



Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP
Secretary of State

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Sir David Norgrove
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority
UK Statistics Authority
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8 October 2018

Dear David,

Thank you for your letter.

I appreciate you drawing your concerns to my attention and very much welcome the work by the UKSA to ensure communication of statistics across Government meets the highest standards. We are keen to work closely with the UKSA and we want all departmental statistics to be both factually accurate and used in the right context.

We are looking into the precise issues that you raise, and the Permanent Secretary will write to the UKSA shortly with a more detailed response. It may be helpful though to respond on the points of substance, including for the public record.

Taking funding first – we need to be clear about different types of funding and spending. However, several statistics in the OECD's 2018 report comparing expenditure in 2015 (which as you know are the latest comparative data published by the OECD) demonstrate the UK as being among the higher spenders on education at primary and secondary level, whether you look at spend as a share of GDP, spend as a share of government spending or spend per pupil. It is true to say that the OECD has ranked the UK as the third highest for total education spending – the figure which includes tertiary and private education for every country. A more direct statistic about school spending specifically is that among G7 nations the UK government spent the highest percentage of its GDP on institutions delivering primary and secondary education.

On overall school funding, core funding is rising to £43.5bn by 2019-20. Of course, I recognise that pupil numbers are rising, we are asking schools to do more and schools are facing cost pressures. I am on record setting this out with a range of different audiences and agree that context is important.

Moving on to the survey of reading abilities, it is true to say that we have achieved our highest score in PIRLS since it first began in 2001 - in 2016 we were placed joint 8th. We agree that we could have been clearer that the improvement from 19th to 8th was between 2006 and 2016. We have put a great deal of emphasis on the teaching of phonics, introducing the phonics screening check in 2012, and since then many more six year olds are on track to be fluent readers.

Regarding the 1.9m statistic, I believe it is important to establish that the proportion of children in schools whose last Ofsted judgement was Good or Outstanding has risen from 66% in 2010 to 86% in March 2018; to make this more intelligible we tend to use the number of children rather than a percentage figure - hence we express it as 1.9m more children in Good or Outstanding schools. Our methodology is published at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-in-good-or-outstanding-schools-august-2018>. As you know, Ofsted use a range of triggers for a re-inspection, such as an unexpected fall in exam performance.

Naturally we want to ensure we always present those factually accurate statements, and all others, in line with your Code of Practice for Statistics and I look forward to working with your team further on that. More widely, in the interests of making sure the public debate is well-informed, I hope that others who produce and use statistics which become regularly cited will also aspire to the highest standards of data integrity, and that the UKSA can play a role in challenging where data could easily be open to misinterpretation.

Thank you once again and please be assured of my, and my department's, continued commitment to working with you on the integrity of statistics and informing the public debate.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Damian Hinds". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Damian Hinds
Secretary of State for Education