

Grindon Hall Christian School – Statement about January’s Ofsted Report from the Principal, Chris Gray

20 January 2015

We are grateful for the many messages of support that we have received from our pupils and parents, and from people around the country.

The Ofsted report issued to us today will come as a huge shock to our parents, pupils and staff because they – along with anyone who knows us – will not recognise the school portrayed there.

It is now well known that the manner in which inspectors questioned our pupils in November was hostile, inappropriate and raises serious safeguarding issues. Despite raising these concerns more than a month ago we have yet to receive any response from Ofsted.

To issue a report that grades the best performing secondary state-funded school in Sunderland (latest published GCSE results) as the worst defies all common sense and logic.

Pupils, parents and staff are deeply concerned that, because of the widely reported breakdown of trust between the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted, schools like Grindon Hall are being caught in the crossfire. Playing politics with the new regulations on “British values” is not acceptable and does little to help our children prepare for life or achieve good exam results.

We are proud of our school and its staff. We have a Christian ethos which our parents love. We have happy, high achieving pupils, and we are oversubscribed – we always have a lot more applications than we have places. Yet Ofsted’s approach to us was negative at every stage, as if the data collected had to fit a predetermined outcome.

We take any criticism seriously and aspire to the highest standards for our pupils. We continually strive to be better, but this report, prompted by the new “British Values” rules, lacks any sense of proportion.

Many have criticized the subjectivity and unreliability of Ofsted reports, including Ofsted’s own national director for schools. Anyone who places our May 2014 Ofsted report alongside the January 2015 report would think they were talking about two different schools. There have been no major changes of staffing, pupils or policy to account for the difference. The difference was the introduction of the widely discredited “British Values” rules and the aggressive attitude of the inspection team.

We are a Christian school. Under our funding agreement and the law, we have a duty to prioritise the teaching of the Christian faith. At the same time, we make sure our children respect people of all faiths and none.

The questioning by inspectors makes clear that their idea of a balanced curriculum is for us to force pupils to celebrate non-Christian religious festivals. This would breach

our Christian foundation which stipulates that we are a Christian school. It would certainly offend against the consciences of many of our staff, pupils and parents. No one should be told by a government official to celebrate any religion. Learn about it, yes. Celebrate its festivals, no.

Inspectors criticized our recruitment processes. We commissioned an independent audit of our systems before the March 2014 inspection and they were approved without a problem. The March Ofsted report said safeguarding was good.

I made a formal complaint to Ofsted on 11 December, stating that the inspection was negative and hostile. I have not received a reply.

I also submitted a factual error report to Ofsted last week. It is disappointing that of the 13 errors raised, only 3 of them have been addressed in the final report. Regrettably, one change Ofsted did make which we did not want was to take out a positive reference to how our grades in 2014 “fared well against a similar dip nationally”.

Ofsted removed a paragraph from the draft report stating: “The Christian ethos of the school permeates much of the school’s provision. This has restricted the development of a broad and balanced approach to the curriculum.” This phrase revealed unwarranted skepticism on the part of the inspection team about our Christian ethos.

I will be submitting a formal complaint under the usual procedures now that the report has been issued.

ENDS

Background

- Grindon Hall Christian School opened as an independent school in 1988. In September 2012 it converted to a Free School.

- The school is oversubscribed with heavy competition for places and is [popular with parents](#).

- [2013 performance tables](#) show that 78% of Grindon’s KS4 pupils achieved 5 or more A*-C GCSEs (or equivalent) including English and Maths GCSEs. This was well above both the national (59.2%) and local authority (60.1%) average. Only two schools in the Sunderland area beat our percentage on this measure – both private schools. (2014 figures have not yet been published.)

- The [2013 figures also show](#) that 90% of Grindon’s pupils made the expected progress or better in both English and Maths between KS2 and KS4. Again, this is well above the local average (69.2% – English, 66% – Maths) as well as the average for state-funded schools nationally (70.4% – English, 70.8% – Maths).

- Our recent Ofsted reports can be viewed [here](#).

- Examples of contradictions between the May and January reports:

Behaviour and safety

January 2015: “Pupils are not adequately safeguarded. Leaders have not acted with sufficient urgency to address weaknesses identified from recent incidents. Pupils are not sufficiently aware of the risks they may encounter to enable them to feel and stay safe.” “Behaviour requires improvement.” (Page 1)

May 2014: “Pupils’ behaviour and safety are good.” (Page 1)

Sixth Form

January 2015: “Leadership of the sixth form is weak.” (Page 1)

May 2014: “The sixth form is good.” (Page 1)

Bullying

January 2015: “Pupils have little confidence in the schools systems to address bullying.” (Page 6) “Prejudice-based bullying, while reported on, is not tackled effectively enough so that discrimination through racist or homophobic language persists.” (Page 1)

May 2014: “The school’s work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.” “Pupils understand how to keep safe and are quick to recognise when bullying, in whatever form it takes, occurs.” “School records of bullying, anti-social behaviour or racist behaviour incidents show a very small number of incidents, but actions taken by staff are effective.” (Page 6)