



Abbey Gate College

June 2022

Dear Parents

“Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogroves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.”

If the Monday was largely defined by the knowledge, realisation, and acceptance that an inspection team would actually be arriving that very week, then the Tuesday felt rather like when you prepare for a significant journey, everything is planned, packed and sitting in a collection of suitcases, but you still feel that you have forgotten something that may turn out to be critical at a key moment; so you go through every single suitcase again, item by item.

We were also aware that, as a College, we needed to help the inspectors as much as possible in their short time with us. This included: writing executive summary guides, bringing at-a-glance information packs together, clarifying a timetable with a range of lessons to observe (which was not our original plan for this week), setting up a working base for the inspectors with a regular supply of nice things to eat and drink, checking that all corridor signs and posters were tidy and straight, reserving parking spaces, organising various groups of pupils and staff to be available in specific places at specific times for their interviews with the inspectors, while continually reminding ourselves that “we’ve got this, and they’ll take us as they find us.” Small wonder that the borogroves were more mimsy than usual in our gardens...

Part of the inspection process happens before anyone actually sets foot in a school, and the Focussed Compliance aspect of this inspection – which checks a school’s core regulatory policies and procedures – combined remote scrutiny with in-person inspection for the initial days of the visit. In truth, when the first inspectors did arrive, early on the Wednesday morning, they neither wiffled nor burbled, and the frumious Bandersnatch was thankfully nowhere to be seen. Even when the full team was with us from the Thursday for the Educational Quality duties of the inspection, the Jubjub bird also stayed well away. As I mentioned in last week’s Message, all the inspectors were professional peers, and they were now welcome in our College. We worked with them, and they worked with us. There was a job to be done, as much collaboratively as was appropriate.

By now, you will have read the final report, which is a public document and will remain on our website for many years. We are delighted with it. We feel that it reflects very well

all that we value at Abbey Gate College, and acknowledges the wonderful commitment, care, and personal attention, tuition, and support given to all our pupils – from our Infants and Juniors in Aldford through to our Seniors and Sixth Formers in Saighton.

We knew that improving our digital infrastructure and in-class integration was a work in progress, so when the Lead Inspector shared that they would have liked to see more blended learning in lessons, where pupils switch seamlessly between use of their own devices and other non-digital resources and activities, we agreed. This was already identified on our own development plan. By September, we will have substantially upgraded our IT infrastructure and Wi-Fi capability across the whole College, and all teaching staff will have been provided with their own Surface Pro devices for the classroom. Professional training and innovation will continue, as we focus on how to impact learning most beneficially with integrated technology, and next year we will then turn our attention to how we want pupils themselves to use technology in their lessons – but only where it evidently enhances learning outcomes.

We also knew that students' agency in their own learning was not quite where we wanted it to be. The new approaches to feedback, assessment, and pupil response had been introduced in the autumn term, but these developments take time to embed; and variant outbreaks, pandemic anxieties, and occasionally perilous COVID-absence rates had all tempered with reality this otherwise excellent initiative. Picking up the pace on this again will be a priority for next year and ties in with the development of the 'Self' pillar in our educational provision; since truly agentic learners are those with genuine self-regulation, intrinsic motivation, and clarity of personal purpose.

There is so much in our report, of which we are rightly proud, and no shortage of quotable sentences and excerpts. If I may, there are three in particular that strike me.

The first is: "Throughout the school pupils answer questions without fear of failure." Much is written in educational research about the beneficial impact of relational practices and how much the psychological environment of the classroom, as created by the teacher, can benefit the learning process; by encouraging speculation, experimentation, and simply having a go. In other words, by creating a 'safe' learning space. Our pupils inhabit a world where they are surrounded by others' opinions and judgements, whether they ask for them or not. To have no fear of failure is arguably one of the most vital life skills our young people will need, arising from appropriate self-confidence and self-worth.

The second statement is: "Pupils reflect strongly the ethos and values of the school in their demonstration of respect, sensitivity, and tolerance for all members of the school community." We believe ourselves to be an inclusive, welcoming, and caring community; it is heartening that the inspectors agree.

And my third choice of sentence is: “The school is successful in meeting its aim to enable pupils to have the self-confidence to go forward into the changeable world with courage and compassion.” As I said last week, we are never complacent at Abbey Gate College, but this is deserved recognition for everyone’s efforts and work, aligned with our deeper sense of purpose and mission, with roots back to the College’s foundation and beyond.

As Head, I may share that, when I read the report, I had some beamish moments and I certainly felt that it was a frabjous day. I hope that this Message and last week’s give a little additional insight and comment on our report for you, as parents. I trust also that you are understanding of my well-intended attempts to integrate Lewis Carroll’s wonderful, wonderland language into this particular text, in recognition of last week’s highly entertaining KS3 performance of ‘Scenes from Wonderland’ – with our own rose gardens and trimmed hedges as authentic backdrop, complemented by superbly themed catering by Chartwells Independent, and the curiosity that remains British weather!

Wishing you all good health as we head, galumphing, into the closing days of this academic year.

With every kind regard

Craig Jenkinson
Head