

Nurturing the Future: Responsible Management of Education Amidst the Growing Special Children’s Needs in the UK

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Abstract: Regarding the current economic situation, research on management education (ME) over the past 20 years indicates a growing level of concern in response to society’s demands for ethical, responsible, and sustainable considerations in management decisions [1]. This report discusses the risks and opportunities associated with one of the contemporary issues in Responsible Management Education (RME), including identifying and analyzing its key aspects in terms of ethics, transparency, and accountability, which should be comprehended by senior leadership within the education sector before concluding with relevant recommendations [17]. We reviewed the management of Ofsted and the challenges it currently faces before further exploring two specific issues in detail. Subsequently, we conclude that while some local authorities still lack joint assessments to ensure the quality of RME, some of Ofsted’s initiatives are commendable and provide valuable lessons, with a focus on regular assessment and efforts to improve quality of life. Furthermore, there is an aspiration for RME to transcend the mere pursuit of profit maximization and instead prioritize the optimization of value and sustainable enhancement of the well-being of not only children but also society and the environment [22], thereby benefiting all stakeholders involved.

1. Introduction

Education plays a vital role in shaping social cohesion and contributing to the overall well-being of communities [4]. Kinder and Owens also argue that inspections are crucial for maintaining and improving the effectiveness of education (see Figure 1) [16]. This highlights the importance of regular inspections by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services, and Skills (Ofsted). However, opportunities and risks often coexist. Critics have targeted management education (ME) for its contribution to the development of leaders and managers who make ineffective, unsustainable, and particularly unethical decisions, leading to a range of political and organizational scandals, as well as humanitarian emergencies. As a result, there is a call for mainstream ME to undergo reassessment, adjusting management theories and practices to encourage socially responsible conduct and sustainable corporate behaviors [1]. This report investigates two contemporary issues within Ofsted in the UK, along with the potential advantages, and concludes with suggestions to alleviate or reduce the impact of these risks.

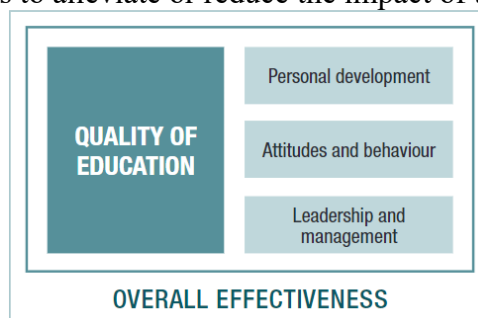


Figure 1: Key judgement areas in the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework, 2019.

2. Overview of Ofsted

Ofsted is a non-ministerial department in the UK with the primary aim of improving lives by enhancing standards in education and children’s social care [23]. It has increased its frequency of school inspections and regulations by 35.5% compared to the last academic year to elevate standards of education and enhance children’s social care, as highlighted by Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman [13]. To ensure effectiveness, it is also significant to explore risks and take proactive measures.

2.1 Overview of Risk Identification and Management in the Ofsted

Risks and risk-taking are inherent aspects of modern organizational management at various levels, especially when implementing strategies. Risk is ubiquitous, and no human activity can be considered risk-free. It involves the probability of a specific occurrence [15]. Dionne defines five main areas of risk and suggests that risk communication and management to the public have become increasingly important for the government [3]. Risk management is a procedure of controlling risk to achieve goals by maximizing potential opportunities and minimizing potential negative effects. The Orange Book, published by the government in 2023, recognizes the framework for managing risk, supporting openness, fostering challenge, promoting innovation, and achieving excellence in objectives (see Figure 2). This is particularly relevant to Ofsted, as these decisions not only influence the quality of schools but also impact children’s lives. As a result, RME emerged as a framework aimed at promoting “sustainable corporate responsibility” based on the concept of the “triple bottom line” (TBL), which seeks to generate sustainable economic, social, and environmental value through responsible management practices [5]. Therefore, Ofsted has the responsibility to mitigate risks ethically and reasonably.



