

## INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

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### What is ISI?

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) was established in April 2000 according to principles agreed by the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Unity Committee in 1998. It is governed by a committee composed of representatives of the eight ISC Associations and is ultimately accountable to ISC. As the operationally independent arm of ISC, it inspects all the independent schools belonging to the associations which form ISC. These are the Girls' Schools Association (GSA), the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC), the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools (IAPS), the Independent Schools Association (ISA) and the Society of Headmasters and Headmistresses of Independent Schools (SHMIS). ISI also inspects schools in membership of The Council of British International Schools in the European Community (COBISEC). It publishes reports and advises the associations on whether schools meet the standards required for membership. Since the agreement in July 1998, ISI is recognised by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) as the agency responsible for the inspection of ISC independent schools and as such reports to the DfES on the extent to which schools meet statutory requirements.

Since September 2003, ISI has been a body approved for the purpose of inspection under Section 162 of the Education Act 2002. A sample of our inspections is monitored by Ofsted.

ISI is in partnership with the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) for the inspection of the National Boarding Standards. Under the terms of this agreement, CSCI inspections are co-ordinated with ISI inspections wherever possible. We have helped CSCI to recruit and train Boarding Sector Professional Inspectors, who are serving care staff from independent and maintained schools with boarding and who take part in CSCI boarding inspections.

ISI examines and reports on all provision for pupils under five years of age in its inspections. In doing so, we report on the same things as Ofsted do. Independent schools have to register all provision for children under the age of two with Ofsted's Early Years Directorate and will be inspected by them. Since Autumn 2004, provision for pupils under three has had to be registered, together with any day care provision for pupils of three to five which is not education. ISI will continue to inspect and report on all this provision. We are in discussions with Ofsted about whether ISI can take over this aspect of inspection for them, as we have the rest of school provision.

### What are the purposes of ISI inspection?

The prime purposes of inspection by ISI are to improve the quality of education provided by the schools involved, to raise the levels of achievement of their pupils and to confirm whether or not the school complies with the registration standards laid down by the DfES.

The inspection system is designed to provide objective and dispassionate reports that include judgements and recommendations which schools should use to improve their provision and achievement.

When a school applies from outside ISC to join one of the independent school Associations it needs to have a satisfactory ISI inspection report before gaining initial accreditation.

A satisfactory inspection report enables a school to be re-accredited as a member of its association (COBISEC, GSA, HMC, IAPS, ISA or SHMIS). Inspections normally occur every six years.

### **What does an ISI report look like?**

ISI reports follow a common format, and are divided into sections as outlined below:

#### 1. Introduction

#### 2. The Quality of Education

The Educational Experience Provided

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

#### 3. The Quality of Care and Relationships

The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

The Quality of Boarding Education

#### 4. The Effectiveness of Governance and Management

The Quality of Governance

The Quality of Leadership and Management

#### 5. Conclusions and Next Steps

Overall Conclusions

Next Steps

#### 6. Inspection Evidence

An inspection report is inevitably a "snapshot", a summary of what was observed during the inspection visit in the context of performance data from recent years. Inspectors can only report on what they have seen: if plans exist to replace an old gymnasium with an impressive new sports hall, the inspectors can only report on what they see in the gymnasium. On the other hand, it is not the role of an inspection report to demand that the school should spend vast sums of money on new facilities, although the inadequacies of existing facilities may be highlighted. The focus of an inspection report is on the quality of education provided; if the

pupils are making excellent progress and are being well taught the fact that the school's buildings may not be "state of the art" is of limited significance.

### **Who serves on ISI inspections?**

ISI inspection teams are drawn from a pool of serving or recently-retired independent school headteachers and senior teachers, Ofsted Registered Inspectors and retired HM Inspectors. All ISI inspectors have passed a special training course. Each inspection team is led by a reporting inspector who is normally a retired HMI, an Ofsted Registered Inspector or a very experienced serving or recently retired independent school headteacher.

### **How are parents and pupils involved in the inspection process?**

ISI has designed a questionnaire for parents which includes sections on academic matters, pastoral care, boarding (where applicable) and general issues. This is distributed in advance of the inspection to all parents. The completed questionnaires are sent confidentially in sealed envelopes to the reporting inspector for analysis. One section of the published report is entitled "Links with Parents and the Community". It includes comment on the information provided by the school for parents about their children's work and on opportunities for parents to become involved in the life of the school. This section includes a comment about whether the school meets the regulations about information for parents and the manner in which complaints are to be handled. In the latter case, inspectors comment on whether there is a suitable procedure properly implemented. It is not part of their role to endorse or criticise the actual outcomes.

Schools may decide whether or not to undertake a pupil survey in addition to the parental survey. This takes the form of a questionnaire. During the inspection inspectors closely scrutinise pupils' work, which is discussed with pupils. Inspectors also discuss other aspects of school life with pupils.

### **How is boarding inspected?**

The detailed inspection of boarding standards is undertaken by inspectors of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). All inspections are conducted by a CSCI lead inspector, assisted by one or more experienced senior boarding staff from boarding schools, specially trained and checked by CSCI, ISI and the Boarding Schools Association working together. These 'boarding sector professional inspectors' ensure that the rigorous checking of welfare, health and safety is informed by an understanding of the educational purposes of boarding.

