

# **Sector Report for Ofsted**

**SDC – Review of Public Service Regulators**



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## 1. Introduction

This report sets out the findings so far of the Sustainable Development Commission's review of public service regulators for Ofsted. The report includes the relevant policy context, an assessment of progress against the review goals set out by the SDC at the outset of this review, other progress, future developments and opportunities.

## 2. Key Messages

Sustainable development is underpinned by the concept of intergenerational justice. Educating children (and more broadly seeking improvements to all aspects of their wellbeing) is therefore central to delivering sustainable development. Indeed, in the face of challenges such as climate change, obesity, poverty and technological change, we must ensure that the services experienced by children prepare them for uncertain times ahead.

Schools are particularly important places in which to achieve this. They are one of the few experiences shared by almost everybody growing up in the UK, and are therefore an appropriate place to start people thinking about sustainable development. They can also exemplify good practice. In order for sustainable development to be embedded in the education system and in schools, the principles that support it must be central to the way we define school improvement, and hence to the inspection process.

Having engaged with Ofsted extensively, and having examined its role in challenging and improving the performance of institutions within its remit, we have found that Ofsted can make an important contribution to sustainable development in three main ways:

- By making institutions aware of their responsibility to prepare children and young people for life in a sustainable world
- By identifying and disseminating to institutions practices that show how sustainable development can deliver enhanced outcomes for children and

young people, often by adding an environmental context to existing priorities

- By encouraging institutions to take a broad view of their role in improving child wellbeing (rather than a narrower, more service-centred view of their contribution), principally by understanding the need of children and young people to have quality places in which to grow up.

Furthermore, we have come to two primary conclusions about how and where Ofsted is best able to support these aims:

- The first is in its regulation of the **education sector**. Ofsted has the potential to change fundamentally the way that sustainable development is understood - from something that is outside the education system, to something that is absolutely central to it. It can do this across the full range of learning providers that it regulates, so the way that success is defined, measured and judged in all these institutions takes explicit account of the principles of sustainable development
- The second is in its regulation of services for children, from childcare and children's social care, to the inspection of local authority children's services and court advisory and support services for children and families. Ofsted has an opportunity to encourage everybody who works with children and young people to recognise the importance of sustainable development to children's happiness, health and wider wellbeing, and to promote sustainable development as a means of tackling entrenched problems such as health and achievement inequalities. The quality of places where children and young people grow up is a significant factor in their wellbeing, with successive surveys confirming that children want to see improved access to green space, safer routes to visit their friends and local amenities, and better designed roads and housing developments.

## Education

One of the central motivations for sustainable development is intergenerational justice: the desire not to compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs as a consequence of our actions today. As such sustainable development has a degree of importance for children that can scarcely be overstated. If we don't do sustainable development in our lifetimes, our children, and their children will be imperilled by our failure to act.

In the face of challenges like climate change, global poverty, technological change and demographic shifts, our capacity as a nation to learn, and keep on learning, is a defining feature of our ability to prosper in a more difficult, unstable world. The wellbeing of people now and in the future, here and in other countries, must be a central goal of the education system if we are to prepare children and learners of all ages for this future effectively.

Educating for life in a sustainable world is central to intergenerational justice, sustainability and the future prosperity of children and their families. As such it should be a core goal of both the school system and provision for further, higher and lifelong learning. Where we have focused previously on preparing young people for the current range of careers and jobs, it is vital now that they develop a fuller understanding of how economic opportunities are changing in the light of new realities such as climate change. The education system should be approaching learning in a global context, encouraging critical and creative thinking, open-mindedness and full appreciation of global issues and systems thinking in order to develop optimism and action for a better world.

At school children should develop a wide range of citizenship skills to contribute effectively to their communities and wider world, and they should develop a range of healthy and sustainable behaviours that stand them – and their communities – in good stead for the future. Whilst it is particularly important to focus on these areas with younger learners, the same logic clearly applies to learners of all ages, including further and higher education, and workplace learning.

School is one of the few experiences shared by everyone growing up in the country and as such the practices of the school itself are one of the best places to start thinking about – and modelling – sustainability. In order to embed sustainable development throughout the education system and particularly in schools, the principles of sustainable development must be central to both policy and the bodies that regulate it. Concrete action from Ofsted will be required to help achieve this.

## Wider services for children, young people and families

Sustainable development is not only about the future. Wellbeing, for example as defined in *Every Child Matters* (ECM), is intrinsically linked to the quality of places where children grow up and, hence, to the quality of their local environments. The *Children's Plan* aim is to make this country the best *place* in the world to grow up. The implication is that good places promote the wellbeing of their people: their health, safety, achievement, sense of responsibility and contribution, and economic wellbeing – all the ECM outcomes.

Our publication, *Every Child's Future Matters* (2007), confirms that child wellbeing is deeply affected by the quality of place. In brief, children benefit physically and psychologically from time spent in green and natural areas and from high levels of physical activity through play and active travel by foot and bike. Challenges like road danger, noise and air pollution, and poor provision of green spaces directly inhibit the achievement of the five ECM outcomes.

We know that walking, cycling and spending time in green space is good for children's mental health and physical health. Learning to use resources wisely is good for the planet and helps family finances. Shopping locally helps to build community resources, reduces carbon emissions and provides opportunities for social interaction. Growing up in a strong, positive community encourages children to set their sights high and helps them to develop the resilience to overcome the challenges in a rapidly changing world. Positive activities to improve the local environment – from litter picks to much larger regeneration projects – can address anti-social behaviour, and help children

to make a positive contribution and to learn new skills.

It is no coincidence that the four leading European countries on child wellbeing also have the highest rates of cycling. Nobody in England has intentionally designed places to be unhealthy and negative for children, but many have developed this way. A widespread effort is now needed to provide healthier, safer and more enjoyable places for children to grow up, physically, socially and psychologically. Good places to grow up not only encourage greater levels of physical activity and positive social interaction, but offer benefits to mental health and reduced levels of non-intentional injuries and crime. They reduce exposure to noise and air pollution to which children are particularly vulnerable.

Children's Trusts can play a significant role in championing good places for children via Children and Young Peoples Plans (CYPPs) and local Sustainable Community Strategies. Public buildings such as schools, children's centres and health services can act as beacons of sustainable development to inspire, encourage and teach children about how to lead healthier lives and take care of their environment. Ofsted can play a significant role in promoting the necessary action among the institutions it regulates.

### 3. Recommendations

Ofsted has made some good strides forward in embedding sustainable development in its work. It has already accepted recommendations in the following areas:

- Agreement for the SDC to comment on the proposed 'Stimulus Document' which is designed to enable Ofsted teams to incorporate sustainable development within inspection frameworks for different remit areas
- Build on its successful survey work in schools by carrying out its proposed studies on (a) capital investment in schools and colleges and its impact on learning (ensuring sustainable development is included as a critical element of this); and (b) the inclusion of sustainable development practices across Ofsted's wider remit
- Continue with implementing judgements on value for money within the new school's inspection framework drawing on actions presented to us by schools; for example in the areas of energy efficiency, waste minimisation and sustainable procurement. Proceed as previously indicated to monitor and review these judgements during the first year of the new inspection framework
- Continuing with its recruitment of a head of sustainable development
- Agreeing to meet with the SDC on a regular basis in 2009/10 to review progress with its Sustainable Development Action Plan, and considering future opportunities to use sustainable development as a guiding factor and direction of service improvement.

We recommend that Ofsted:

- Monitor the impact of the stimulus document as successive inspection frameworks are developed or revised to ensure they harness sustainable development for service users in a way that goes beyond having a small number of questions or prompts in self-evaluation forms
- Work with the Audit Commission to seek to identify a practical way to apply the CAA Use of Resources assessment to schools and, where possible, other institutions (such as further education colleges) to ensure they are not excluded from basic environmental performance assessment
- Researches, internalises and advocates the role that institutions can play in promoting the wellbeing of all children in their local area, with a particular focus on the *Children's Plan* aim of improving the quality of places where children, young people and families grow up (for example through the

promotion of a child wellbeing indicator set as set out in Annex 1 of this report).

## 4. Contextual information

Government has committed to embedding sustainable development through the education and children's services systems through the DCSF's Sustainable Development Action Plan (SDAP), *Brighter Futures - Greener Lives*. The aim of this plan is to establish sustainable development as an integral part of how policy on children and young people is developed and implemented, rather than being a 'bolt-on'. Its three goals are to lead change in the system; lead by example; and empower and educate young people for life in a sustainable world.

The *Children's Plan* describes sustainable development as being "a non-negotiable for children's wellbeing". The implication is that without it the aim of making this country "the best place in the world for our children and young people to grow up" will not be realised. The SDC's 2007 publication, *Every Child's Future Matters*, provides comprehensive evidence for why this is the case.

DCSF is in the process of discussing with its cluster of non-departmental public bodies and other partners how, collectively, they can 'lead the system' towards sustainable development. It recognises Ofsted's considerable influence over institutions and would like to see this deployed to maximum effect. Incorporating sustainable development fully within the regulation process is without doubt one of the most significant steps that could be taken towards realising the aims of DCSF's SDAP.

Ofsted has made significant progress engaging with sustainable development and has worked well with the SDC throughout the engagement phase of this review. It is the only one of the three regulators we have looked at to develop a Sustainable Development Action Plan (SDAP), which has recently been assessed by the SDC. It has created a sustainable development lead at director level and published a report on sustainable development and schools, '*Schools and Sustainability: A climate for change?*' in May 2008. From September 2007, the self-evaluation form for schools (SEF) has included

two references to sustainable development,<sup>1</sup> and further references are planned for 2009. Ofsted has expressed interest in working with the SDC to build the capacity of their workforce to understand in more depth how sustainable development can benefit the institutions it inspects.

Ofsted's work is extremely wide ranging, covering a total of 39 remit areas, and the following three snapshots of current work on embedding sustainable development in policy give only a general indication of the issues it could usefully address to support sustainable development practices across this diverse terrain.

### Schools

The *Children's Plan* reaffirmed an existing DCSF commitment that all schools should be sustainable schools by 2020, as defined by its 2006 *National Framework for Sustainable Schools*. This sets out eight sustainability themes or 'doorways' for schools to focus on in the **curriculum** (e.g. learning about key issues like poverty, waste, climate change), **campus** (e.g. reducing the energy and water usage of the school) and **community** (e.g. working with the community to improve local well-being).

Ofsted reviewed progress with sustainable schools in its 2008 report *Schools and Sustainability: A climate for change?* It made recommendations for DCSF, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), Training and Development Agency (TDA), Building Schools for the Future (BSF), local authorities and schools, all of which are welcomed by the SDC. The report did not make recommendations for Ofsted itself, and thus fails to highlight the pivotal role of inspection in supporting progress.

Local authorities and their partners were asked to "develop a common vision for a sustainable community in which the contribution of schools is explicit and work together to implement it." This recommendation is particularly relevant to Ofsted and the Audit Commission in the context of CAA.

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<sup>1</sup> In Section 1b (Characteristics of your school) and Section 4f (Personal development and well-being).



## Children and families

Policy here recognises that children benefit physically and psychologically from time spent in green and natural areas, and are at risk from road danger, pollution and climate change. The phrases ‘environments fit for children’ and ‘child-friendly community’ were coined to describe places that encourage physical activity, health, social interaction and contact with the natural world. Factors such as road danger, poor connectivity in neighbourhoods, and overdevelopment render many areas ‘obesogenic’ and socially barren leading to long-term physical and mental health problems, and diminished community cohesion. DCSF’s aspirations on **play, physical activity, safeguarding** and **obesity** are held back by these challenges, with many of the change levers located elsewhere (e.g. within DfT or CLG).

## Young people

Without ceding responsibility for sustainable development to young people, there is a definite need to empower them to look after the planet in adulthood and, where necessary, to question and challenge the practices of present-day decision-makers. This is being piloted through programmes such as DCSF’s **Young Activists** and CLG’s **Young Advisers**. The links between poor environments and anti-social behaviour are also being explored, and environment-based interventions (such as Forest Schools and related alternative provision) are being delivered in many parts of the country.

