



2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020

Dear Parents,

## **Inspection of Castle House School by ISI on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

I have some wonderful news to share with you, however please forgive the somewhat lengthy preamble below which is required to set the scene.

It is coming up to three years since I joined Castle House School in January 2018. Those of you who have been in the school since before that time will be aware of the changes of successive leadership and governance which occurred in the preceding few years. Therefore, when I was appointed it was with a very clear brief that the school needed both a change of direction and upgrading, indeed in some areas the establishing of our systems, policies and procedures. Three weeks after I took up post, and indeed before much of the work was completed, we were inspected and quite understandably the inspectors found areas where the school was not compliant with the ISSRs – the framework against which Independent Schools are inspected.

Since that time we have been under the spotlight of the DfE, Ofsted and ISI (The Independent Schools Inspectorate), but through successive visits and formal dialogue with the DfE alongside guidance from ISA we have seen the school move forwards. It is perhaps frustrating that one part of one ISSR which is not met, no matter how small, will always result in a judgement of non-compliance. Ironically a significant number of our local competitor schools have found themselves in this position and frustratingly for all Heads this always leads to questions about safeguarding and leadership and management. In some cases, the DfE will place a restriction or even a closure notice on a school for the most minor issues.

On Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> November I received a phone call at 8.00am to say that two ISI Inspectors were around the corner and about to arrive at school. Their visit was unannounced and was to look specifically at two aspects of the ISSRs which had been flagged in the past. We were very much prepared for this and the whole day

was smooth and a very positive experience. The two inspectors gathered evidence from a large variety of sources including our documentation and interviews with the staff, governors and children. I have now received their finalised report which is attached. It is a little frustrating that the judgements are not quantified and are only 'met' (in our case) or if there is a problem 'not met' resulting in action by the DfE. The short commentary in each section, however, is a little more descriptive and includes phrases such as 'best interests of the pupils', 'kind, caring, trustworthy and fair', 'thorough scrutiny', 'depth and breadth of oversight', 'good skills and knowledge' and so on.

Therefore, Castle House School is judged as being fully compliant with all ISSRs and as I say there are a good many schools which fail in this area.

Moving forward, we should now revert back into the usual cycle of inspections and I estimate, due to the backlog of cancelled Inspections due to COVID, that in approximately 12 months, but maybe longer we will be visited again. This will be a full four day Inspection checking on these ISSRs and looking specifically at teaching, learning and the progress of the pupils. It is at this point where we as a school can excel and show what we really can achieve.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff for their tireless work; the governors for their unwavering dedication to the school, you the parents for your support and of course the children for upholding our values and beliefs.

At the end of a long term, indeed a difficult and challenging year, this is certainly good news for both now and the future of Castle House School.

Kind regards

Ian Sterling

**Headteacher**