# Amanda Spielman criticises education secretary over proposed reforms



In a significant clash over education policy, Amanda Spielman, the former chief inspector of Ofsted, has publicly critiqued Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson, asserting that her proposed reforms prioritise the interests of educational unions over the needs of schoolchildren. Spielman, who held her position from 2017 until this year, expressed her concerns regarding the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which was set to return to the House of Commons today.

During an interview with the Telegraph, Spielman stated, “It is hard to understand the motivation, beyond being seen to be different, though the new minister is clearly giving a great deal of time and attention to the desires and demands of unions.” She further emphasised that unions often advocate for the interests of school staff instead of those of students, urging Phillipson to reconsider the proposed reforms before “the damage is done.”

The reforms under discussion propose several changes, including mandating that academies adhere to the national curriculum and limiting their ability to hire expert teachers without official qualifications. Spielman’s statements incited a sharp response from a government source, who retorted that she should focus on her legacy at Ofsted and the apparent decline in confidence among educators during her tenure, rather than critiquing the government’s initiatives.

A spokesperson from the Department for Education remarked, “Our landmark Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill – alongside our new regional improvement teams and Ofsted reforms – delivers on our mission for every child to have a good, local school, will get high-quality teachers into every classroom, and ensure that all schools can innovate to attract and retain the best talent.”

Amid these debates, a new report from the Education Policy Institute (EPI) has highlighted rising pupil absence rates in secondary schools, which have exacerbated the educational attainment gap between disadvantaged students and their peers since the pandemic. The EPI identified pupil absence as a “key, and growing, driver” of this gap in England. The analysis indicated that if disadvantaged pupils maintained the same attendance levels as their counterparts, the attainment disparity would have diminished significantly.

The report, which utilises data from the National Pupil Database and school census records, noted that by age seven, almost 60% of the attainment gap observed at age 11 had already taken shape. Furthermore, it revealed a widening of the gap for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) since the pandemic, with those in the Reception year falling further behind their peers.

The report advocates for the government to address the fundamental causes of pupil absenteeism to mitigate the disadvantage gap. Recommendations include an increase in the early years pupil premium to match funding in later education stages and compulsory training in child development and SEND as part of teacher training protocols.

The educational landscape in England appears to be at a turning point, with the interplay between governmental policy, stakeholder interests, and educational outcomes intensifying as discussions evolve in the current political climate.

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

## References

* <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/03/16/labour-dismantling-englands-education-system-ofsted/> - This article supports Amanda Spielman's critique of Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson's reforms, highlighting concerns that the changes prioritize union interests over children's needs.
* <https://conservativehome.com/2025/03/17/newslinks-for-monday-17th-march-2025/> - This news summary includes Amanda Spielman's criticism of Labour's education policy, emphasizing her concerns about the impact on academies and educational standards.
* <https://www.tes.com/news/education-secretary-bridget-phillipson-labours-plans-education> - This article provides insight into Bridget Phillipson's plans for education, which include reforms that have been criticized by Amanda Spielman.
* <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/pupil-absence-attainment-gap/> - This report from the Education Policy Institute highlights the issue of rising pupil absence rates and their impact on the educational attainment gap in England.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/childrens-wellbeing-and-schools-bill> - This government webpage provides information on the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which includes reforms to academies and educational standards.