

Response to Draft OFSTED Inspection Report for Peaslake Free School

Dear Inspector

Thank you for sharing your draft report following your recent inspection of Peaslake Free School. We have significant overall comments and a number of areas where we would ask you to consider to make changes to the wording used to reflect what we consider to be important facts/clarifications.

Overall

We have always been proud of our culture of continuous improvement, and this inspection, and the wider discussion that has followed, will help us on this journey.

As we stated in the debrief session, we are clearly very disappointed at the outcome of the report and the overall evaluation. We are particularly surprised at the findings with regard to Quality of Education, given the learning outcomes that the school has achieved, and continues to achieve (e.g. SATS consistently above the National Average) and the strong trajectory of progress sustained over many years of our unique small school. This strength is recognised by parents - as evidenced by the universally positive parent questionnaire feedback and growing pupil numbers - as well as by the feedback from subsequent schools in which our children go on to thrive.

At the heart of the inspection was the rigorous application of the new evaluation framework which has been put in place since our last very positive inspection. In particular its focus on evidence of sequencing in the subject-specific curriculum has highlighted areas where we are on a journey. We do acknowledge that we have more to do in terms of explicit mapping of skills progression for our teachers and breaking down the smaller steps of learning. It does seem to us that the change in our evaluation is more about the framework applied than some downward shift in our actual Quality of Education.

That said, even in the application of the framework we were hoping that;

- a) the Inspectors would spend time with the Head and teachers looking at our Cornerstones curriculum where the subject-specific plans we follow are recorded

- b) the selection of deep dives would recognise our more thematic approach to subjects outside Maths, Reading and Writing (e.g. History and Geography together). We described this approach in advance and we understand from the OFSTED guidance it is still acceptable
- c) A review of the books/from the end of last year would form a bigger part in the process, where the sequential progress and impact of learning is evidenced (as we were only three weeks into this school year).

Our biggest concern, however, is that the inspection report takes limited account of the context of the school and the timing of the visit. Our small size and correspondingly small teaching staff of three full time teachers does put pressure on our ability to build subject depth across all subjects. We note that other small schools have identified this challenge.

We have an additional factor, as we explained, that we have just at the start of this school year begun the implementation of a more year-specific teaching model across Reception, Year 1 and Year 2, having previously operated with mixed age groups in two main classrooms. Getting the curriculum and revised teaching team aligned to this structure has been an early priority.

This early time in the school year, along with the presence of COVID impacted cohorts, is also a key factor in the behaviour observations of the inspectors. This was an area that the school leadership had identified and were in the process of implementing interventions. We are confident that we are on a path to settle down to the normal high levels of learning environment that the school has consistently achieved.

Finally, no mention is made in the report of the universally positive feedback from parents in the questionnaire. We believe that the confidence that the parents have in the school and its teaching is relevant and lies behind the success of the school in attracting new pupils.

Specific Wording Changes/Factual Concerns

The phrase “leaders have not identified the key knowledge that they want pupils to learn” is not factually correct. We have this documented in Cornerstones and this drives our lesson planning. Our Head does know and understand the framework.

The same is true of the statement “In many subjects, other than phonics and early reading, leaders have not set out clearly what pupils need to learn and in what order”

We request that you consider adding a contextual paragraph to the end of the first section of the report that states:

“We recognise that Peaslake School is a small school, with a small teaching team and that they are on a journey to deepen subject-specific curricula across the three year groups”

In the paragraph on behaviour beginning “Pupils do not always behave as they should”, might this paragraph start: “The inspection took place three weeks into the new academic year and issues with behaviour had been identified by the team early in the school year and they are in the process of implementing systems to address them”. We also ask that the phrase be “Some pupils” as otherwise it implies all pupils.

In the final section we disagree with the phrase “As a result pupils do not learn as well as they should”. There is no factual evidence that our children do not learn well and all outcomes achieved by the school point to effective learning. If that sentence is to remain, notwithstanding our factual objection, we would ask for it to be qualified to “some” pupils, rather than implying all.

There are other places where we consider a similar qualification should apply to create less sweeping general impressions, e.g.

“As a result, *some* pupils are not able to build on previous knowledge...”

“*We observed that some* pupils, including the youngest children, do not listen carefully enough to their teachers”

“*We observed that some* pupils do not always try their best”

“*Some* pupils’ attitudes to learning are not as strong as they should be”