

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 03000 123 1231
Textphone 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/ofsted

Direct T 03000 130311
Michael.Wilshaw@ofsted.gov.uk



Sir Michael Wilshaw
Her Majesty's Chief
Inspector

16 November 2015

Dr Christine Ryan
Chief Inspector
Independent Schools Inspectorate
Cap House
9–12 Long Lane
London
EC1A 9HA

Dear Chief Inspector

Annual report on the quality of the inspections and reports by the Independent Schools Inspectorate in the academic year 2014/15

Please find enclosed a copy of the 2014/15 annual report of the Independent Schools Inspectorate, which I have sent to the Secretary of State for Education, the Rt Hon. Nicky Morgan MP, today. The annual report will be published on Ofsted's website.

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 and Ofsted's social care and regulatory inspectors to efficiently monitor the work of the Independent Schools Inspectorate. I would also be grateful if you would extend my thanks to the schools that we visited.

Yours sincerely

Sir Michael Wilshaw
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

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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 Independent Schools Inspectorate in the academic year 2014/15

I have pleasure in presenting my annual report on the quality of the inspection work carried out by the Independent Schools Inspectorate in 2014/15. The report will be published on Ofsted's website.

Based on the report's findings, it is Ofsted's view that the Independent Schools Inspectorate should continue to be approved as an independent inspectorate.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Wilshaw". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Sir Michael Wilshaw
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

Annual report on the quality of the inspection work carried out by the Independent Schools Inspectorate in the academic year 2014/15

Introduction

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect selected registered independent schools in membership of the associations that make up the Independent Schools Council, including their registered early years provision and boarding provision.¹

Under section 107(1) of the Education and Skills Act 2008,² Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) has a duty to prepare and send a report to the Secretary of State about the inspectorates for independent schools, at intervals of no more than a year. HMCI must have regard, under section 107(2),³ to matters that the Secretary of State may direct about the form and contents of the report.

The Secretary of State's directions to HMCI are set out in Annex A of the 'Memorandum of understanding (MoU) for Ofsted's monitoring of the independent inspectorates for independent schools in England' (February 2015). Ofsted's monitoring of ISI's work since March 2015 was carried out in line with this memorandum of understanding. Prior to the 'MoU', the 'Protocol between Ofsted and the approved independent inspectorates' (March 2014) was in place.

The ISI's inspection activity for 2014/15

ISI carried out 283 inspections during the academic year 2014/15.

Ofsted's monitoring of the Independent Schools Inspectorate in 2014/2015

Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and Ofsted's social care regulatory inspectors monitored 14 inspections on site and reviewed 27 published inspection reports.

Findings

1. In the majority of inspections that Ofsted monitored in 2014/15, HMI observed teams of inspectors effectively scrutinising schools' arrangements to safeguard children. The independent school standards for pupils' welfare, health and safety were checked thoroughly. Reporting inspectors focused well on the effectiveness of schools' arrangements and how well staff implemented them.

¹ Section 106 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, as set out in the agreement of 13 January 2015 between the Department for Education and ISI; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/25/section/106

² Section 107(1) of the Education and Skills Act 2008; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/25/section/107

³ Section 107(2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008; www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/25/section/107

2. In the inspections where the teams did not do so, inspectors did not probe, record or report the effectiveness of the arrangements to safeguard children well enough. In a small number of the inspections monitored, the written evidence did not always provide a full account of the evidence gathered or clear enough evaluations of the impact on pupils' achievements or well-being. In some reports, there was an insufficient match between the text and the grade awarded. Sometimes the text in the reports could be interpreted as being contradictory.
3. The impact of unmet independent school standards on the grades awarded for leadership and management, governance or pupils' welfare, health and safety was not sufficiently evident in some inspection reports.⁴ This meant that school leaders, parents and carers and other readers of the reports did not always have a clear picture of the quality of schools' work. Some inspectors had not paid sufficient attention to the inspectorate's guidance and training, and the inspectorate had not resolved the potential anomalies through its quality assurance arrangements. This remains a weakness that Ofsted reported last year.
4. The main findings section of reports reviewed usually set the scene well for what followed in the report and readers were left in no doubt about what the school did well or what they needed to do to put things right. Some reports explained explicitly why a higher grade was not awarded. Recommendations for further improvement and improvements since the previous inspection were written particularly clearly in some reports.
5. HMI and Ofsted's social care regulatory inspectors found good examples of clear reporting of schools' strengths and weaknesses. In the strongest inspections, there was a particularly close match between the grades awarded and the inspectorate's grade descriptors. References to the views of pupils and parents helped to explain clearly the quality of schools' work, and the procedures to safeguard pupils were reported particularly clearly. Reports often explained the impact of schools' work on pupils' academic performance well, including the effect on pupils who board, those with special educational needs or those who are more able. The quality of schools' provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage was successfully threaded through most reports.
6. Reporting inspectors and coordinating inspectors for early years and boarding provision were highly organised in most inspections. Arrangements to check the quality of written evidence, the challenge to inspectors at team meetings and thorough pre-inspection preparation meant that inspectors were clear about what was required and that judgements were well supported by a range of evidence.

⁴ The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014;
www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2014/3283/contents/made.

7. Reporting inspectors and coordinating inspectors for early years and boarding provision were respected for their professionalism, experience and attention to detail by team members and by school leaders. This helped senior leaders to engage fully in the inspections, including when senior staff were new to leadership, when leaders were not in agreement with the inspection judgements or when they challenged inspectors' conduct. Similarly, high-quality leadership by reporting inspectors supported new or inexperienced team members well.
8. Formal feedback to governors and senior leaders was usually clear, factual and with useful examples to illustrate the points made.

Recommendations

Ofsted recommends that:

- the ISI should continue to be approved as an independent inspectorate
- systems should be strengthened to support ISI inspectors to follow the inspectorate's framework and guidance closely so that any unmet independent school standards are reflected in the grades awarded for leadership and management, governance or pupils' welfare, health and safety.⁵

⁵ *Integrated handbook – framework September 2012; Integrated handbook – guidance November 2013; Guidance for intermediate boarding inspections September 2012; Integrated inspections grade descriptors September 2012 and January 2015.*