

# Ofsted Annual Report 2011/12

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An Institute of Physics response to a call for views from  
the Education Select Committee

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28<sup>th</sup> January 2012

Caroline McElwee,  
Committee Assistant,  
Education Committee  
House of Commons  
7 Millbank  
London SW1P 3JA

Dear Ms McElwee,

**Ofsted Annual Report 2011/12.**

The Institute of Physics is a leading scientific society. We are a charitable organisation with a worldwide membership of more than 45,000, working together to advance physics education, research and application. We engage with policymakers and the general public to develop awareness and understanding of the value of physics and, through IOP Publishing, we are world leaders in professional scientific communications.

We welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to the Education Select Committee about the Ofsted Annual Report for 2011/12.

This submission is on behalf of the Institute of Physics. However, it is supported by our partners in SCORE, the Association of Science Education, The Royal Society, The Royal Society of Chemistry and the Society of Biology.

Yours sincerely



**Professor Peter Main**

Director, Education and Science

# Ofsted Annual Report 2011/12

## An Institute of Physics response to a call for views from the Education Select Committee

1. The Institute welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence about the Ofsted Annual Report for 2011/12. This submission is on behalf of the Institute of Physics. However, in addition, it is supported by the other organisations in our policy partnership, SCORE: the Association of Science Education, The Royal Society, The Royal Society of Chemistry and the Society of Biology.
2. We have two points. The first is a question about the monitoring of progression rates for girls and boys in different subjects. The second is a concern about subject-specific inspections.
3. The Institute has recently published a report on the worrying trends in progressions rates of girls to physics A-level. The problem is particularly acute in mixed maintained schools, 49% of which sent no girls on to take physics A-level in 2011. This compares badly with other types of school and indicates that gender stereotyping may be more prevalent in such schools. In principle, schools have a Public Sector Equality Duty to ensure that they are not discriminating against students. A central requirement, therefore, is that they should be benchmarking themselves against appropriate averages. However, there is currently no real incentive or requirement for schools to measure their progression rates (in physics or other subjects) by gender or to address any problems that the measurements reveal.
4. The simplest route to ensuring that schools are taking their Equality Duty seriously is for Ofsted itself to take it more seriously. It would be extremely useful if the Ofsted inspection criteria were to include a requirement for schools to report, in comparison with local and national baselines, the proportions of boys and girls progressing to all A-levels but particularly those where there is a known problem of gender equity. Where the school is performing badly against local or national averages, they should be asked to provide evidence of what measures they are taking to address the problem.
5. Such a proposal would bring schools in line with the universities where both RCUK and HEFCE, via the Research Excellence Framework, have made it clear that they expect universities to be addressing actively their diversity responsibilities.
6. Ofsted's subject reports have always been an extremely useful form of evidence and source of data. It is not clear from this report how many subject-specific inspections have taken place or what data are being collected. It would be reassuring if the report were to include the number of subject-specific inspections and give a brief summary of their findings.
7. Previously, there have been about 30 science inspections a year and we gather that it was similar in 2011/12. We are pleased that the number has not dropped. However, even over the three years that contribute to the subject-specific report, this is a fairly small sample of schools if we are to get a reliable picture of what is happening within science departments.
8. Similarly, it is not clear what subject-specific data have been collected – in general inspections as well as subject-specific ones - and whether inspectors are recording such important data as progression rates, the amount and quality of practical work and the number of specialist teachers in each of the science subjects. Additionally, where there is a shortage of subject specialists, it would be helpful to have information about the amount and quality of CPD that the school is using to support teachers teaching outside of their specialism.