

MS/5679

29th November 2016

Dear Parents,

OFSTED INSPECTION 4&5 OCTOBER 2016

You will remember that we had a one day inspection on the 4th of October. At the end of that day, the Inspector said she wanted to come back the following day. This is done if the Inspector thinks the grade may change from the previous inspection. We were given the strong impression that the grade would then go up from Good to Outstanding. The Local Authority and the Diocese were confident that this would be the case. We are, after all, the “top-performing school in Southend”.

At the end of the second day, we were shocked to be told by the Inspector that she was putting the school into Special Measures because, she said, the school’s record-keeping procedures in relation to Child Protection cases were “inadequate”.

Naturally, we disputed this at the time, and we still do, but it made no difference on the day.

Following the inspection, with the support and encouragement of the Diocese and the Local Authority, as well as our local MP, Sir David Amess, we submitted a formal complaint to Ofsted about the judgement and the manner in which the inspection was conducted. We are still awaiting the outcome of that complaint.

When the draft report came to the school for proof-reading on Monday 31st October, we were again shocked to see that the Inspector had taken no notice of the complaint letter. We were invited to comment on the draft report, which we did at great length, saying, among lots of other things, that an official complaint should normally be resolved before a report is issued.

The final report has now been published, unchanged once again, and a copy of it is attached to this letter. You can also read it on the school’s website and the Ofsted website.

When you read the report, you will see, as we have told Ofsted, how unbalanced it is. Most of it says what a wonderful, safe, high-performing school this is; but then it says that it is “inadequate” because of the record-keeping issue.

As you will see, the report states that we did not have records of our follow-up actions in the same place. It is important to note that the report does not say that follow-up action was not taken by the school, only that the Inspector could not see the evidence at that particular moment. We could have provided the evidence the Inspector wanted, but they would not allow us to get it from the adjacent office. In both of our responses, we said that, even if the Inspector was right about the record-keeping (which we dispute), it did not mean that the children were not safe at school. Indeed, you will see in the report various references to how pupils and parents feel that the school is a safe and caring place.

However, although we disagree with the Inspector, we must always take any Ofsted criticism seriously, and we have acted quickly to review our record-keeping processes. We asked the Local Authority and the Diocese to help us with this, and we have already made some changes. I am confident that, if Ofsted were to come back tomorrow, they would find that their criticisms have already been completely resolved.

I want to emphasise here that the report does not say we are not a good school. We know we are a good school, and Southend Local Authority and the Diocese agree. However, the outcome so far is very disappointing and frustrating. We feel that we have been unfairly caught up in the national unease about safeguarding, and that this Inspector is guilty of using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. We did offer to sort out the records as she said they should be within an hour. The offer was refused.

There were several other aspects of the inspection that we were very unhappy about, which formed the basis of our as yet unresolved complaint. The Catholic Education Service, which is the national body in charge of Catholic schools, and Sir David Amess, are taking up these issues with the Government.

We do intend to appeal again to Ofsted against the verdict and the report. At the very least, we want a rapid re-inspection, which will, I am confident, take us out of Special Measures.

Finally, I want to reassure you that for all of us at the school, it's business as usual! Neither you nor the children will see any change in the way we operate.

Once you have read this letter and the report, if you would like to make any comment, do please contact me. The best way is to email me at the school address, write a letter, or ring the school office. **In view of the seriousness of the verdict, we are organising a meeting for all parents/carers later this week. It will take place this Thursday, December 1st, at the school at 6pm. You are all warmly invited to attend.**

Yours sincerely,

Mrs M. Sullivan
Headteacher
Mr J. Johnson
Chair of Governors