

## **OFSTED INSPECTION OUTCOME – LETTER FROM CHAIRMAN**

Dear Peaslake Free School Parents

As you are aware, we had an OFSTED inspection in September and we have just received the final report. I am attaching a copy of the report which we are sharing with all parents. The overall result of the inspection is “**Requires Improvement**”.

Both the Governing Body and staff team are, of course, very disappointed and surprised at this result. We have stated this very clearly in our response to the draft report which I attach for you to read.

The two main areas where we were marked down were:

- Quality of Education
- Behaviour and Attitudes

The evaluation of Leadership and Management as Requires Improvement was automatic, given the evaluation of Quality of Education.

### **Quality of Education**

This year’s OFSTED inspection rigorously applied a new OFSTED evaluation framework which prioritises subject-specific curriculum planning evidence and knowledge beyond the core subjects of Maths, Reading and Writing.

Previous inspection approaches have focused much more on the evidence of actual learning outcomes in the key Maths, Reading and Writing subjects and the breadth of provision outside of those core subjects. It was on this basis that we were evaluated as “Good”, tending towards “Outstanding” in our last inspection in June 2019. Our continuing very strong SATS results (which measure attainment in Maths, Reading, and Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar) are above the national average and validate our strengths in these important areas of the curriculum.

The report does reference the effectiveness of our Reading and Phonics work and our Maths was reviewed without comment. Our Early Years provision in Reception was also viewed positively.

The inspection made deep-dives into the specific subjects of Art and History and, based on the new evaluation framework, found them to be in need of improvement in terms of their subject-specific detailed curriculum plans and teacher knowledge. Concerns in these two subjects drove the overall assessment. We use Cornerstones, which is a bank of interesting, sequenced and resourced projects and lessons to help shape our teaching plans in these subject areas. We were disappointed that the inspectors did not review the curriculum plans documented in Cornerstones, did not look at completed books from last year and showed limited interest in other areas of our broad curriculum e.g. Music and Forest School.

Most importantly in this area, our very recent shift to a three-class model from a two-mixed age class model was given little acknowledgement.

We do recognise that we are on a journey towards more subject-specific curriculum depth but also, as a very small school with limited teacher numbers, our ability to have subject leaders across all subjects is difficult. The new framework has been acknowledged as particularly difficult for infant schools – as can be seen from this article; <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/ofsteds-framework-is-failing-first-and-infant-schools/>

In fact, 95% of all infant schools inspected under the new model in the past year were downgraded – including 30% of Outstanding schools that were moved to RI. This challenge has been recognised by OFSTED and a consultation has been launched into this. We are disappointed this has come too late for us, though we are contributing robust input to the review.

We were pleased to see that the very recent pupil learning survey showed that the children have a good grasp of what they are learning in many different curriculum areas. We appreciate your support for this important information-gathering activity to guide lesson planning.

### **Behaviour and Attitudes**

The second key area of review was behaviour and attitudes to learning. This is an area where again, over the years, we have seen strong performance. Our last OFSTED said “Pupils behave exceptionally well both in class and beyond. They are attentive, conscientious and intellectually curious”.

The OFSTED evaluation this time around was influenced by the early point in the school year, where many children, especially the youngest, were in just their third week of school life. The staff team had identified, prior to the inspection, that the ongoing impact of COVID restrictions and some specific individual children needing support required some targeted action plans. These factors were not considered as substantive mitigations by the inspectors. We are pleased to say that we can already see improvements from the passing of the weeks of school experience and our interventions.

### **Overall Comments**

Nonetheless, as you read the report, you will see that the inspectors did find much to commend in the school and we are very proud of the positive comments made with regard to pupils’ love of being in the school, teachers’ knowledge of the individual children and the depth of personal skills that are developed by the many broad activities that the school supports. We also appreciate the important positive reflections on our Safeguarding stance, the quality of Reading, our SEND provision and Early Years teaching.

We are most disappointed that the narrowness of the perspective applied, especially to the Quality of Education, did not do justice to the quality, dedication and effectiveness of our teaching team. I have had the privilege of being Chair of Peaslake School for over 28 years and we have had some great teaching teams over that time. I am clear that the current group of teachers and TA’s which has been brought together and led by our excellent Head, Sara, is the strongest that I have seen. They enjoy the complete confidence of the Governing Body.

We were also sorry that the universally supportive input provided by you, our parents, to the inspectors did not weigh more strongly in their evaluation. We thank you for your support for the process and the time that you took to engage with it. We are delighted that you see the power of our unique school and the positive impact that it has on your children and their critical early education. This developmental excellence has been recognised by the generations of parents who have gone before you and, very importantly, by the schools which the children go on to.

Finally, we remain committed as a Governing Body and teaching team to continue to take the school forwards. There are lessons to be learnt from this inspection and we will be making plans to strengthen and advance the school as ever. Our teaching team has already developed a number of ideas and we are looking forward to reversing this result as soon as possible in our next inspection.

We know that many of you will wish to understand more about these plans and our response and may have questions and concerns. **We will be holding a meeting at the school at 7.30pm on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> of November** and look forward to welcoming as many of you as possible in person. We will provide a Zoom link as well. Please feel free to reach out to me, other Governors or Sara if you need any further information.

Thank you again for your support to Peaslake Free School

Yours sincerely

Mark Foster  
Chairman of Governors