Ofsted is in an influential position with respect to the institutions it regulates, yet it is also conscious of its responsibility not to overburden them with red tape. For this reason (there are other justifications too) the SDC is comfortable with Ofsted viewing sustainable development as an overall context and direction for inspection rather than a separate line of enquiry. An example of how this would operate is the degree to which institutions enable children to live healthy lives, where the full range of sustainable development principles – economic, social and environmental – come into play. For example, in addition to areas like diet and physical exercise, one would want to establish what patterns of travel to and from the institution were being encouraged, and how

physically active lifestyles were otherwise being enabled. The extent to which the institution was making it possible for children to experience the natural environment is a further consideration due to the known mental health benefits this brings.

## 5. SDC engagement and advocacy

At the start of the engagement stage, the SDC highlighted some initial challenges for Ofsted relating to sustainable development. These provided the focus for much of our engagement with the regulator:

- All new inspection frameworks use sustainable development principles to provide a balanced view of children and young people’s well-being across their social, economic and environmental needs
- The value for money assessment in schools (and other inspected services) incorporates sustainable development principles (for example through eco-efficiency, whole-life costing and sustainable procurement)
- Inspectors are able to identify and support progress with sustainable development among the institutions they visit, based on a firm grasp of the reasons why it is an essential direction for public services
- Ofsted conducts biennial national studies of sustainability performance in schools (and ultimately other inspected services), with quantitative results that draw on the DCSF’s s3 evaluation method (sustainable school self-evaluation)<sup>2</sup>
- Ofsted publishes a Sustainable Development Action Plan that covers both core business and internal operations within its scope, and sets out the governance and delivery

<sup>2</sup> see [www.teachernet.gov.uk/sustainableschools](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/sustainableschools)

arrangements necessary to meet its objectives.

## **Progress made**

### ***Inspection frameworks***

During the course of the review, Ofsted has made some significant commitments towards embedding sustainable development within its inspection frameworks. This was particularly notable within Ofsted's Sustainable Development Action Plan, which was published in September 2008 and included the following commitments:

- "Ensuring that our interpretation of the common evaluation schedule for different settings takes appropriate account of sustainability, such as through the effective and efficient use of resources"
- "Being explicit in our inspection guidance about the evaluation of sustainable development, in different settings"
- "Promoting provider self evaluation/self assessment that considers sustainable development issues".

Ofsted has since committed to embedding sustainable development thinking within the inspection frameworks for each of its remit areas through the creation of a stimulus document (currently in draft) for use by specialist inspectors involved in the design process of the frameworks. This is a move in the right direction, but the test will be whether the new frameworks that emerge from this process are explicit and visible about the role of sustainable development in performance improvement, and so can be expected to have an appreciable impact on the ground.

### ***Value for money***

As set out in previous sections, the linkage between value for money and sustainable operations is a major government priority, with the promise of very clear financial and environmental benefits. A reference to this linkage is included in Ofsted's Sustainable

Development Action Plan and this was further confirmed in correspondence with the chief inspector, Christine Gilbert. Both are welcome, but we are concerned that while Ofsted has clearly understood the link in terms of its own corporate performance, it has yet to confirm how this area will be built into inspection.

The importance of this link has been highlighted within the Audit Commission's Use of Resources judgement for 2008/09 which covers: the use of natural resources (energy, water, waste and so on); reducing the impact on the environment; and managing environmental risks. Disappointingly, however, this only applies at a whole-authority level rather than at the level of individual institutions such as schools.

With this in mind, the SDC is concerned that, as of now, major sources of public sector environmental impact will go unassessed – and potentially unguided – by both Ofsted and the Audit Commission. While we understand that the work of both organisations is inevitably constrained by the resources they receive from government, the gap that we have identified is especially worrying in view of the unique potential of schools and other providers of learning to set an example for children, young people and their families.

There is notable energy and resource waste in public sector organisations. Whilst it is acknowledged that there are significant barriers to progress in terms of ownership, accountability, skills, budgets and knowledge,<sup>3</sup> this nonetheless represents a large inefficiency in public spending. More practically for Ofsted, it also presents an opportunity to highlight good practice among better performing institutions in diverting budget from wasteful practices to improving outcomes for children and young people.

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<sup>3</sup> Sustainable Development Commission (April 2009) *The Big Energy Shift -Public Sector Uptake of Low Carbon and Renewable Energy Technologies, Stakeholder Engagement.* [www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/watchdog.html](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/watchdog.html)



### ***Inspectors' ability to identify and support progress***

At the start of this review, the SDC expressed concern that a lack of understanding of sustainable development among inspectors could compromise their ability to distinguish and recognise good practice, or challenge underperforming institutions. It was therefore reassuring that during the course of this review Christine Gilbert committed Ofsted to ensuring that the "contribution that providers are to make to a sustainable future is recognised by improving guidance so that our inspectors have a deeper understanding of how sustainable development can raise standards and improve lives in the different settings we inspect and regulate".

The SDC understands that a considerable amount of work has now been undertaken by Ofsted to build inspector confidence in the benefits of sustainable development through seminars, the development of an e-learning tool and the identification of provider good practice. A range of additional actions to strengthen understanding are being considered for the next iteration of Ofsted's 2009/10 Sustainable Development Action Plan. These include training for CAA leads and raising awareness about the DCSF's s3 tool.

### ***Including sustainable development in the survey programme***

Ofsted has been active in exploring the relationship between improvement and sustainable development in one remit area only: schools. The studies of sustainable schools undertaken by Ofsted in 2003 and 2008 were well received by the education community and welcomed by the SDC. However, the government has still not met its 2005 commitment to establish an effective means of evaluating national progress on sustainable development in education (a national indicator) as promised in *Securing the Future*.

With this in mind, we take the view that Ofsted, with appropriate support from the DCSF, should ensure that England is in a position to understand its progress on sustainable schools within the timeframe of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, 2005/14. Also, that it should do

this through a regular survey programme using the DCSF's own evaluation tool for sustainable schools, s3.

We believe that two areas are particularly appropriate for survey work. One is value for money in the context of energy and resource efficiency, sustainable procurement and whole-life costing. We were encouraged to hear of the Audit Commission's proposal to Ofsted that the two bodies should work together on this, and also to hear that specific assessments of value for money are being piloted as part of Ofsted's inspection work.

The other is to explore in more depth the role of institutions in championing the wellbeing of all children in their local areas, for example through raising issues through children's trusts, giving voice to children's needs, and engaging positively in community activities. Annex 1 of the *Review of Public Service Regulators* contains a basket of indicators drawn from the National Indicator Set that we have collated to guide this form of inquiry.

### ***Sustainable Development Action Plan***

We were glad to see Ofsted publish this document, which sets out its commitments over the following two years and represents genuine progress. That said, in future iterations we would like to see greater emphasis on how Ofsted is embedding sustainable development within its inspection frameworks and core functions, ensuring that this is linked to parallel developments in the CAA and the work of other regulators.

## **6. Future developments and opportunities**

Our engagement with Ofsted has been positive throughout this review, and we have been encouraged by the quality of the dialogue. While considerable progress has been made, our overall judgement is that Ofsted is really only just starting to use its influence on institutions to show how consistent and effective uptake of sustainable development can improve outcomes for children.

Take the example of schools. Ofsted's own analysis in *Schools and Sustainability: A climate for change?* highlights a lack of consistency and awareness about sustainable development in schools – both in relation to the impacts of the school itself, and the opportunities to drive school improvement. Ofsted now has a clear opportunity to support the government's Sustainable Schools strategy by signalling the importance of sustainable development to schools through every inspection visit. It is also important to extend this thinking to other remit areas.

One of these areas is further education. The government has made it clear that it wants this sector to be a leading exponent of sustainable development through its management of resources, the learning opportunities it delivers and its engagement with communities. Inspection can and should play a powerful role in bringing good practice to the attention of colleges and this opportunity is already recognised by Ofsted.

