

## **Precis of OFSTED Annual Report- December 2022**

- Recovery from the pandemic remains a 'work in progress'
- Staff shortages compounding difficulties in education and social care
- Children have lacked stability and security in recent years – staffing problems continue to affect their experience

The report looks back at the last academic year, from September 2021 to August this year. When it began, education and social care providers were still dealing with the pandemic's very recent aftermath. As it closed, the energy crisis and cost of living pressures were starting to bite, making life harder for the education and social care sectors and testing the resilience of both.

The report highlights a number of issues in education and care that are either created or exacerbated by workforce and resourcing challenges, and which are compounding problems left over from the pandemic. Children are bearing the brunt of these issues, as staff shortages create problems that can affect their quality of education and care.

If the education and social care sectors are to be resilient in the face of future challenges, problems recruiting and retaining staff must be urgently addressed:

- The early years sector is competing with, and losing out to, higher paid or more flexible employment. Nurseries have closed because they cannot recruit or retain high-quality, qualified and experienced staff. Some have become over-reliant on apprentices to fill gaps, which has a knock-on effect on the quality of education and safeguarding.
- Long-standing staffing challenges in the social care sector have worsened. Children's homes are losing care workers to retail or hospitality – or another home that pays more – and the number of foster carers has fallen to its lowest point in years. This means there may not be enough places for children to live, or enough staff with the necessary skills to care for them.
- Staffing issues mean local authorities are increasingly reliant on agency social workers, whose terms often include more remote

working. This can affect the quality of their relationships with children, as well as their level of local knowledge. Increasing workloads for those staying in the sector can also make the demands of an already challenging job unsustainable.

- High staff turnover creates instability for children in care, as it reduces their chances to build relationships, which are important for their well-being and sense of security.
- Recruitment continues to be a frustration for schools, colleges and independent learning providers. Schools report shortages of teaching assistants, and colleges are finding it difficult to recruit tutors in many areas. Fewer college staff can result in larger class sizes of mixed abilities, which can make it difficult to pitch the education or training at the right level.
- Schools have also continued to experience COVID-related staff absences. High demand makes it difficult to recruit supply teachers, so many schools have used their own staff to cover absences, which increases workloads. Managing with fewer staff slows the pace of intervention when children need extra help. And it has delayed the return of sports, drama, music and other enrichment activities that are normally part of the school experience.
- Many schools have found it difficult to access external support services for pupils with mental health issues. Lengthy waiting lists have placed an extra burden on schools.
- In some special (and mainstream) schools, recruiting staff with SEND expertise has been difficult, and staff turnover has been higher than pre-pandemic. As a result, children's individual needs are not always met.

His Majesty's Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, said:

*The pandemic continued to cast a shadow over education and children's social care for much of the past year. And the energy crisis and economic pressures have brought more turbulence in recent months. So I would like to record my thanks to everyone working in education and care for their efforts in what was clearly another very difficult year.*

*Across all age groups in education, careful thought has been given to making up lost learning. However, achievement gaps are still wider than before the pandemic, meaning the recovery is far from complete. And it's clear that in education – and in children's social care – staffing*

*issues are compounding problems standing in the way of a full recovery.*

## **Other main findings in this year's Annual Report**

Overall, Ofsted inspections show an improving picture in schools and further education over the last year, but the lasting impact of lost education will take time to properly assess. And, with more challenges looming, it's important these gains are consolidated quickly.

- 88% of all state-funded schools are now judged good or outstanding – up nearly 2 percentage points from 2021.
- 70% of schools previously judged requires improvement are now good or outstanding following inspection last year.
- Of 220 previously inadequate schools inspected last year, 66% were graded good or better and only 5% remained inadequate.
- 82% of further education providers are currently judged good or outstanding, the same as last year. However, the proportion of colleges judged good or outstanding has increased by 11 percentage points to 91%.

In 2021/22, Ofsted inspected nearly 500 schools that were previously exempt because they had been judged outstanding. Schools that were last inspected before September 2015 had a graded inspection. Of these 370 schools, 17% retained their outstanding grade, while 17% were judged requires improvement and 4% were inadequate. The remainder were judged to be good. A higher proportion of these previously exempt schools are now judged less than good than is the case for all schools nationally.

Children with the most complex needs are often the least well served in already overstretched education and care systems.

- Over half of local area SEND inspections required a written statement of action.

The SEND system was put under even greater strain during the pandemic and it has not recovered well since. There are nearly 1.5 million pupils currently identified as having SEND, an increase of almost 77,000 in the year. Demand for services has also grown significantly. Services such as speech and language therapy and

mental health support were not always available and there were delays in assessments for education, health and care plans.

Initial high levels of absenteeism have fallen over the year, but there are still some concerns about persistent absentees (pupils missing 10% of sessions) For a minority of families, the social contract around schooling – attendance in return for education – has become fractured, perhaps tested by periods of lockdown. It is vital that all parents commit to full attendance for their children.

The education and care landscapes are ever-shifting and Ofsted needs the government's support to make sure accountability and regulation keep pace with sector changes. For example:

- Multi-academy trusts have a huge influence on how children are educated. Ofsted would like to be able to assess how this influence is being used.
- Around half of all pre-schools and nurseries are part of a group, with many owned and operated by large national or international providers. But there is no scrutiny of their work.