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20<sup>th</sup> January 2022

Dear parents and families

We are finally able to share the outcome from our recent inspection. Please find together with this letter, the report that will be published on the Ofsted website, within the next 8 days.

I am aware that some may find this report surprising, some may even think, disappointing. Our school was last judged 'Outstanding' in our previous Ofsted, which was 14 years ago. However, I would emphasise two important points with regard to our new grade of 'Good'.

Firstly, a rating of 'good' is very creditable and reflects the high standards maintained at St Vincent's.

Secondly, the rating needs to be viewed in the context of Ofsted's declared approach to its inspections. As recently as November 2021, Amanda Spielman, Ofsted Chief Inspector, stated that she expected the number of 'outstanding' schools in England to fall by roughly 50% following inspections.

According to Chris Russell, the watchdog's National Director of Education, "Some 'outstanding' schools which have improved since their last inspection may still be downgraded because the bar has been raised under the latest Ofsted inspection framework [...] if a previously 'outstanding' school receives a 'good' grade it doesn't mean that the school has declined in recent years, in fact the opposite can be the case".

Education has changed focus and direction since our previous inspection and so has the attention of Ofsted inspections. Typically, the inspections were, in the past, based on progress and attainment which we continue to believe to be the most important criteria by which St Vincent's should be judged. Inspections currently have a completely different focus which may explain the final grading for our school.

I would like to clarify here some points that you may question regarding the inspection and where the school is right now.

For many years, our school has been recognised locally and nationally for its academic results. In fact, in 2019, with the last published set of national data, our school was ranked in the top 3% of schools in the country. The journey our students make from starting point to end of their primary school years is exceptional year on year, with most of our children achieving well above national expectations. This has been and continues to be, our strength.

Unfortunately, the pandemic has severely curtailed our ability to evidence this journey, as national exams have been cancelled for two years now. Moreover, Ofsted advised that they would not take into account any school data (historical or internal) in the course of their inspection. This was disappointing because, although we were able to prove that many of our children have progressed, from a starting point below national standards at Reception to gaining access to elite secondary schools due to their high attainment at the end of Year 6, we were told Ofsted would not be looking at progress or standards in the new framework.

Therefore, we were mainly judged on the children's broad depth of knowledge, equally on all subjects. So, for example, whereas we believe, in order for children to succeed to the best of their abilities, the main emphasis should be on core subjects (Mathematics, Reading, Writing, Phonics and R.E.), we are now expected to balance equally learning within all subjects. For instance, we were advised that our children should know in depth different composers throughout the times and be able to discuss differences and similarities on music and art movements. Our children were asked by the inspectors to discuss the pointillism technique from different artists. Although children were able to demonstrate and show this technique, their knowledge was not considered strong enough, when comparing artists, to be deemed outstanding. This does not mean our children did not learn about key people in art or music, but it means we need to deepen their learning, particularly developing their long term memory. Our relevant subject leaders have already put the wheels in motion in those areas.

Although the report highlights how the inspectors reached their decision, I was able, together with Mrs Hall, to observe discussions between inspectors and wanted to share with you some of the findings that have not been put into the report.

All of our subject leaders were praised for their passion, commitment and strong leadership skills, with some comments like: "Very sharp", "Strong subject knowledge", "Walking, talking, Phonics guru", "Music is impressive", "Exceptional subject leader".

Inspectors were very impressed by pupil attitudes and maturity, and described their engagement and enthusiasm in lessons as exceptional. Inspectors had the opportunity to talk to pupils in groups, during their lessons, at break and lunch times and their dedication and love for the school was seen as impressive.

Throughout the inspection the children shared that they feel safe; they could name trusted adults in school who they could turn to for help and felt supported in their learning and development.

I would also like to explain the delay in sharing the result of this Ofsted inspection with all of you. After reading the first draft, I had some misgivings about the wording of the report, although I did not intend to contest the outcome. I agree that St Vincent's is a Good school if one follows the criteria on the new Ofsted framework, although, I still consider it exceptional based on the results we consistently achieve. