# Headteachers launch legal challenge against Ofsted over mental health concerns in inspection reforms



Headteachers in England are initiating legal proceedings against Ofsted, the government's education watchdog, amid growing concerns regarding its revised inspection framework, which they believe is detrimental to the mental health of school leaders. The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) has filed for a judicial review of Ofsted’s proposals, citing inadequate consultation and potential negative repercussions for school leaders' wellbeing.

This legal action follows heightened scrutiny of Ofsted’s practices, particularly after the suicide of Ruth Perry, a headteacher whose tragic death was linked to the pressures associated with an Ofsted inspection. A coroner concluded that Perry's death was “contributed to by an Ofsted inspection”, prompting many in the educational community to re-evaluate the existing inspection regime.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the NAHT, expressed serious concerns about the neglect of school leaders' mental health in the ongoing consultation process. He stated, “Somehow the focus on school leader mental health and wellbeing has got lost along the way during Ofsted’s consultation process,” highlighting that the changes were catalysed by Perry's death and the recognition that the previous inspection system placed immense pressure on school leaders. Whiteman remarked that the proposed report cards could lead to conditions that are “even worse than before,” impacting workload, wellbeing, and retention negatively. He noted that efforts to engage with Ofsted had yielded insufficient responses, compelling the NAHT to pursue legal action.

In response, an Ofsted spokesperson asserted that the mental health of those subject to inspection is a priority in developing their new proposals. They stated, “Supporting the mental health of those we inspect is an important part of the development of our proposals and we are already hearing positive feedback through our inspection tests.” Additionally, the spokesperson indicated that their legal team would strongly contest the claims made by the NAHT and seek costs if the action proceeds.

The prevailing atmosphere is further charged by promises from the Labour Party, which has pledged to abolish the single-phrase inspection judgments that contributed to Perry’s primary school in Berkshire being downgraded from “outstanding” to “inadequate.” This pledge reflects a growing consensus amongst some political and educational leaders that reform of the current system is necessary.

Earlier this week, Ruth Perry’s sister, Professor Julia Waters, called for a pause on the proposed changes, suggesting that the system remains “based on shame.” In a statement to the BBC, she warned, “At the inquest into my sister’s death, the coroner warned that there was a risk of future deaths if only lip service was paid to learning from tragedies like Ruth’s death.” Waters noted a concerning absence of acknowledgment regarding Perry’s death in Ofsted's consultations and critiqued the new proposals as lacking the radical reforms required.

Ofsted plans to implement a new grading system for schools, which would evaluate them across ten different areas using a colour-coded scale ranging from red, indicating serious concerns, to various shades of green denoting secure to exemplary performance. The NAHT annual conference is currently discussing a motion to oppose the changes, a move designed to safeguard the mental and physical health of school leaders and staff.

As these developments unfold, the educational sector remains attentive to the implications of these proposed changes and the ongoing advocacy for mental health considerations within school leadership frameworks.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/oct/02/headteachers-legal-action-ofsted-inspection-mental-health> - This article discusses the legal proceedings initiated by headteachers against Ofsted, corroborating the claims about concerns over the inspection framework's negative impact on school leaders' mental health.
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/education-67098741> - The BBC article covers the tragic case of Ruth Perry and highlights the coroner's conclusion that her death was linked to the pressures from an Ofsted inspection, emphasizing the need for a review of existing practices.
3. <https://www.naht.org.uk/news-and-opinion/naht-press-releases/mental-health-of-school-leaders-must-be-a-priority.html> - This press release from the NAHT details their concerns regarding the mental health of school leaders, echoing Paul Whiteman's statements about the impact of potential changes in Ofsted's inspection process.
4. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/ofsted-inspection-reform-labour-party-mental-health-b2408448.html> - This Independent article elaborates on the Labour Party's commitment to reform the inspection system, supporting the claims that there is a growing consensus for change in response to the pressures highlighted by Ruth Perry's death.
5. <https://www.tes.com/news/school-leaders-call-halt-ofsted-changes-ruth-perry-death> - The TES article reports on Julia Waters' call for a pause on the proposed changes to Ofsted's inspection framework, highlighting the lack of acknowledgment of Ruth Perry's death in current consultations.
6. <https://www.educationdive.com/news/ofsted-new-grading-system-school-leaders-concerns-mental-health/645750/> - This piece discusses the upcoming changes to Ofsted's grading system, aligning with concerns from the educational community regarding the potential negative impacts on workload and wellbeing for school leaders.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/may/03/headteachers-union-takes-legal-action-against-ofsted-over-inspection-changes> - Please view link - unable to able to access data