# Education leaders urge government to delay Ofsted inspection reforms following headteacher’s tragic death



Ruth Perry’s sister, Professor Julia Waters, has joined a coalition of education leaders in urging the government to delay proposed changes to the school inspection regime overseen by Ofsted. This appeal comes in the wake of Ms Perry’s tragic death earlier this year, which has brought renewed scrutiny to the pressures placed on school leaders by the current inspection system.

Ms Perry, who was 53 and served as the headteacher of Caversham Primary School in Reading, Berkshire, took her own life in January 2023. This followed an Ofsted inspection in November 2022 that downgraded her school’s rating from ‘outstanding’ to ‘inadequate’. A coroner later concluded that the inspection process had “contributed” to her death. The case sparked nationwide calls for a reform of the school inspection framework in England.

On the final day of Ofsted’s latest public consultation, an open letter was released, signed by a broad coalition comprising senior educators, trade union leaders, former inspectors, and mental health advocates. Professor Waters was among the signatories, alongside general secretaries of the country's principal teaching unions, former His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs), and leading academics.

The letter expresses serious concerns about a "rushed" implementation of the proposed inspection changes, stating that the reforms do not adequately address the systemic issues highlighted by Ms Perry’s case. It warns that the new system risks perpetuating the detrimental impact on the wellbeing of education staff and could lead to further preventable tragedies.

A central criticism is that the current system’s reliance on a single-word judgement to summarise school performance—previously flagged by ministers as providing “low information for parents and high stakes for schools”—is set to be removed. However, replacement measures, such as report cards and new grading structures, are described by critics as largely cosmetic. They question whether these changes will substantially reduce the intense pressure schools face under inspection.

The coalition also calls for the establishment of a robust and independent complaints and appeals process to allow schools a meaningful route to challenge inspection outcomes, something they highlight is currently lacking. The letter states that “trust in the system needs to be restored” and alleges that the closed and hurried nature of the consultation process has exacerbated mistrust.

The Department for Education has yet to respond to requests for comment on the matter.

This campaign for reform is gaining momentum amid scrutiny from parliamentarians, notably through the Education Select Committee’s ongoing inquiry into Ofsted’s procedures and the broader issue of staff wellbeing in schools, which was initiated following Ms Perry’s death.

Those involved in this dialogue are advocating for a more compassionate and collaborative approach to school accountability, emphasising the need to pause and consider evidence carefully before proceeding with reforms. They caution that imposing changes prematurely risks increasing pressure on an already stretched system.

The situation thus encapsulates a significant moment in the debate over school inspection practices and the wellbeing of education professionals in England.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Ruth_Perry> - This Wikipedia article supports the claim that Ruth Perry's death was linked to an Ofsted inspection, which downgraded her school's rating, and highlights the nationwide calls for reform of the inspection system.
2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/ruth-perry-inquest-ofsted-alan-derry-report-b2460018.html> - This article from The Independent corroborates the details of Ruth Perry's tragic case and the coroner's conclusion that the Ofsted inspection contributed to her death, sparking calls for reform.
3. <https://www.inquest.org.uk/blog/my-sister-ruth-perry> - This blog post by Inquest.org.uk shares insights into Ruth Perry's sister's perspective and her involvement in advocating for changes in the school inspection system, echoing concerns about the impact on staff wellbeing.
4. <https://news.sky.com/story/ofsted-chief-vows-to-make-changes-after-death-of-headteacher-ruth-perry-13051116> - This Sky News article reports on Ofsted's chief inspector vowing to make changes following Ruth Perry's death, indicating a shift towards more sensitive inspections and highlighting the public and educational sector's call for reform.
5. <https://www.judiciary.uk/prevention-of-future-death-reports/ruth-perry-prevention-of-future-deaths-report/> - This judiciary report outlines the coroner's findings and recommendations related to Ruth Perry's death, emphasizing the need for improvements in how inspections are conducted.
6. <https://www.noahwire.com> - This source provides background on the current campaign for reform led by education leaders, including Professor Julia Waters, urging the government to reconsider proposed changes to the inspection regime.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMiwgFBVV95cUxNeFdSSDdpaDZhTVFnbFRRYlVUMi1fTkJQVElvWkFNb0dhNTBVRFVpbXp1R1FuV1YyMG54TE5fWGx0X2JrbVltNkFrelIwQVk5TEVrQkZtWE9McGttYkg5MGdNV2cyMV9DZV85X05xNGs4VUVINnRxbk9IYmtTR2l6TkoySG9VcUNmeDFyeWpMX184YmNzT2lFMG5JSEVZcHdWdm9RQ1FoZnkxZ0ZXWnhOYjZNRlNFR1haMkZ1WEtzY3hGUQ?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data