

School Statement Regarding the ISI Report

This text aims to provide readers with context about the UK inspection system in general, as well as specific context regarding our most recent inspection (October 2024) at both our schools Brockwood Park School and Inwoods Small School.

All schools in the UK get inspected regularly against an increasing number of regulations, either by Ofsted or by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). Under the current framework, our schools have routine inspections by the ISI every three years. Inspections are meant to support schools in their own self-evaluation efforts, and point out areas of improvement. Unfortunately, in recent times the approach to inspections has become increasingly narrow and punitive, which is reflected in both our own experiences and in the widespread public criticism of the inspection system in the UK over the past couple of years.

Regarding our most recent inspection that occurred in October 2024, we received highly positive feedback about most areas of both schools at the end of the inspection, some of which is reflected in the written report. Unfortunately, the report includes findings of unmet standards in the vast areas of Health & Safety and Fire Safety (and, as an automatic consequence of this, in the area of Leadership & Management as well) as inspectors had identified two issues during the inspection. Both of these issues were due to a different interpretation of the standards and, in our view, were minor issues not representative of systemic problems. We went through a complaint process with the ISI to contest these findings, but our complaint was not upheld.

Specifically, the unmet standards in the areas of Health & Safety and maintenance were due to the fact that some windows on the upper floor of the main house at Brockwood Park were not restricted. Inwoods has only ground floor buildings so this wasn't a concern at the primary school. Many schools in the UK consider it necessary to restrict windows to a maximum opening of 10 cm, but our own risk assessment, based on the age and type of our students at Brockwood, led us to believe that such a stringent measure (which has significant downsides such as decreased ventilation and increased risk of mould development) was not necessary in our case. Unfortunately inspectors had a different view on this.

The other issue was related to a small number of uncompleted actions on Brockwood's most recent fire risk assessment. We are talking about a very small number of additional signs (among hundreds of existing signs that clearly point out escape routes, fire doors, call points, etc.) that were deemed necessary and for which we had put in place alternative strategies. We want to stress that both issues did not in any way cause a risk to the wellbeing of our students as could be inferred from some of the sentences in the inspection report. Although these two issues relate to Brockwood and not Inwoods as both schools are linked, Inwoods is also considered to have not met all the standards as a result.

We feel it is very unfortunate that the punitive and high-stakes approach which is currently applied to school inspections places an incredible amount of additional strain and administrative work on small schools such as ours, and thereby deflects important resources away from the central work we are trying to do. Furthermore, the increasingly mechanical nature of inspection reports (using highly technical and standardised language) does not succeed in painting an accurate and representative picture of our school. We are fortunate to receive incredibly positive feedback from our students and their parents every year, which puts in perspective the rather limited view inspection teams can gather of the school when they come to visit the school for two days.