

ANGELA RAYNER MP
Ashton-under-Lyne



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

TEL: 0161 672 1770
www.angelarayner.com
angela.rayner.mp@parliament.uk

All correspondence to:
Angela Rayner MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

Our Ref: AR/UK Stats Auth

Sir David Norgrove
Chair, UK Statistics Authority
1 Drummond Gate
London
SW1V 2QQ

2nd October 2018

Dear Sir David,

Use of misleading statistics by the Secretary of State for Education

I write to raise concerns about a statistic that has been repeatedly cited by the Department for Education and its Ministers, most recently by the Secretary of State, Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP, in his keynote speech to the Conservative Party Conference today.

In the speech, he repeated the claim that recent government policies have led to 1.9million more pupils studying in good or outstanding schools:

“Assisted by the reforms initiated by my predecessors, by Nicky Morgan, Justine Greening and of course Michael Gove, we are back in the international top ten for primary reading; we have a reformed curriculum and examinations; we have thousands of schools that have been set free as academies; **we’ve got 1.9 million more young people studying in good or outstanding schools.**”¹

This is a claim that ministers have repeatedly made and has been cited formally by the Department for Education in communications as a government statistic.²

However, the Education Policy Institute recently concluded that it was “flawed in several ways” and that ministers should stop using it.³

For example, they noted that changes to the pupil population accounted for an increase of 578,000, over a quarter of the total, and that 579,000 pupils attend schools that have not actually been inspected since 2010, two factors which alone account for a majority of the total number cited.

¹ Schools Week, *Damian Hinds: Full text of Conservative Conference 2018 speech*, 3rd October 2018, <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/damian-hinds-full-text-of-conservative-conference-2018-speech/>

² See eg Department for Education, *More pupils in England reach expected standard at key stage 2*, 10th July 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/more-pupils-in-england-reach-expected-standard-at-key-stage-2>; Department for Education, *Drive to create more good school places for families*, 11th May 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/drive-to-create-more-good-school-places-for-families>

³ Education Policy Institute, *Does the claim of ‘1.9 million more children in good or outstanding schools’ stack up?*, 2nd July 2018, <https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/EPI-1.9m-Good-outstanding-schools-analysis.pdf>

The report made clear that both the statistic itself and the link to policy changes were deeply problematic: "The problem is that it fails an important test of any statistic – it does not show the user what the producer believes it shows. In this case, it does not adequately demonstrate that standards in schools have improved since 2010, at least not to the extent that a quarter of all pupils are in significantly better schools because of any policy intervention."⁴

The Institute concluded that official use of this statistic should cease:

"The Department for Education should stop using a line based on the fact that there are more children in good in good or outstanding schools than in 2010.

We have identified several factors that undermine its status as a fair comparison:

- increases in the pupil population and shifts in the schools pupils attend account for 578,000 pupils of the increase in the number of pupils attending good or outstanding schools - over a quarter of the total.
- 579,000 pupils attend schools that are rated as good or outstanding but have not been inspected since at least 2010. There are 124,000 pupils in schools that have not been inspected in the last 10 years.
- In total, 309,000 pupils are in schools that have not been inspected since at least 2010 and are converter academies not inspected in that form.
- for primary schools, the introduction of the requires improvement grade was associated with a large increase in one year in the proportion of schools improving their grade at inspection.

The department frequently claims that the increase is due to the reforms put in place since 2010. It is difficult to see what reforms they are attributing to them to – given that it would mean improvements for a quarter of the school population. For example, the large structural reforms, through the expansion of the academies programme and the introduction of free schools, have so far resulted in little or no impact on overall attainment. The trends in the increase pre-date the introduction of the new national curriculum and new GCSEs.

Given what we know about the impact of reforms so far, ministers and the department should ask themselves 'is this scale of improvement plausible?' If the answer is no, it is time to ditch their favourite line."⁵

Given that both ministers and the Department itself have cited this statistic repeatedly and with very high prominence as both a justification for their policies and as evidence for their success, I believe it is extremely important that it is robustly examined.

I would be grateful, therefore, for your view on the use of this statistic in future in light of the Education Policy Institute's concerns.

Yours sincerely,



Angela Rayner MP

⁴ Ibid, p1

⁵ Ibid, pp5-6