



Griffin House Preparatory School

Little Kimble, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP17 0XP

Griffin House Preparatory School – ISI Inspection 11th September 2020

Introduction

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) coordinates and arranges the peer review of private schools by fellow teachers.

In February 2020 the ISI arranged for a two-day peer review inspection of Griffin House for compliance and educational quality. Whilst the educational quality side of the report is very complimentary - with sample comments including “competency in numeracy is excellent”, “pupils have excellent communication skills” and “a significant proportion of pupils gain places at local selective schools” - on the compliance side the inspectors have highlighted some areas that they judge as in need of improvement.

Having reviewed the ISI report in detail, we have made a formal complaint about the report on the basis of factual errors and procedural flaws and will be seeking an urgent re-inspection.

Health and safety and the wellbeing of our pupils are of the utmost importance to Griffin House at all times, and we have a strong history of excellent pastoral support and care across the school. Further to the inspection, we immediately reviewed the issues raised. Prior to the inspectors leaving the school, despite not agreeing with all the findings, all their points had been attended to or a plan of work put in place to ensure their swift completion.

Background

Three years ago, Griffin House successfully completed its last ISI compliance inspection. Since that inspection, further to the acquisition of Griffin House by Chatsworth Schools in January 2019, health and safety procedures have improved beyond measure. These include a full Health and Safety and Fire Risk Assessment Audit conducted within a week of us being owned by Chatsworth and all issues found having been addressed within the first year of ownership. Griffin House has also worked with a dedicated, qualified Health and Safety consultant, who has guided the school to improvements and we have access to a Health and Safety expert who sits on the Chatsworth Management Team.

We thought parents and prospective parents would find Griffin House’s perspective on the report useful.

Context

There are eight aspects to an ISI compliance inspection and the inspectors judge whether a school has met or not met each standard. In our recent inspection, Griffin House met five of the standards - the quality of education provided, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils, the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are handled - and the inspectors made recommendations for action on the other three areas.

1. Quality of education provided – standards met

- *In the years 2017 – 2019 the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading and maths was above the proportion attaining that standard in maintained schools.*
- *The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources.*

2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils – standards met

- *Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law abiding citizens.*

3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils – partly met

- *Arrangements are made to safeguard pupils that pay due regard to current statutory guidance, good behaviour is promoted, bullying is prevented as far as reasonably possible, provision is made for first aid, pupils are properly supervised and a disability access plan is in place.*
- **The report claims:** *The school has an appropriate fire safety policy, but this is not implemented consistently. Actions required by a recent fire risk assessment had not been addressed in a timely manner. Fire wardens have received appropriate training and regular fire drills are carried out and recorded. Fire equipment is checked at appropriate intervals.*
- **School response:** The Griffin House fire risk assessment report mentioned in the report (commissioned by Chatsworth Schools and carried out by an independent health and safety expert) was far more extensive and wide-ranging than ISI requirements as Chatsworth Schools sets a higher bar than the ISI for all its schools on health and safety issues. Griffin House had an action plan in place to address the few outstanding areas from this report, yet we were judged on fire safety against the Chatsworth-commissioned report rather than ISI criteria - which we believe we met - so were found to be in breach of health and safety regulations. We have raised this with the ISI.
- **The report claims:** *An effective approach to risk assessment was not in place with inadequate risk assessment of the grounds permitting access to the stream and unsecured flammable, corrosive and toxic chemicals, and an insufficient response by the school to the fire risk assessment.*
- **School response:** We take this allegation seriously. It is correct that the School had identified several gaps in its risk mitigation following the repositioning of a small number of sheds but it is also true that a clear action plan was in place to address this by replacing fencing and in the interim there were implemented temporary safety measures. The fact that the plan of work had not been scheduled to be completed when the inspection took place does not in our view amount to a failure by the school to have in place an effective approach to risk assessment, and we have also raised this with the ISI in the formal complaint.

4. Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors - met

- *The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors and keeps a register as well.*

5. Premises of and accommodation at schools – partly met

- *Suitable toilet and changing facilities, appropriate accommodation for pupils medical and therapy needs and suitable outdoor space are provided.*

The report claims: *The premises are not maintained to a standard that consistently ensures the welfare and health and safety of pupils. The school does not give prompt attention to matters such as broken window catches, fallen roof tiles and a damaged fire escape.*

School response: We strongly refute this claim – and in fact there were no broken window catches at the school, neither now nor during the inspection. The issue which the inspectors brought to the School's attention during the inspection related to window restrictors. We understand the primary risk in question to have concerned a pupil potentially seeking to exit a ground floor classroom via a window and

subsequently putting him or herself in harm's way, rather than a concern as to a risk of falling. In such circumstances, the level of risk and appropriate response are matters of judgement. While we acceded to the inspectors' views by installing window restrictors during the inspection, we don't necessarily agree with the ISI's view because there was no risk of falling from any of the windows identified (and nevertheless subsequently restricted) during the inspection.

In the weeks ahead of the inspection, there had been a number of severe storm conditions which may have resulted in minor damage to the school roof. This was not a recurring problem, but all tile guards have now been fitted. Following the changeable weather, the fire escape was closely inspected by the Chatsworth Health and Safety expert. Their assessment was that whilst there was minor damage to the fire escape, the staircase was not in any way unsafe and did not need to be replaced.

The report claims: *The school does not ensure that hot water is always at a safe temperature to use.*

School response: There is no history of scalding at school as the children are carefully supervised and risks are carefully managed. The nature of the old building has meant that managing water temperature has been historically difficult. Temperature monitoring valves have now been installed where necessary to ensure that temperatures are consistent.

6. Provision of information – met

- *Information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education.*

7. Manner in which complaints are handled – met

- *Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process and records are kept appropriately.*

8. Quality of leadership and management of schools

- **Report claims:** *In light of the issues listed above, the proprietor does not ensure that the leadership and management fulfil their responsibilities effectively so all standards are met.*
- **School response:** As a result of only partly meeting two of the ISI compliance criteria, Griffin House was automatically determined as not meeting the criteria for leadership and management of the school. Given our response (as highlighted above) to the claims made in the ISI report, we do not agree this analysis. We believe that Griffin House has a strong, capable and effective leadership team that puts the welfare of pupils at the forefront of everything the school does.

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