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Dear Simon

### **Annual report on the quality of inspections and reports by the School Inspection Service 2008/09**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your inspectors for their courtesy, cooperation and professionalism during the year. This has enabled Her Majesty's Inspectors to complete their monitoring of inspections and reports by the School Inspection Service efficiently. I would also be grateful if you would extend my thanks to those schools which we have visited. I have pleasure in sending you the following summary of Ofsted's findings from our monitoring work this year. A copy of this letter will also be sent to the Department for Children, Schools and Families and published on Ofsted's website.

#### **Introduction**

The School Inspection Service is recognised by the Secretary of State as an approved body for the purposes of inspecting registered independent schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust under section 162A(1) of the Education Act 2002 as amended from September 2005. The framework for the inspection of schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust requires systematic inspection and reporting of the registration standards as set out in the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003, as amended from January 2005 and May 2007.

This is Ofsted's third annual report on the work of the School Inspection Service. Ofsted monitors the work of the School Inspection Service at the request of the Department for Children, Schools and Families. In September 2008, there were 35 schools, of which 13 are primary schools, affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust. Nine schools were inspected in the academic year 2008/09 and in the course of the year, HMI monitored three of these inspections and reviewed six reports.

The Focus Learning Trust is a national organisation which groups together schools that are owned and maintained by local assemblies of a religious group known as the Brethren or Exclusive Brethren. The schools currently cater for a total of around 2444 pupils of primary and secondary age. The School Inspection Service maintains its independence from the Focus Learning Trust and its member schools. The

inspectorate's work and model for inspection is clearly defined in the handbook for the inspection of schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust. Schools have four days notice of inspection.

The School Inspection Service was established as an independent body to carry out section 162A school inspections and was approved by the Secretary of State in 2006 to inspect registered independent schools. The inspectorate is staffed by a Co-ordinating Inspector and a team of inspectors most of whom are former HMI. Included within the team are a number of inspectors who have specialised in particular educational disciplines such as special needs, post-16 education, primary class specialists, school management and other specific areas. School inspection teams of professional inspectors are led by reporting inspectors who therefore have significant experience. In addition, teams are complemented by a lay inspector from the Brethren community. The lay inspector is appointed and approved by the Focus Learning Trust for the purposes of inspecting, for example, the financial management of the school and the maintenance of its distinctive ethos. This is to meet the Focus Learning Trust's requirements to inspect some areas of provision in its affiliated schools which are not subject to a legal requirement for inspection under the terms of current educational legislation.

### **The quality of inspections**

All of the inspections monitored by HMI were judged to be of good quality.

Strong features of the inspections carried out by the School Inspection Service are the quality of inspection planning by the reporting inspectors and their leadership and management of the inspection. In particular, their pre-inspection planning is very thorough and makes good use of all available information to establish key areas for further enquiry. Team briefings, for example, were seen to be comprehensive and included high quality analysis of the findings of previous inspections and of the school information and self evaluation form. As a result, inspections are planned well, they run smoothly and inspectors are deployed to best effect. Careful organisation and a high level of rigour on the part of the reporting inspectors ensure that the evidence base covers a good range of inspection activities. These activities include a scrutiny of pupils' work, examination of school documentation, discussions with pupils and staff, observation of lessons and an analysis of parents' and pupils' questionnaires.

Recorded evidence is clear and supports inspectors' judgements well; for example, recorded lesson observations were detailed and perceptive. Emerging judgements and issues were documented clearly in the inspectors' records. The level of detail gave confidence in the accuracy and fairness of the overall judgements. The reporting inspectors improved the quality of the evidence through careful quality assurance and provided good support for their teams.

Effective communication was a very positive feature of the inspections that were monitored by HMI. This was exemplified well in team meetings. Reporting inspectors used meetings well to ensure that the 'Every Child Matters' agenda was covered

effectively. As a result, health and safety, risk assessments, child protection and safeguarding matters were considered rigorously. Regulations were checked effectively. All team members contributed well to the discussions so that clear and corporate judgements were made after full consideration of the evidence. This in turn underpinned the helpful feedback that was provided to the schools and to the trustees.

In those inspections monitored, professional relationships were established effectively between the reporting inspector, inspection team and school during the inspection process. Effective communication from an early stage helped the staff to prepare for their inspection. During the inspection, reporting inspectors ensured that the school was kept well informed about emerging judgements and was in a position to supply any additional evidence that might have been required. The schools' senior teachers reported that they appreciated the on-going dialogue with inspectors and the informal feedback on emerging judgements which were said to be helpful in confirming priorities. Schools also commented positively on the professionalism and courtesy of the inspection teams.

Senior teachers and trustees report that the inspection process is clear and well organised. They feel that they are involved effectively in the process. In one inspection, the trustees reported that pupils had enjoyed meeting the team and felt it was valuable for them to be able to talk to people from outside the community.

### **The quality of reports**

HMI monitored six of the inspection reports that were published during 2008–09; all met the required standard and were clear about regulatory matters. Of those monitored, five were judged to be good and one to be satisfactory.

Reports continue to be well written by inspectors. They are accessible to a range of readers and present a clear picture of the schools that have been inspected. In the best reports, the judgements made are argued effectively and the examples used bring life to the report. Similarly, the conclusions provide an accurate summary and are well matched to the body of the report. As a result, it is clear why judgements have been reached, and the report leaves the reader in no doubt as to the quality of the school's provision and outcomes for pupils. In most cases, the school's 'next steps' for improvement can be traced to the main body of the report and the reader is clear that they will enable the school to improve. In just one case, an overall judgement about the strengths of the provision needed clearer explanation given that the report had also identified some shortcomings.

### **Issues for the inspectorate's consideration and action**

Feedback from schools and trustees is consistent. They value the fact that inspection teams are very experienced. Schools report that other factors complementing the inspection process include the inspectorate's administrative arrangements and the speedy notification of the team details and the framework that is sent to schools. Similarly, the inspectorate's framework and inspection guidance are thorough and provide effective support to inspectors. Inspectors report positively on the quality of

the training provided by the School Inspection Service. In particular, support given to an inspector new to the inspectorate was considered to be good, enabling the inspector to prepare well and to fulfil his responsibilities with confidence. The lay inspector is now an integral part of the team throughout the inspection.

I hope that these observations are useful to you and your inspectors in your work to generate further improvement both in your inspection service and in the schools of the Focus Learning Trust.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Christine Gilbert". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Christine Gilbert  
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools