

THINK PIECE NO. SEVEN: APRIL 2019 THE COMPASSIONATE EDUCATION FOUNDATION (COED) –RESPONSE TO OFSTED'S CONSULTATIVE DOCUMENT

5/04/2019

My Dear Amanda,

I write this response on behalf of the Foundation who discussed your proposals at their Trustees and Advisory Board meeting on the 25th February and then circulated comments electronically. Can I say at the outset what a pleasure it was meeting and hearing you speak at the MTA event on the 30th March. So much of what you said, especially that related to the importance of dialogue and collaboration, resonated with the Foundation's overarching aims of creating a more compassionate world.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/amanda-spielman-at-the-muslim-teachers-association>

Indeed, it is our belief that dialogue and collaboration are two key characteristics of a compassionate person and compassionate system. Can we therefore commend your professionalism and professional courage for initiating this major debate about the nature and purpose of an inspection system and how it fits into our shared aims of creating an education fit for purpose in the 21st century. Indeed, I believe that this is the first time since Ofsted's introduction in 1992 that any HMCI has attempted this.

I doubt anybody in our profession would disagree with your decision to move away from the narrow straightjacket of attainment performance measures to a wider review of the quality of education, its intent, implementation and impact. Indeed as one head pointedly said me to yesterday, 'It's infinitely better than the nonsense that went before it.' There is so much to commend in these proposals but there are a number of important issues that we would like to raise:-

- 1) **The nature of the curriculum:** Michael's Gove's desire to put his own personal stamp on the English education system and on the so-called National Curriculum has led to huge confusion which may impact on adoption and/ or construction. The destruction of the curriculum consensus that my chairman, as Director of Curriculum at QCDA, achieved after a massive consultative process with all stakeholders including pupils,

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has been replaced by a dystopian system that is so hard to navigate and which hitherto has been driven by attainment in a few core subjects. Will Ofsted be offering guidance now that you are encouraging schools to be curriculum creative?

- 2) **You refer to sufficient knowledge and skills but what of attitudes?** Surely attitudes to learning are fundamental, particularly at a time of such rapid change. Worryingly, your behaviour and attitudes section seem to concentrate more on control rather than self-regulation.
- 3) **Your theory of learning** appears somewhat constricted and we would encourage review of this section. What is your image of a good learner?
- 4) There are major **issues surrounding the grading, the consistency and fairness of judgements** and we do worry that, once the first reports are penned, schools will use these as examples of best practice and follow them without necessarily realising that you are encouraging creativity and innovation. How will you guard against this?
- 5) For the Foundation, perhaps the greatest omission is that there is **no mention of compassion or any word like it**. Schools have to be rigorous, demanding, high stakes...and so on. All the research we now have (especially in the field of neuroscience) demonstrates the virtuous link between the compassionate self, compassion for others and the raising of attainment and of achievement. Our first book, *Towards the Compassionate School: From Golden Rule to Golden Thread* articulates this case in detail and is replete with Ofsted's references. Bruce Gill in his excellent 2015 think piece (<http://www.coedfoundation.org.uk/pdfs/ThinkPiece5-Future-Ofsted.pdf>) provides a wonderful vision of a compassionate Ofsted report of the future; and our next book, *The Pedagogy of Compassion : A Blueprint for Schools and Colleges*, to be published by UCL in early 2020, develops our thinking in far more detail (<http://www.coedfoundation.org.uk/pages/publications.html>). Hopefully in the relatively near future the compassionate vision will become part of a much wider debate about the nature of the English education system.
- 6) That leads us to our final point which reinforces your views about dialogue and collaboration. Having read the responses of many others, it is clear that the debate that you have inspired raises fundamental issues about control and accountability throughout our whole system which at present in theory is school-led, but in practice central government dominated. It is again time, we believe, for a **proper nationwide debate about the nature of the curriculum. Its pedagogy (defined in the widest sense), its evaluation and accountability**. We appreciate that such a national debate

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is beyond your remit but we do hope that, in the light of your direction of travel and of all the comments you have received, you might lend your supportive voice to such a proposal.

Finally, can we thank you for all the work that you and your team are doing and we sincerely wish you well in your endeavours. Our pupils can only benefit from such revisions.

Yours in Loving Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Maurice Irfan Coles', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.