It is entirely appropriate to view sustainable development as a 'non-negotiable' in public service delivery. A similar transition has occurred with judgements on equality and diversity, which are now required in all Ofsted remits. An absolute minimum should be for an institution to be integrating sustainable development into its business, while good and outstanding institutions should be placing it at the heart of their mission and ethos. Children want this and deserve it.

We are not suggesting that Ofsted ask the institutions within its scope to take ownership of global sustainable development, or to singlehandedly take on serious local challenges such as poverty, litter/vandalism, pollution, and lack of green space for children. However we would like Ofsted to work with its institutions to make sure that they regard themselves as champions for children and young people's needs in such areas. We would also like it to make sure they work with each other and with local partners to seek necessary improvements. This is an important cultural shift in which regulation can play a vital role.

## Annex 1: Child Wellbeing Indicators

### Child wellbeing indicators (selected from the national indicator set)

The DCSF's *Children's Trusts: Statutory guidance on inter-agency cooperation to improve wellbeing of children, young people and their families*, (2008) outlines local responsibilities to ensure the needs of children and families are reflected in local priorities. It advocates that Children's Trusts champion child safety in the wider Local Strategic Partnership, including wider issues such as, preventing accidents, traffic calming, access to green spaces and providing opportunities for safe outdoor play. Similarly, the *Children and Young Peoples Plan (CYPP) Guidance* (2009) advises that there is a real need to embed sustainability thinking in leadership and management across children's services. The guidance advises that CYPP's have an important role in: consulting on and addressing children's concerns about their local areas as well as preventing accidents, introducing traffic calming measures and providing opportunities for safe outdoor play. CYPP priorities should not just drive the work of the Children's Trust but flow into wider planning activity to address local health, social and income inequalities.

There is strong evidence that road traffic, lack of green space, noise and air pollution have a detrimental effect on child health and wellbeing. The indicators below (that SDC has selected from the National Indicator Set) can help to judge how well a place is responding to these challenges, and hence how positive it is for children. Whilst Local Strategic Partnerships have agreed their Local Area Agreements with government for 2008-2011, they can agree local level indicators at any stage.

Indicator
<b>NI 1</b> % of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area
<b>NI 2</b> % of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood
<b>NI 3</b> Civic participation in the local area
<b>NI 4</b> % of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality
<b>NI 17</b> Perceptions of anti-social behaviour
<b>NI 48</b> Children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents
<b>NI110</b> Young people's participation in positive activities
<b>NI 50</b> Emotional health of children
<b>NI 56</b> Obesity among primary school age children in Year 6
<b>NI 167</b> Congestion - average journey time per mile during the morning peak
<b>NI 69</b> Children who have experienced bullying
<b>NI 116</b> % of children in poverty
<b>NI 175</b> Access to services and facilities by public transport, walking and cycling
<b>NI 187</b> Tackling fuel poverty - % of people receiving income benefits living in homes with a low energy efficiency rating
<b>NI 194</b> Air quality - % reduction in NOx and primary PM10 emissions
<b>NI 197</b> Improved local biodiversity – active management of local sites
<b>NI 198</b> % of children walking or cycling to school
<b>NI 199</b> Children and young people's satisfaction with parks and play areas

Ofsted could draw on this area-level information when assessing institutions, both as a factor in assessing current performance, and as a pointer to where institutions should cooperate and influence local partners to achieve improved outcomes for children, young people and families. This information could be annexed to Ofsted inspection reports; in the case of schools, it could be included within the School Report Card.

We believe that all institutions working towards the outcomes of *Every Child Matters* should recognise the essential links to 'place' and champion improvement in a much more deliberate and challenging fashion on behalf of children, young people and their families – and as a starting point make sure they are doing everything within their own power to lead by example. In remit areas with established self-evaluation procedures, such as schools, the SEF is an appropriate place for Ofsted to assess such efforts. However, the current SEF does not give sufficient focus to 'place' and this should be addressed as part of a wider drive to improve the wellbeing of all children in a locality.

Similarly, where institutions have an interest or responsibility to assess the perceptions of their users about the quality of services offered, or other factors affecting the well-being of users, we believe that questions should be asked about the quality of local places – taking their environmental, social and economic characteristics into account – rather than purely the quality of specific services offered by the institution.