Wherever administratively possible, CSCI and ISI inspections will be conducted together. Each will produce its own report, sent to all parents. Where joint inspection is not possible, ISI inspectors will not inspect the National Boarding Standards but will check whether schools have followed up the recommendations of the previous welfare inspection report.

In any case, ISI teams will always consider the impact of boarding on the educational development of the pupils. They will write about this in the sections on the Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils.

### **What if parents have concerns about their child's school?**

Most complaints or grievances about the school should be able to be resolved through the school's own procedures, involving the head in the first instance and then, failing a satisfactory resolution, the governing body of the school. Schools are now required to have and follow a published complaints procedure. The details of this can be found in [Part 3 of the Handbook](#).

If the school is about to be inspected, then parents may indicate any concerns in their responses to the parental survey, and can add any written comment. Inspectors must look into any strengths and concerns indicated by a significant number of parents and state their conclusions in the report. They will also indicate how positive or otherwise is the picture

presented by parents. The analysis of the survey, as well as any significant issues raised, are presented to the head at the beginning of the inspection.

Parents can address concerns related to the quality of education or the welfare or safety of pupils, by writing to Durell Barnes, Head of Communications, Independent Schools Inspectorate, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA, or email [durell@isinspect.org.uk](mailto:durell@isinspect.org.uk). Any concern will be passed in strict confidence to the reporting inspector, and copied to the DfES for information. However, inspectors may not investigate disputes about fees or specific complaints about the past.

At other times parents can contact the registration authority, the Department for Education and Skills. They should write to Margaret Pattinson, Deputy Registrar of Schools, DfES, Mowden Hall, Staindrop Road, Darlington, DL3 9BG (telephone 01325 392172, e-mail [Margaret.Pattinson@dfes.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Margaret.Pattinson@dfes.gsi.gov.uk)). ISI forwards letters expressing serious concerns to the DfES and places them on file for reference at a future inspection.

If the concerns relate to bullying or possible child abuse, then they can contact either the child protection unit of the Local Authority Social Services Department or Margaret Pattinson (see above). DfES and SSD have the power to investigate, where they consider children's welfare or safety to be at risk.

### **Will ISI ensure that the school is safe for my child?**

As already stated, inspectors are required to check that schools take proper precautions to ensure safety and welfare and point out any significant concerns to the school and indicate them in the report. In boarding schools, the local authority Social Service Departments are the main agencies to inspect and follow up matters of welfare. ISI inspectors check to see if any concerns raised in previous welfare reports have been addressed. Associations must check that any such weaknesses are dealt with and confirm this to the DfES, who have the power to intervene at any point. No report can guarantee that nothing will ever go wrong. However, hazards and concerns that are identified have to be dealt with by the school. Inspectors are not health and safety experts and do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety scrutiny.

### **What is done about the reports and their recommendations?**

ISI advises the Inspections Committee of each Association about the suitability for membership of each of that Association's member schools inspected. It also advises the DfES whether each school meets the statutory requirements. After receiving its report, each school has to inform the Association of the actions it intends to take to deal with any deficiencies or areas for improvement which are referred to in the report. The school also has the opportunity to comment on the findings and on the conduct of the inspection itself. This is a valuable part of ISI's quality assurance.

The Association reviews the report with the school's response and determines whether any further action is needed. In some cases, they may seek further assurances or may organise a visit to the school to check or guide. All this is carefully recorded and communicated to the DfES and ISI.

ISI also advises the DfES whether each school meets the statutory requirements. The DfES then writes to the school and asks for an action plan to deal with any shortcomings and checks to see that this action plan is satisfactory.

### **What if the school has serious weaknesses?**

That will be made clear in the report, just as reports will celebrate the strengths schools have. In such a case, the Association may require the school to have a follow-up inspection before reconfirming membership and could, if not satisfied that the school meets their standards, withdraw membership altogether. If the report indicates that a school is failing to provide an

adequate standard of education, welfare or safety, the DfES may ask HM Inspectors of schools to make a further visit to the school. In other cases involving welfare, health, safety or hygiene, they can call in other relevant agencies to inspect. If the school fails to improve, the DfES can initiate action to remove the school from the register and so stop it from operating. This is very rare in the case of ISC schools.

### **How does ISI monitor the quality of its inspections?**

By various means, both formal and informal.

Ofsted visit a sample of our inspections and check a sample of our reports and tell us of any strengths and weaknesses. The DfES monitor our reports and notify us of any discrepancies or issues. We ourselves visit a sample of inspections to check that they run properly. Our editors make sure that reports meet our standards and complete quality assurance checks of which the results are held centrally. Heads of schools complete evaluations of their inspections and comment to their Associations' inspections committees. Each team member is appraised by the reporting inspector and in turn completes an evaluation of the inspection. The Association's inspection committee consider each report and raises with the Chief Inspector any matters of concern about the inspection or report.

### **Can inspection reports help me to choose my child's school?**

Yes they can. They should indicate how well the education caters for pupils of different ability, how broad the education is, what the atmosphere of the school is like in terms of ethos, behaviour and relationships, and how well pupils are cared for. Reports, however, are no substitute for a personal visit to the school to evaluate for yourself the extent to which you think it will suit the talents, character and needs of your own child. Few, if any, even of the best schools are equally suited to every kind of pupil. Our reports are emphatically not designed to provide a ranking or league table of schools.

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