

24 October 2014

Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP
Secretary of State for Education

By email: nicky.morgan@education.gsi.gov.uk
and nicky.morgan.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Mrs Morgan,

**Ofsted inspection of Trinity Christian School
- failure under Paragraph 5 of the revised Independent School Standards**

I write on behalf of the Governors of Trinity Christian School, an Independent School in Reading. Trinity has a strong Christian ethos and is designated by the DfE as a school with a religious character. We are a small school which provides a stable and caring environment, fostering high expectations of our pupils.

In particular, I wish to raise with you a matter of grave concern regarding Ofsted's recent decision to fail the school against the new requirements relating to *spiritual, moral, social and cultural development* in the revised Independent School Standards.

Ofsted inspection in November 2013

In November 2013, the school was inspected by Ofsted and rated "Good" in every category, with its provision for pupil's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development being deemed "excellent". In particular, the report stated:

"The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Every care is taken to provide pupils with plentiful opportunities to enhance their spiritual understanding and development through the biblically-based curriculum and daily Christian assemblies that are in keeping with the ethos of the school. As a result, pupils develop good levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. They learn well from biblical stories. They celebrate Christian festival days such as harvest thanksgiving and learn about different cultures and appreciate diversity, for example, through their close links with a school in Zambia and contacts in the local community. They are currently

*preparing for a concert in a local care home. **Pupils are well prepared for life in modern, multicultural, democratic British society through the teaching of the Christian principle to 'love thy neighbour' as found for example in the teaching of the biblical story of the Good Samaritan.** Pupils gain a practical understanding of public institutions and democracy through educational visits, for example to Windsor and through visits from the local fire brigade and local community nurses. They are making good progress in their personal development and in their behaviour.” [emphasis added]*

Ofsted inspection in October 2014

In July 2014 the school applied to the DfE to extend its age range to include pupils from 9 to 11. It was subject to an inspection in relation to this application on 7 October 2014. The inspection was therefore purely to determine whether the school should be permitted to take children older than its current age range.

Despite this, the inspection on 7 October focused predominantly on whether the school could demonstrate evidence of Paragraph 5 of the revised Independent School Standards, with regard to *spiritual, moral, social and cultural development*. We understand that the revised standards only came into force on 29 September and are held out as the Government’s response to radicalism and extremism.

The inspector had already viewed the school’s website and the curriculum which we had submitted to the DfE in July 2014. But she had determined that these provide insufficient evidence that we meet the requirements of Paragraph 5 and so the inspection was to determine whether the school was able to do so. The inspector sought evidence, particularly in relation to our curriculum but also through our extra-curricular activities and through questioning the staff.

The inspection particularly referenced 5(a) and 5(b)(vi). This dominated the inspector’s questions, requests for evidence and feedback. For your ease of reference, these provisions state:

5(a) “actively promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs”.

5(b) “ensures that principles are actively promoted which – (vi) encourage respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010”.

Surprisingly, at no point were any questions asked about other aspect of the curriculum or the quality of teaching assessed through lesson observations.

Various points were made by the inspector in the hearing of the Head and Deputy Head Teachers, which alarmed them regarding the future of the school. In expressing doubt over the school’s continued existence, the Inspector stated:

- That representatives of other faiths should be invited to lead assemblies and lessons in order for the school to demonstrate compliance with the Standards;
- That evidence needed to be provided, including within the curriculum, that the school “actively promoted other faiths”;
- That the school should actively promote the principles of the Equality Act 2010, that pupils must learn about people with protected characteristics and that the school must not give a viewpoint that certain lifestyles are wrong. Nor should the school promote a particular lifestyle; and
- That the promotion of a principle, namely the Christian principle that all people are equal before God and have inherent dignity as human beings, was not enough to demonstrate Paragraph 5(b)(vi).

We have since received an Advice Note from Ofsted stating that the school does not meet the new requirements for the spiritual, moral social and cultural development of pupils.

Prospect of closure

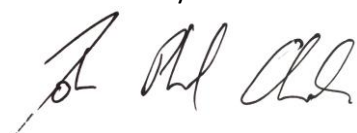
From November 2013 to October 2014 the school has continued the same provision for pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development which Ofsted adjudged excellent in November 2013. Yet, immediately following the introduction of the revised school standards, the school is threatened with the prospect of closure.

We cannot understand how such a change in thinking can take place within a year. It is an explicit aim of ours to encourage pupils to serve and respect other people, appreciate different cultures and ideas and equip them for life in society. But the comments made by Ofsted, as a result of the new regulations, undermine our aims and would prevent us from teaching in accordance with our Christian foundation.

As an independent school with a religious ethos, we understand that various exceptions exist in the Equality Act 2010 allowing the school to prioritise its Christian beliefs in the way it provides education. Furthermore, we understand that the Equality Act in fact excludes the school curriculum (indeed in *all* schools) from the principles of the Act. We are therefore extremely concerned about where the new school standards leave the protections afforded by the Equality Act and our school’s charitable objects as established in its trust deed.

We would be very grateful if you would look into this matter for us and review your decision regarding the new regulations.

Yours sincerely



John Charles
Chairman of Governors