

11 February 2025

Dear Parents and Carers

On 12 November, Ofsted visited Chase High School. This was an ‘unannounced inspection’, which means that inspectors arrive without notice. The inspection was triggered by a historic safeguarding concern raised by the Local Authority. The Local Authority had already investigated this concern and undertaken a safeguarding review at the school. Although reassurances were given by the school during that review, and we were advised by the Local Authority that it was satisfied by our responses and would not be referring the matter to Ofsted, for some reason, that only the Local Authority knows, a referral to Ofsted was made.

Although any Ofsted inspection can be a daunting experience for schools, we were happy to share with the Ofsted inspectors exactly what we had shared with the Local Authority, which demonstrates our current comprehensive safeguarding practices. However, we were not prepared for what happened next.

We were hopeful that we would be treated with respect, fairness and professionalism. Sadly, this was not the case.

It is our opinion that the Ofsted team arrived with a predetermined hypothesis, for which they then sought to find supporting evidence. The inspection lasted three days, but early on the first day, both Mr. Suttanwood and I raised our concerns with the lead inspector, advising him that we believed that the team had come into the school with a set agenda. We continued to raise concerns throughout the inspection.

Additionally, our staff were not listened to, were spoken over and, in some cases, treated disrespectfully. I am reporting this first-hand, as I personally witnessed this. The lead inspector’s conduct in two meetings that I attended, was unacceptable. In the second meeting, he had to be reminded, by Mr. Suttanwood, that both the volume and tone of his voice was inappropriate. In our next meeting with him, he apologised for his actions. However, other staff members were left, not only frustrated by the lack of professionalism shown by some of the inspectors, but also distressed.

Let me be clear, we do not recognise the school portrayed in the report, nor did we accept its findings when we received the draft report in December. We, therefore, lodged a formal complaint with Ofsted, but unfortunately, when you complain about an Ofsted inspection, it is investigated by other Ofsted inspectors - there is no independent scrutiny or oversight. The complaints procedure has been publicly described by many as Ofsted ‘marking its own homework’. Therefore, notwithstanding that our complaint contained comprehensive and compelling evidence, including a 33-page report, eight emails attaching 77 documents and 39 staff statements, it was, very disappointingly, not upheld. To put this into context, in 2023/24, Ofsted closed 398 complaints from schools, yet only three led to an

overall change of judgement. That is 0.75%. There is a widely held view that the current complaint system it is not fit-for-purpose. Based on this data, I will let you decide.

Not only do we not recognise the school described in the report, but I would also say, based on the number of responses I received from my recent letters to yourselves, that you do not recognise this as the school you send your child to.

On 27 November 2024, I sent a letter to you asking for specific feedback. I quote from that letter '*I would like to hear from parents and carers about behaviour that their child/children may have witnessed, or been the victim of. In particular, feedback linked to discriminatory, homophobic, racist and/or misogynistic language.*' A contact email address was provided, and I received one reply.

On 8 January 2025, I wrote to you again asking for you to contact me if your child did not feel safe at school and/or did not have a trusted adult. I received three responses.

Additionally, since the inspection in November, the Trust has been undertaking regular pupil panel meetings. The overwhelming majority of pupils have stated that they feel safe at school. I would add that the Trust has been undertaking pupil panel meetings long before Ofsted visited. Such engagement with pupils is a vital part of our ongoing quality assurance process. At no point during those meetings did pupils disclose what is now being reported.

For wider context, two other Trust schools have also been inspected by Ofsted recently. I would like to quote from those reports:

Larchwood Primary School – *The trust, and the school, proactively look for ways to improve the provision on offer. The trust provides effective support to the school. It checks how well leaders are working towards key areas to improve.*

St. Martin's School (secondary) – *School leaders, including trust personnel, display an excellent knowledge of the school.*

Clearly the Trust knows, supports and challenges its schools. Why would Chase High sit outside of this? Additionally, the Trust's School Improvement Team, of which I am a part, is based at Chase High. We were part of the team that contributed to the school receiving a 'Good' outcome less than three years ago.

Since the inspection in November, we have enlisted the additional support of an external consultant. This is to provide a third-party, independent view, and to ensure that we are not looking at the school through 'rose tinted glasses'. The consultant is a current Ofsted inspector, a previous His Majesty's Inspector (HMI) and Department for Education (DfE) adviser, who has undertaken extensive work for many Trusts. To reassure you, he also does not recognise the school being described in the report.

This time last year, the Trust team was supporting a secondary school on Canvey Island. We were asked, by the DfE, to provide support, as the school had been placed into special measures by Ofsted. We provided this support for the Spring term. At the end of this support, Jonathan Duff, the DfE Regional Director said in the letter sent to the school's community:

"Following the concerns raised by Ofsted about the Cornelius Vermuyden school, I asked Discovery Educational Trust (DET) to provide urgent leadership and school improvement support for the spring term. Since then, DET has made significant changes and improvements around the school that have

made a positive difference. I am extremely grateful to the trust board and staff at DET for the interim help they have provided.

Again, to reassure you, the same team that supported Cornelius Vermuyden School, is now supporting and adding capacity to the Senior Leadership Team at Chase High. The quote from the Ofsted report 'The school's capacity to bring about the required improvements is weak', is unsubstantiated. Having appointed Mr. Suttwood as the Headteacher last year, he has done nothing but wholly commit and dedicate himself to Chase High and, specifically, to its improvement. He not only has my full support, but also the support of the entire Trust Board.

As with all schools, we know that there are areas for improvement. We know that our SEND provision needed to be reviewed, and this work was already in progress prior to the Ofsted inspection. A school improvement plan was, and has always been, in place. Such a plan is a core element of the leadership and management of every school in our Trust. This practice will not change. In fact, although we fundamentally disagree with the inspection outcome, we have already written and are enacting a 'Post Ofsted Action Plan', which has been approved by the Trust Board.

With regard to the 'excuse culture' portrayed in the report, it is not excuse-making to highlight outside influences and some of the challenges that the school faces. It contextualises the community that we serve. A community that, I believe, we serve well.

With this in mind, we are inviting you to a meeting at the school on **Thursday 13 February at 5.00pm**. The meeting will be held in the hall (please enter via the main reception) and will provide an opportunity for us to discuss the report and our plans with you. The meeting will be led by Mr. Suttwood, but I, members of the Trust team and some of our Trustees and Governors will also be present.

I have no doubt that, for most of you, the report and this letter will come as a shock, and for that I apologise. I fully understand and acknowledge that this is not what you want to be reading about your child's school. However, on Thursday, you will hear about the steps that we have already taken, and the ones that we will continue to take to ensure that Chase High is ultimately recognised as the school that it really is. You will also have the opportunity to ask any questions.

Today, Mr. Suttwood spoke to pupils about the Ofsted visit. In light of this, and conscious of space restrictions in the hall, Thursday's meeting is for parents and carers only. Thank you for your understanding.

I look forward to seeing you on Thursday.

Yours faithfully,



Mr. Ryan Duff
Chief Executive Officer
Discovery Educational Trust