



Abbey Gate College

June 2022

Dear Parents

It was during my first meeting of the Monday, when the call from the Independent Schools Inspectorate came through on my office phone. The moment itself brought with it almost a certain numbness and a sense of anti-climax. There was now a reality to deal with, plans to be swiftly made, and actions to be realised.

With so much in the national media and in works of fiction about school inspectors, it is understandable that the idea of inspection has taken on a rather exaggerated and almost disconnected shape in our collective thinking. Since I started in September, so many meeting agendas with Governors, Leadership, and Staff had included 'Inspection Readiness' as a standing item, as we discussed and fed back to what extent we were prepared. Innumerable had been the communications, briefings, and updates from various external organisations and networks, advising school leaders on how the apparent focus of inspections was shifting and trending, with each month: make sure your part-time cleaners know how the revised statutory framework for Relationships and Sex Education has impacted on your provision; make sure your pupils understand peer-on-peer abuse and can make declarations safely, in response to the #MeToo campaign; make sure that your curriculum and practices in relation to Diversity can evidence a proactive and effective response to recent race-related reports from around the world. We had been in a state of continual alert – anticipating, speculating, waiting...

However, I was a team inspector for ISI before going overseas, so I knew first-hand that the people who would visit us in a couple of days were fellow professionals and human beings. My hope on that Monday morning was that our small team of visitors, in the very short time that they would have, would actually experience and understand enough of our College, so that whatever written report then went into the public domain and would sit on our website for the next 5 years or so would actually be as fair, reflective, and accurate as we would wish.

My leadership team and I did have a concern that this was not an ideal week for inspection, if ever there could be such a one, given that our Senior School had all pupils in Years 7 to 10 off timetable, out of lessons, and engaged in formal, summative assessments, and our Year 6 pupils were on their re-scheduled residential. The dates of our internal examination week were known to ISI in advance; however, all inspections are catching up on time lost during lockdowns and closures, so it did not really come as a surprise when, having raised this concern with ISI and also the Department for Education

in direct response to the Monday call, the decision came back in the afternoon that the inspection would still proceed as scheduled. Swift work was needed then for our committed teachers to re-think their week's plan and make some learning lessons take place, when originally these would have been given over to supporting the actual assessments. Our staff understood. Everyone did the best they could in the circumstance.

The surveys to parents, pupils, and staff were among the first actions for us. The directed turn-around time was unavoidably tight, but the feedback from the many who replied was very positive indeed. If I focus here on our parental returns, your opinions were sought as to how well we, as a College, delivered our overall provision, broken down across a variety of focussed statements, to which you would indicate: strong agreement, agreement, disagreement, or strong disagreement. When I met with our Lead Inspector on the Wednesday, to hear the initial results in confidence, I was delighted to be told that our average approval rate from parents across all aspects of provision was 95%. We are a school and a service provider; this was a very healthy statement of confidence in our College. Thank you. Additionally, no individual aspect of our provision scored anything less than 90% approval which, again, was very heartening.

Specifically, I am pleased to share the following headlines of particular interest:

- ✓ "The school ensures my child learns in a safe environment" – 99%
- ✓ "The school helps my child to develop strong teamwork and social skills" – 97%
- ✓ "The school helps my child to be confident and independent" – 96%
- ✓ "Teaching, including any online provision, enables my child to make progress" – 96%
- ✓ "The school equips my child with the team working, collaborative and research skills they need in later life" – 96%
- ✓ "The school actively promotes good behaviour" – 97%
- ✓ "The school treats children fairly, regardless of their sex, faith, race or needs" – 97%
- ✓ "The school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of other people" – 97%
- ✓ "The school safeguards my child effectively" – 98%

Complacency is not a characteristic of Abbey Gate College. Even with such strong returns, we will continue to look at what we do and consider how we can be better. We know, for example, that the role and impact of our new Parent Reps in the Senior School deserves additional attention, going forward, with more regular meetings and a greater confidence that this small team of parent volunteers are being best supported to enable a healthy two-way conversation between ourselves and our families. Alongside this, the on-going re-development of a whole College Parents' and Teachers' Association, with respective sub-committees for Aldford and for Saighton, to help us organise enjoyable, post-pandemic social events, is aiming to benefit from the goodwill, commitment, and care of all parents who have stepped forward in the interests of our College.

We value all of our parents' support and we are rightly proud of what Abbey Gate is achieving. Your feedback is always heard and we are grateful for it.

In my next Message I will talk about the Inspection Report itself. Until then, I wish you good health and extend my thanks again for the collective strength of your inspection survey returns.

With every kind regard

Craig Jenkinson
Head