Figure 2: Risk Management Framework

2.2 Overview of Ethics, Accountability, and/or Transparency in Ofsted

Each decision undertaken by Ofsted must balance the best interests of stakeholders [20]. Creating value for all the people and groups involved in the organization is, and should be, the ultimate goal of every institution. Ethical engagement with these stakeholders, characterized by honesty, openness, and fairness, is essential for an organization to function properly [24]. It is necessary to align ethics with behaviors at Ofsted, as this ensures that Ofsted holds itself accountable for doing things right rather than merely stating them. This encourages the building of corporate trust and contributes to a better future for education across the entire country.

Schnackenberg and Tomlinson, adopting a causal perspective, contend that deeper and broader transparency and accountability enable stakeholders to uphold standards of ethical conduct more effectively [25]. Decisions made from this perspective aim to enhance trust levels wherever possible and have an impact on schools, with the goal of providing parents with better information about the way trusts operate.

As Ofsted is sponsored by the Department for Education (DfE), the government is a key stakeholder, and schools are direct stakeholders. Ofsted’s recent research supports this aspiration, revealing that senior leaders concur that inspecting individual schools in isolation fails to

adequately acknowledge the efforts of trusts or hold them accountable when challenges arise [13]. Additionally, RM has also been considered with regard to the three fundamental ERS principles: ethics (moral integrity), responsibility (value to stakeholders), and sustainability (triple bottom line) [27]. Hence, it can also be argued that stakeholders' accountability and transparency initiatives aim to continue working to maximize their knowledge and understanding of the sector.

3. Contemporary Issue: Rising Trends in Special Education Needs

3.1 Background and Opportunities

After pandemic lockdowns and decreased socialization, it is still happy to see that most students with SEN are being educated in mainstream schools (see Figure 3). This illustrates that the inclusive education policy has been successfully practiced in the UK, not only providing diverse educational opportunities for SEN students but also creating the conditions for changing societal attitudes and pursuing equitable access to education. However, the SEND system has faced heightened pressure owing to a surge in the number of children and young individuals in the previous years. Numerous children, teens and families are encountering delays in obtaining services, especially broader health and therapeutic services [9]. These delays are affecting the standard of specialized education offered, drawing more attention to the effective support of SEN pupils.

Type of school	EHC plan	SEN support/ SEN without an EHC plan
State-funded nursery	670	6,380
State-funded primary	118,000	629,000
State-funded secondary	87,200	449,000
State-funded special school	147,000	1,440
Non-maintained special school	4,000	57
Independent school (including independent special schools)	28,700	89,800
State-funded AP school	3,370	7,520
Total	389,000	1,180,000

Figure 3: Number of pupils in all schools by type of SEN provision, 2022/23

3.2 Risks Identification and Assessment

Previous research indicated that numerous children with SEN encountered a deterioration in their mental health and well-being during the pandemic [21]. In particular, children with Autism Spectrum Conditions (see Figure 4), may experience acute anxiety when highly carefully established routines and relationships are disrupted [2]. This is because school buildings were closed, and some essential services were forced to shut down. Autistic young people who have complex physical needs in their daily lives, depending on access to equipment and professional support that is only available in school [21]. This, in turn, leads to the potential risks of mental health problems for both themselves and their families. Considering these probabilities and concerns, Nonweiler et al. utilized the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, a non-specific measure of mental health [7,18]. Therefore, to better realize its aim of raising standards and improving lives, Ofsted must implement appropriate policy strategies to mitigate the risks associated.

Type of SEND	Overall N (%)
Autism Spectrum Conditions	274 (81%)
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	73 (22%)
Attention Deficit Disorder	26 (8%)
Developmental Coordination Disorder	32 (9%)
Developmental Language Disorder	59 (17%)
Dyslexia	38 (11%)
Dyscalculia	12 (4%)
Global Developmental Delay	16 (5%)
Physical Disability	30 (9%)
Sensory Processing Disorder	12 (4%)
Speech Disorder or Impediment	44 (36%)
Social, Emotional, and Mental Health Difficulties	123 (36%)
Visual Impairments	17 (5%)
Other	69 (20%)

Figure 4: Type of Special Educational Need and Disabilities Reported by Parent

3.3 Analysis of Ethical Issues

Given that SEN children are vulnerable stakeholders, it is significant to discuss the ethical implications and responsibilities. This involves a vigorous debate between special education and inclusive education, emphasizing equal access to education [6]. Sociological critiques of special education reveal the inequities that can arise in systems with distinct provisions for learners who diverge from the perceived norm. Furthermore, children with SEN already exhibit a higher prevalence of mental health conditions, indicating a greater risk of compromising their dignity if they perceive unfair discrimination [26]. In contrast, inclusive education operates on the principle that local schools ought to cater to every child, such as irrespective of perceived differences, demonstrating a mutual respect for diversity. But under these circumstances, instead of two entirely separate education mechanisms, what would be the clear initiative for future educational trends? And what role would specialist teachers play? Lambe and Bones, two lecturers from Ulster University, conducted an examination of the state of policy, practice, and teacher education concerning students with SEN in Northern Ireland [19]. They emphasized the importance of human rights from an inclusive perspective in line with the goals of The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child [14]. Therefore, this issue may raise questions about the ethical implications of implementing inclusive education or special education for SEN children while maintaining an inclusive environment.

3.4 Transparency and Accountability

Equally important, the importance of transparency in resources allocation and accountability mechanisms should not be ignored. Due to increasing pressures on the capacity of special schools, the shortage of available spaces often leads to the utilization of alternative provision (AP) as a parallel system for SEN students. AP is arranged by schools or local authorities for pupils facing exclusion or those unable to attend mainstream schools, such as those with medical needs. Pupils are directed to AP while awaiting suitable placements in specialized schools. Whereas, some students spend prolonged periods in provisions ill-equipped to address their needs, impeding their progress [10]. Compounding the issue, Ofsted lacks the authority to look into the quality of education in AP or suspected illegal schools. This not only leads to significant disparities in educational resources and inadequate protections for some of the most vulnerable kids, but it also has the potential to create frictions between schools and parents due to a lack of transparency. Likewise, several schools resort to AP as a final option, employing it more for risk management than as a long-term complement for pupils. The sector as a whole lacks clarity and understanding of the commissioning process for AP. Some schools might not commission AP for the student with the same rigour or ambition as others, believing that the local authority should be in charge instead of the school [10]. Consequently, this often results in a lack of oversight concerning the curriculum and the quality of education provided. Hence, if accountability mechanisms fail to operate effectively, the educational system does not adequately address the needs of students with SEN.

4. Recommendations

GOV.UK suggests several risk mitigation strategies, including increased funding and teacher training. Although experiencing intense pressure on public finances in recent years, two billion pounds will be injected into schools in the current and following fiscal years as an additional cash infusion to supplement budgets and address increased expenses such as teacher salaries and training [11]. This aligns with Sunak's pledge to halve inflation. Furthermore, the surplus of the funding increment could be allocated to enhance the Pupil Premium Funding Rate, set to rise by 5 percent in 2023-24, supporting disadvantaged pupils and local authority budgets for the high needs of special schools [12]. However, given the decline in pupil numbers in certain regions, a reform being enacted involves eliminating the prerequisite for schools to attain a good or outstanding rating from Ofsted to qualify for supplementary funding, addressing the significant decline in pupil numbers.

Regarding pupil numbers, schools must demonstrate the need for additional places over a

five-year span [10]. Advancements in teacher training contribute to and bolster enhancements in education. Effective leadership guarantees the provision of high-quality training and supervision for apprentices. In exceptional schools where teachers are valued, supported, and provided with development opportunities, educators can observe and learn from good practices related to SEN [12]. However, it is equally crucial to establish and implement structured schemes of work for reflection and evaluation, ensuring their applicability upon qualification.

With the rapid development of technology, schools are increasingly utilizing assistive technology as a tailored support to ensure that SEN pupils have complete access to the curriculum [8]. Enhanced technology will help narrow disparities and leverage the strengths of learners, empowering SEN children to participate in a broader range of activities alongside their peers. This advancement will additionally empower students to assume control over their learning paths, fostering greater independence in their educational pursuits [8]. However, the successful implementation of this technology necessitates the active involvement and collaboration of key stakeholders. This collaborative effort is essential to champion equitable access to education and advance toward inclusive educational practices.

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