



15 July 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

It is over four months since Ofsted visited us for a two-day Inspection on March 3rd and 4th.

At the end of Day 2, the Lead Inspector and his team of three inspectors, through careful analysis and moderation of a thorough evidence base, judged Priesthorpe to be 'Good' in all five aspects of the inspection framework (Quality of Education, Leadership & Management, Behaviour & Attitudes, Personal Development, and Sixth Form). As a consequence, our judgment for Overall Effectiveness was 'Good'.

Clearly, all present were delighted by the inspectors' findings and that the strengths and areas for development highlighted carefully matched those within our own Academy Self Evaluation Form. The Inspectors recognised the journey we are on, our achievements to date, and the values and behaviours which have underpinned these improvements.

An inspection report is normally released within two to three weeks of the date of an inspection. Having heard nothing for five weeks, I contacted Ofsted for an update. In response, I received a letter on 1 May which said that, following 'enhanced quality assurance', gradings provided at the end of our inspection had been changed. In four of the five areas of the framework, our grades had been reduced from Good to Requires Improvement. As a consequence, our Overall Effectiveness grade had changed from Good to Requires Improvement.

It goes without saying that receiving this news was bitterly disappointing.

For the following four weeks I worked very closely with Mark Williams, one of the Trust's Chief Education Directors, who was a Senior HMI for twelve years, on producing a detailed complaint to Ofsted.

On 26 June I received notification from Ofsted that our complaint had not been upheld. This outcome was then further challenged when our Trust's CEO met with OFSTED's National Director of Education and its Yorkshire, Humberside and North East Regional Director on 3 July. Despite strong representations, the outcome of this meeting was that our report would remain unchanged.

We firmly believe this is an unjust outcome. However, we must not, and will not, let this deviate us from what is a sustained journey of upward school improvement. We have fought long and hard, on a platform of strong principles, values and beliefs to reach this point and must continue to do so.

We absolutely believe we are a 'Good' school. A team of four highly experienced inspectors, including a Lead Inspector who had led on over 70 inspections and never had a judgment overturned, gathered extensive evidence over two days and arrived at the same collective conclusion.

The Co-op Academies Trust stands shoulder to shoulder with us as an Academy, in the resolute belief that Ofsted have misjudged Priesthorpe. The Trust has an unswerving belief that the quality of provision for our students is 'Good'. The Trust's CEO, Chris Tomlinson, has asked that I share the following with you:

"It goes without saying that we have an absolute belief that Priesthorpe is a Good school and, like the Principal, Senior Leaders and governors, we are hugely disappointed with the final inspection outcome and how it has materialised. It is vital that we do not let this impact the hard work that goes on every day in the Academy and that, with staff, governors, students and parents, we will work tirelessly to prove that this is a Good school which will carry on improving."



The news I am sharing with you will take time to digest and I know you will share our bitter disappointment. In situations such as this, the pain and sense of injustice are felt as a community as well as individually.

OFSTED today published the final version of the inspection report. It can be viewed [here](#).

Before you read it, please take time to read the comments below, for each of the four areas of the Ofsted framework where our grades were changed from those made by the Lead Inspector and his team of three inspectors. These comments had been given verbally at the final feedback session at the end of day 2 of our inspection, attended by our Vice Principal, the Trust CEO, the Trust West Yorkshire Chief Education Officer and me. The comments are transcribed, word for word, from that meeting. Please then compare these comments with the narrative in our inspection report. Only then will you be able to appreciate fully our bewilderment and sense of injustice.

Quality of Education:

- *'The provision is right for the students and is inclusive.'*
- *'I've only seen positive things over the two days of the inspection.'*
- *'In relation to developing History and Geography, the team agree the school has taken action to bring about change, replacing leaders, when needed.'*
- *'The school has responded well to the new framework'*
- *'Is the curriculum right for the school? Yes. Senior leaders know what to do and are committed to doing it. It has got breadth and is a really ambitious curriculum. I cannot see it not developing in the small number of subjects it needs to.'*

Sixth Form:

- *The provision is right for the students and is inclusive.'*
- *'The retention rate is strong from Year 12 to Year 13'*
- *'Strong careers guidance'*
- *'High levels of attendance; currently 94.9%'*
- *'Year 12 Work Experience; all students take part.'*
- *'The academy is working hard to raise aspirations and broaden the outlook of students through, for example, the 'Reach for Excellence' programme. 3 students have been offered places to read Medicine at university.'*

Behaviour and Attitudes:

- *'Year 7 pupils really like it here. They feel grown up. They love Maths and Science'*
- *'The school is very inclusive. The inclusion information provided is honest. It only excludes when it absolutely has to and tries to rescue these kids'*
- *'Fixed Term Exclusions are very low. There has only been one Permanent Exclusion in 8 years'*
- *'Staff meet students at the door in the morning and check in with them.'*
- *Corridors: 'Bottleneck; yes, it was busy, but it was orderly.'*
- *'Pupils want to learn.'*
- *'The Reflective Behaviour Centre is useful in helping to re-integrate pupils into mainstream lessons. It is supportive and reflective.'*
- *'The Academy doesn't shy away from challenging problems that happen out in the community. They are being both proactive and reactive to these issues.'*
- *'Very positive attitudes to learning in all but one lesson I visited.'*
- *'Behaviour is better than it was.'*



(NB: Ofsted January 2017: Personal development, behaviour and attitudes: 'Good'; Ofsted November 2012: Behaviour and safety of pupils: 'Good').

- *The determination of leadership to improve it is clear.*

Leadership and Management:

- *'Clear ambition of senior leaders*
- *'Strong relationships at all levels, where staff model positive relationships.'*

I hope the paragraph below, lifted directly from our complaint, reflect the sense of injustice we feel but at the same time highlight the journey we have been on and the values we have and will continue to hold at the heart of the work we do:

"Co-op Academy Priesthorpe has a well-established reputation for being an extremely inclusive school, with co-operative values and restorative practice at its core. At the time of Ofsted's inspection in March this year, it was at the most exciting stage in its achievement and improvement journey in its history:

- *two consecutive years of Progress 8 being in line with national figures (-0.07, -0.04)*
- *clear evidence of the impact of senior and middle leadership on underperforming subjects (for example, rapid improvement in Progress 8 in maths from -0.62 in 2016 to +0.24 in 2019), and the number of students on role at its highest ever.*
- *improving attendance and achievement for Disadvantaged and SEND students*
- *whole academy attendance at national figures*
- *fixed term exclusions significantly below national figures for the seventh year in succession (an average of 42 per year, in a school with circa 1150 students), 1 permanent exclusion in the previous 8 years*

The final feedback from Inspectors on Day 2 and their provisional judgments absolutely reflected the point we believe we are at in our improvement journey, and, critically, how and why we have arrived there. Elements of our inspection report leave us reading about a school we quite simply do not recognise.

I would very much welcome the opportunity to speak with any parents who would like to discuss our report's contents and also share with you more detail about our experiences with the inspection process. We will be hosting a meeting in our Main Hall at 5pm on Wednesday 29 July. Our Parent Governors will be attending and will be happy to respond to and questions you may have. In order for us to plan for the event and to ensure we can maintain social distancing guidelines, please can you email prie-info@coopacademies.co.uk if you would like to attend. Can you please title your email 'OFSTED meeting'.

Finally, our dedicated team of staff and governors and I will continue to work tirelessly to ensure we deliver a high-quality provision that supports our students in achieving excellent outcomes whilst growing into brilliant citizens of the future. We will continue to do this with humility and an unswerving optimism.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely

Martin Blacoe

Martin Blacoe
Principal