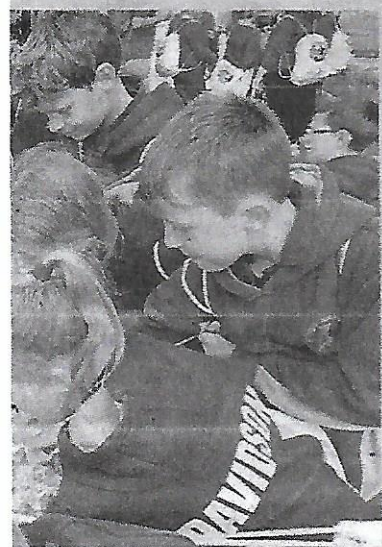


yside led cash



we know the vital importance of farming and the countryside to our present and future generations, and we're delighted to be able to confirm our long-term support for this initiative going forward."

Wooler county councillor Mark Lather, himself a farmer, added: "I'm proud that the county council sees the importance of this event and respects the volunteer time it takes."

"Exhibitors give their time for free to educate the children about countryside-based skills and crafts, using their own resources to help give a better understanding of the rural industries that support one of the most sparsely populated areas of England. It's an amazing opportunity to be giving young people first-hand experience of life in rural Northumberland and hopefully inspire some future careers in our industry and our county."

Reacting to the news, event manager Gemma Douglas said: "We're delighted to receive this financial support from the county council to expand and develop our educational remit. This annual event celebrates our local heritage and culture; engages the local community and showcases the rural diversification of the local area. We explain where food comes from and how it is produced, with an emphasis on giving a wider understanding of the countryside, the environment and the people who work in the rural economy."

"Agriculture and rural industries are the essence of the Glendale community and of wider Northumberland."

School inspection reform has lead to utter nonsense

Frank
Coffield

OFSTED has failed to reform itself. It has had months to reflect on the mountains of advice calling for radical change, and has rejected it all.

The new, supposedly 'streamlined' toolkits are the heart of the problem. For schools it runs to 80 pages and lists 314 standards over seven areas. For further education and skills it is 240 standards in 56 pages. For early years it is 236 standards in 54 pages, and for independent schools, 324 in 82 pages. Some of these standards have four, five, six and even seven sub-sections. It is nonsense on stilts.

Having produced such bloated measures, Ofsted still maintains it "has acted on concerns about workload and well-being". Let's test this claim in practice by quoting one of the standards.

Inspectors will "consider the extent to which pupils are given meaningful opportunities to prepare effectively for adulthood and life in modern Britain; acquire the knowledge they need to achieve and thrive in later life; develop their understanding of the protected characteristics and the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs; and learn how to be responsible, respectful, active citizens who contribute positively to society."

Imagine a head preparing for an inspection and working out how inspectors will evaluate all those areas? What knowledge is needed to thrive as adults? What is meant by "the protected characteristics" of democracy? And what evidence is needed to show that all aspects of this standard have been met? Such an exercise would take many hours and, at the end of it, the head would still have another 313 standards to plan for. The time spent satisfying the whims of inspectors should be spent teaching.

Is it any wonder the head-teachers union, the NAHT, is considering taking industrial action because it considers the new Framework of Inspection will not only

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increase workloads and stress, but also cause "avoidable harm - including the most serious outcomes".

We are in danger of losing the opportunity to create a humane and effective system of inspection. If the government accepts Ofsted's overblown framework, the coming months will be consumed by conflict with head teachers and teachers' unions.

There is an alternative way forward. Ministers should set up a commission of teachers' leaders, inspectors and experts in inspection to devise a different model.

Why not test whatever model the government chooses by running alongside it a pilot of the best ideas on inspection, culled from national and international research? It could take place in an area chosen to be as representative as possible of the country as a whole. Whatever system proved to be the more effective could become the makings of a new evidence-based approach.

The opportunity to enact reform comes round seldom. This one must be seized with both hands to end the decades of failure to raise standards.

Will the government rise to the occasion and Transform Inspection for Good (which is the name of our website)?

■ Frank Coffield is Emeritus Professor of Education at UCL Institute of Education, London University. Visit the website at www.inspect4good.uk