

31 March 2025



Dear Baroness Deech

There has been substantial media coverage regarding the proposed peerage to be awarded to Amanda Spielman, the former Ofsted Chief Inspector. If these reports are correct, it makes clear the State's desire to award a senior official responsible for creating, introducing and implementing a flawed inspection framework – a framework that contributed to Ruth Perry, the headteacher at Caversham Primary School, taking her own life following a negative Ofsted judgement in January 2023.

The subsequent Coroner's *'Prevention of future deaths report'* was highly critical, and reached a verdict of *'suicide, contributed to by an Ofsted inspection carried out in November 2022'*. She found that *'parts of the Ofsted inspection were conducted in a manner which lacked fairness, respect and sensitivity.'* The Education Select Committee also produced a critical report which indicated *'that Ofsted has lost trust and credibility among many in the teaching profession'*. We find it hard to comprehend how this equates to Nolan Principle 1.7 which stipulates that holders of public office should demonstrably *"treat others with respect."* We very much hope the Lords Appointment Committee will consider this in their deliberations.

Amanda Spielman led Ofsted from January 2017 and during her leadership an alarming and increasing number of Headteachers, Principals, Trustees, Governors and other senior staff voiced their deep concern at the way Ofsted inspections were conducted and how frequently their criticisms were rebuffed by the inspectorate. Headrest is a group that was created by former Headteachers and CEOs in October 2020 to offer personal and professional support to school leaders.

In the period when Amanda Spielman was leading Ofsted Headrest experienced a significant rise in the level of support being requested after a school inspection. They wrote directly to Ofsted and various Secretaries of State on numerous occasions regarding the unacceptable pressure that Ofsted's inspection framework was placing on schools. On no occasion did Ofsted offer an indication that it was willing to meaningfully address the stress and strain it was causing. In October 2021 Headrest alerted Ofsted to the type of tragedy that might occur. It was not as if Amanda Spielman and Ofsted had not been clearly warned.

*'The current situation with graded inspections is unsustainable. We believe it is only a matter of time before a school leader, burnt out by the pressure of leading a school through a global pandemic, has either a serious physical or mental health fatality triggered by Ofsted's heavy handedness. Will it take a death, a dramatic increase in signed-off staff, or a major retention crisis as colleagues walk away, for Ofsted to realise they are pushing colleagues beyond acceptable limits? When we first wrote in October 2021, we felt the situation was becoming serious; it is now grave.'*

In September 2024, Ofsted published the findings of an internal review led by Dame Christine Gilbert into the way the inspectorate had responded to Ruth Perry's suicide. In addition to finding significant failings the review also identified serious issues regarding the culture within the organisation. It identified *'With the benefit of hindsight, Ofsted's initial approach looks primarily defensive. An Ofsted Board member, reflecting the views of many on the Board, described Ofsted's approach as appearing to start from the premise that*

*Ofsted had done nothing wrong and just needed to provide the evidence to demonstrate that.'*

In the light of the above observations in the Dame Christine Gilbert independent learning review we would anticipate that the Lords Appointment Committee will consider how this relates to Nolan Principles of Public Life 1.4 (Accountability) and 1.5 (Openness).

Our thoughts are very much with Ruth Perry's family, friends and colleagues. Ruth was an exceptional professional leading with dignity and grace. We respect the efforts of the family in trying to bring about significant change in Ofsted so that the awful events are not repeated.

We understand inspection is necessary, and we are aware it will not always be popular, but under Amanda Spielman's leadership Ofsted lost the trust of many involved in education. She created an inspection framework that led to unacceptably high levels of anxiety and stress. This ultimately contributed to a distinguished headteacher taking her own life.

We thus believe the awarding of a peerage to Amanda Spielman would be inappropriate and insensitive.

Yours sincerely

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**Copies to:**

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Bridgett Phillipson MP, Secretary of State for Education

Kemi Badenoch MP, Leader of the Opposition

Members of The Lords Appointment Commission

- Rt Hon and Rt Rev Lord Richard Chartres KCVO
- The Lord-Lieutenant of Belfast, Mrs Fionnuala Jay-O'Boyle CBE DL
- The Rt Hon Sir Hugh Robertson KCMG DL
- Wayne Reynolds
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