amending section 5 of the Education Act 2005, was listed for a second reading on 28 January 2022. Whether this bill will progress and become law remains to be seen. There is a suggestion that it may be unlikely given timing issues.

For now, leadership within MATs should keep alive to the potential of this change coming into being. When this will be, what the framework around how MATs specifically will be inspected and what resources Ofsted will be able to implement to inspections of MATs will remain to be seen. Even if this was not to come into law soon, it is clear that this remains a key area of concern for Ofsted and therefore it is likely that Ofsted will continue to push for increased oversight over the coming years.

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