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Ms Christine Ryan
Chief Inspector
Independent Schools Inspectorate
CAP House
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Sir Michael Wilshaw
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

Dear Chief Inspector

Annual report on the quality of the inspections and reports by the Independent Schools Inspectorate 2013/14

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your inspectors for their courtesy, cooperation and professionalism during the year. This has been very helpful in enabling Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) to monitor the work of the Independent Schools Inspectorate efficiently. I should also be grateful if you would extend my thanks to those schools which we have visited. Additionally, thanks are due to the staff at CAP House who have been most accommodating to HMI monitoring inspectors when they have visited.

Further to Ofsted's monitoring, I have pleasure in sending you a copy of the annual report letter that I have sent to the Secretary of State today. A copy of the annual report letter will also be published on Ofsted's website.

Yours sincerely

Sir Michael Wilshaw

Annual report on the quality of the inspection work carried out by the Independent Schools Inspectorate 2013/14

Context

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Department for Education (DfE) under section 162A(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, as inserted, to inspect schools in membership of the associations that make up the Independent Schools Council (ISC), including their registered early years provision. Since September 2011, the ISI has also been approved to conduct inspections of boarding provision in ISC boarding schools.

Ofsted monitors the work of ISI at the request of the DfE, which is the registration authority for independent schools. Her Majesty's Inspectors monitor ISI inspections and review its published reports.

During the academic year 2013/14, ISI carried out 327 inspections of association schools in England. Her Majesty's Inspectors monitored 12 on-site inspections and reviewed 20 inspection reports.

Regular meetings held during the year between Ofsted, ISI and the DfE included discussions about inspection development, the monitoring of ISI inspections and reporting and regulatory changes.

Summary of findings

There remain clear strengths in the inspectorate's work. However, in a few reports, the impact of regulatory failings on related judgements is not explained sufficiently clearly.

Five full inspections were judged to be good, three were judged satisfactory, one was judged as requires improvement and one was inadequate.

All but one of the 12 inspections met the standards agreed with the DfE. Two of the inspections monitored were intermediate boarding inspections and met the requirements agreed with the DfE.

The proportion of reports judged to be good is smaller than in the previous year. Sixteen of the reports were judged to be of good quality, three were satisfactory and one was inadequate.

Quality of inspections monitored by Her Majesty's Inspectors

During the monitoring of on-site inspections, Her Majesty's Inspectors have seen a number of areas of good practice.

ISI inspections were characterised by well-prepared inspection teams who received clear guidance and close checks on their work. Reporting inspectors managed team meetings well and inspectors considered a good range of evidence in reaching judgements.

Team inspectors were managed and deployed well. They gathered a good range of evidence that covered the breadth of schools' work, with the safeguarding of pupils being at the forefront of inspectors' activity. Their evidence forms from lesson observations were detailed and evaluative and they responded flexibly to challenges emerging from their findings.

Reporting inspectors managed the relationship with the schools well. Feedback to schools was precise, with clear evidence in their recommendations for improvement.

During weaker inspections, evidence forms varied too much in quality. Some forms were too brief or not fully complete and some written comments and judgements appeared contradictory.

On the majority of inspections, reporting inspectors carried out effective quality assurance on the work of their team. However, on one occasion the reporting inspector did not record whether any quality assurance activity had been carried out, for example checking the quality of evidence forms.

Quality of reports reviewed by Her Majesty's Inspectors

ISI's best reports were written in a clear style that made them easy to read and understand. Inspectors reported their judgements concisely and consistently and schools' improvements since their previous inspections were referenced well.

Reporting inspectors provided a clear picture about which regulatory requirements, including those for boarding schools and the 'Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage', were met. They made clear links between the regulations and the schools' arrangements for safeguarding pupils. Their observations were illustrated with pertinent examples that provided the reader with a rich picture.

The inspectorate's reports on outcomes for different groups of pupils by age and ability were convincing. They clearly identified recommendations for further improvement and these could be easily traced within the main findings and the body of the report.

In a small number of reports, judgements about how well schools met regulatory requirements were less clear. For example, in reports where some regulations regarding safeguarding were not met, but where welfare, health and safety of pupils, leadership and management and governance were judged as 'sound', 'good' or 'excellent', the basis for the positive judgement in terms of the impact of the regulatory failing was not sufficiently explained. Some terminology, including that in the recommendations for improvement sections, was not clear to non-educationalists without greater explanation.

Priorities for further improvement

Ofsted recommends that ISI ensures that:

- on all occasions when regulations are not met, there is a proportionate and clearly explained impact on relevant judgements
- reporting inspectors quality assure evidence bases more consistently and challenge team inspectors to produce high-quality evidence forms.