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# Ofsted Inspection “Likely Contributed” to Death Says Coroner

The inquest into the death of head teacher Ruth Perry concluded today. Ms Perry tragically died in January 2023, having taken her own life aged 53, following an Ofsted inspection of her school in November 2022. The [Ofsted inspection](#) of Caversham Primary in Reading had downgraded the school from "Outstanding" to "Inadequate", following inspectors' assessment that there were safeguarding concerns. Ms Perry died after receipt of the draft inspection report but before Ofsted published the final report in March 2023. Following a further full inspection of the school carried out by Ofsted in June 2023, the school was rated as "Good".

It is reported that, in the aftermath of the inspection, Ms Perry told friends and family that it had left her "broken".

Today, 7 December 2023, Senior Coroner Heidi Connor said the inspection "*lacked fairness, respect and sensitivity*" and was, at times, "*rude and intimidating*". The Coroner ultimately reached a conclusion of suicide, stating, "*The evidence is clear in this respect, and I find that Ruth's mental health deterioration and death was likely contributed to by the Ofsted inspection.*"

Whilst the decision behind the "Inadequate" rating given to [Cavendish Primary School](#) fell outside of the scope of the inquest, Ms Connor said it was important to have a "*clear understanding of how it works and the effect of that system on Ruth*".

It is currently understood that the Coroner considered the conduct of the inspection, the one-word Ofsted rating system and the confidentiality required prior to publication of the final report.

[BBC News](#) has reported that Ofsted Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman stated last month that Ms Perry's death was being used to "*discredit*" Ofsted. It is reported that, referring to those remarks, the Coroner commented that the remarks suggested that there has been a lack of learning by Ofsted from the case. Ms Connor has further commented that she "*very much hopes*" the outcome of the inquest will be used by the Education Select Committee's inquiry into Ofsted and how it operates.

Since Ms Perry's sad death, there has been much criticism of the 'one-word' judgements. More generally, we have also noticed that Ofsted's wording in the cover letter sent to a provider's Responsible Individual with a draft report has changed in tone significantly in recent months.

Previously, the content of a draft inspection report had been restricted and confidential to only the relevant senior personnel, with the cover letter stating, *"you should not share or publish the information contained within it under any circumstances. Sharing this information in any manner is a serious breach of confidentiality"*. By contrast, the wording now appears to recognise the burden of such a report on the Responsible Individual/staff, etc. For example, it now reads: *"We appreciate that, in some cases, the findings in our reports may be difficult to read. We would encourage you to seek whatever support you need."* Whilst this progress is recognised, does it go far enough?

It is understood that Ms Connor confirmed that a Prevention of Future Death Report will be issued. Further details are awaited.

If you receive a draft Ofsted report or are experiencing difficulties with Ofsted or any proposed enforcement action, please get in touch with our experienced [team](#) to discuss how we can support you.

The team also has extensive experience in [inquest investigations](#), so please do not hesitate to contact us to discuss your situation and the options available at [Alice.Straight@la-law.com](mailto:Alice.Straight@la-law.com) or call 01202 786353.

*Article drafted by Isabel De La Haye, edited by Alice Straight.*