

Dear Parents & Carers,

I am really pleased to finally be able to share the report from the recent Inspection which was carried out on the 25th and 26th of January this year by Ofsted. I welcome the findings of the report; it has captured much of what it is like to be part of this special community and the quality of provision that our students experience. I had the privilege of being part of the Inspector's lengthy deliberations at the end of each day, and heard so many of the wonderful and humbling comments that they made about the school and what they had seen. Unfortunately, under the limitations of the current framework these are not included in the written report itself, which is brief and factual.

The inspection was extremely rigorous under the new framework, so to have our provision recognised in such a positive way is especially meaningful. Perhaps what we have most to celebrate, is that the Inspection team recognised our unique Christian Ethos and how evidently it permeates through all aspects of school life. ***"Notre Dame High School is a caring community where pupils feel safe, valued and supported. The school's Christian ethos is evident in all aspects of the school's work."***

I am sure St Julie is very proud, because expressed in our Hallmarks so clearly, is that we are called to value each individual as a unique part of God's creation. This includes everyone involved in our community; students, staff, parents and the wider community. St Julie's work involved starting schools for girls, who at that time would not have been able to access an education, particularly those who were from poor backgrounds. St Julie and her Sisters, recognised the importance of education and its ability to transform lives. Furthermore, it is through education for life that we all reach towards the potential that God has given us to be the person that he envisaged us to be. Most importantly, it is through education that we are called to work for the common good of all and to transform the world around us for the better. To know that we are providing education for life including those who are most vulnerable and face the greatest of challenges, means that we continue to serve in the tradition of St Julie and the Sisters of Notre Dame.

For this reason, we should be particularly proud that the report highlights; ***"students work alongside senior school leaders to develop the wider culture of the school. This has helped develop a strong, inclusive environment where diversity is celebrated. The cross-community partnership between staff and pupils is a real strength of the school"***. Not only does this recognise the diverse and inclusive nature of the school but that students are leading the way with change. That is exactly as it should be and student leadership is an area that is a priority for us.

Of course, it is important to address the change in grade. Since our last inspection was fourteen years ago, we have warmly welcomed this opportunity to have a critical eye cast over our provision because we want to provide the highest quality of experience and education for all our students. Although the process was undoubtedly rigorous, it was also fair and it will assist us in our desire to improve further.

However, for some context, it is important to understand how many changes there have been to the framework since our previous inspection. Previously, the main focus was on exam performance data and the results that students achieved. However, in the current framework this is not considered. Since that time, we have remained as we were then, consistently in the top 25% of all schools nationally, which is a huge achievement. It is important to note that since the previous inspection in 2008, Ofsted have carried out an annual risk assessment of Outstanding schools. A dip in exam performance, a safeguarding concern or complaint would have triggered an inspection. It is very likely therefore, that if we had been inspected

on the previous framework that placed such emphasis on exam performance we would have retained our outstanding grade.

The current framework broadly focuses on the experience that students have in school and how well they are being prepared for life. Paramount are opportunities for personal development, behaviour, and a broad and balanced curriculum that is ambitious for all students. We welcome this change of emphasis, as our aspiration is that all students feel valued, safe, cared for and listened to, as well as reaching their potential academically. It is important that we know what it is like to be a child in our school at the moment and therefore encouraging to read ***“all pupils benefit from an ambitious curriculum and enjoy wider opportunities”*** and that ***“Pupils trust adults to listen to their concerns and to sort out any issues”***.

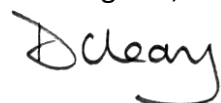
It is true that the inspectors did not see us at our very best. In the fourth week in January we were still at the peak time for high rates of staff absence due to COVID. On the days of the inspection we had very high levels of staff absence. The last two years have had such an impact on students and indeed us all, as you know only too well, so to have achieved a report as good as this at this moment in time, is something to be truly proud of. If we return to the Section 48 Inspection of RE and the Catholic Life of the School in 2019, we are reminded of where we were before COVID. Nothing in our approach or aspiration has changed in the intervening time other than a two-year pandemic.

In terms of areas that we see as priorities for improvement, it was gratifying to read that the inspectors agreed with our evaluation. This demonstrates how well we know our school. We will be continuing with our school improvement work and COVID recovery plan as intended.

Finally, I would like to thank the many parents who took time to give their thoughts and comments about their experience of the school through Ofsted’s Parent View. The lead inspector conveyed some of the lovely positive responses to us and it was a truly humbling and heartwarming experience.

If you would like to make any comments on the report or would like to ask any questions I would very happy to receive them. You can do so by clicking this link <https://forms.office.com/r/jdLUeYxrne>

Kind regards,



Mrs D Cleary
Headteacher

“How Good is the Good God”. St Julie.