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Sir Michael Wilshaw
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

26 November 2014

Mrs M A Buckingham
Chief Inspector
Bridge Schools Inspectorate
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Dear Chief Inspector

Annual report on the quality of the inspections and reports by the Bridge 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 Bridge Schools Inspectorate efficiently. I should also be grateful if you would extend my thanks to those schools which we 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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Michael Wilshaw'.

Sir Michael Wilshaw



27 November 2014

Sir Michael Wilshaw
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

The Rt Hon. Nicky Morgan MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Dear Secretary of State

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

I have much pleasure in presenting my annual report on the quality of the inspection work carried out by the Bridge Schools Inspectorate. The report will be published on the Ofsted website.

In addition to regular monitoring activities this year, I have, in response to a number of issues raised about the performance of the approved inspectorates, commissioned an investigation into the robustness of the work of each.

The investigation considered 13 of the Bridge Schools Inspectorate's reports for coherence and transparency. It also examined the quality of the inspectorate's reporting on schools' arrangements for safeguarding pupils, including the extent to which schools meet the independent school standards.

I set out below the findings of the investigation on the Bridge Schools Inspectorate, together with my conclusions.

Key findings

- The inspectorate does not publish its criteria for making judgements on different aspects of schools' performance. I believe that this is unhelpful.
- Of the 13 reports, eight do not, in my view, provide clear and balanced assessments of schools. Of these eight, six over-emphasise the faith-based and religious values at the expense of other essential aspects of schools' work, for example the secular curriculum.
- I believe that the reports do not consistently provide parents with the information they need to make a decision about their child's education. Reports are often too long, complex and disguise serious weaknesses in schools. For example, four reports identify pupils' attendance as below

standard, yet these concerns did not have a significant impact on inspection judgements. Four reports are not clear about pupils' achievements. There is a lack of clarity in some reports because positive and negative statements in the same paragraphs confuse the overall picture of how well pupils are doing.

Notice periods

I have also considered the inspection notice period given to schools by each inspectorate. In my view, schools inspected by the Bridge Schools Inspectorate receive too much notice of an inspection, particularly in the light of historical and current safeguarding issues in the sector. The inspectorate gives schools five working days' notice of an inspection. By the time the inspection team arrives, the school has had significant time to prepare.

I believe that the inspectorate should reduce its notice period to no more than half a day.

Suitability of inspectors

The Bridge Schools Inspectorate prides itself on allocating a Christian and Muslim inspector to each school. Some of these inspectors are drawn from the same group of schools or belong to the same association. I believe that it is unwise for schools in small, closed communities to be inspected in this way. Such staffing of inspections may lead, as shown above, to judgements that emphasise the faith-based curriculum at the expense of a rounded curriculum that properly prepares students for life in modern Britain. Accordingly, I recommend that the Department investigates the staffing arrangements of the Bridge Schools Inspectorate.

I hope that these observations prove useful as you consider further approval of the inspectorate.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Wilshaw".

Sir Michael Wilshaw
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

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

Context

The Bridge Schools Inspectorate (BSI) is approved by the Department for Education (DfE) under section 162A(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, as inserted, to inspect selected registered independent schools that are members of the Association of Muslim Schools UK or the Christian Schools' Trust.

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

During the academic year 2013/14, BSI carried out 14 inspections. Her Majesty's Inspectors monitored one on-site inspection and reviewed three evidence bases and three inspection reports.

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

Summary of findings

The quality of the inspectorate's sampled work is less strong than in previous years. The inspectorate has not ensured that inspectors are able to identify warning signs of extremism and radicalisation in school settings with enough rigour. Her Majesty's Inspectors found that inspectors do not always probe sufficiently deeply to verify whether schools' arrangements for safeguarding pupils are effective. At times, inspectors rely too heavily on the assertions of school leaders and not enough on substantive evidence.

The inspectorate's lead inspectors prepare and brief their inspection teams effectively. There are some examples of clearly recorded evidence bases and detailed information about how schools meet the Independent School Standards.

The quality of the on-site inspection monitored by Her Majesty's Inspector was judged to require improvement.

One evidence base was judged good and two required improvement.

One report was good, one was satisfactory and one required improvement.

Quality of inspection monitored by Her Majesty's Inspectors

The BSI lead inspector gave the inspection team clear and detailed joining instructions before the inspection. The team developed a strong and positive working relationship with the headteacher. The lead inspector provided regular feedback to senior leaders throughout the inspection, noting the independent school standards they had not met.

However, during team meetings, inspectors did not evaluate evidence about students' spiritual, moral and social education in enough depth. In addition, they did not take into account the evidence from Ofsted's social care inspector on the welfare, health and safety of boarders when reaching judgements.

Some inspectors did not demonstrate sufficient knowledge of ways to root out extremist behaviour, views and practices.

Quality of evidence bases reviewed by Her Majesty's Inspectors

There were strengths within individual evidence bases. In one base, where the school did not meet the independent school standards relating to the welfare, health and safety of children, the evidence was clear and recorded well. One evidence base had a particularly clear focus on pupils' understanding of British democracy. Inspectors recorded the achievement of pupils with different abilities well.

In two evidence bases, there was no evidence of the evaluation of pupils' understanding of how to stay safe when accessing the internet or social media.

One evidence base had no record of team meetings – which had been identified for improvement in the previous year's monitoring report – or of the final formal feedback to school leaders.

Inspectors did not always seek enough evidence to support judgements. In one case, inspectors did not collect enough information to be able to fully evaluate pupils' performance in Key Stage 3.

Quality of reports reviewed by Her Majesty's Inspectors

The one good report provided clear information about the curriculum and how the school had improved since its previous inspection. It included strong examples of where teaching was both good and less successful.

While all three reports referred to the independent school standards well, two reports had some weaknesses. One report did not state clearly enough whether staff other than school leaders implemented safeguarding procedures effectively. In another, not all the judgements were written explicitly. For example, the quality of education was unclear. The two weaker reports had limited information regarding different

groups of pupils. In one report, this related to disabled pupils and those with special educational needs and, in the other, gifted and talented pupils.

One report gave scant attention to the impact of the school's outdoor learning provision on children's development in the Early Years Foundation Stage, even though it had been a regulation not met during the previous inspection.

Priorities for further improvement

Ofsted recommends that BSI ensures that:

- all inspectors probe deeply into how schools prevent extremism and radicalisation
- it inspects schools' safeguarding arrangements thoroughly to ensure that they are consistently evidenced and reported on, especially with regard to e-safety
- inspectors record a wider range of evidence to substantiate leaders' assertions.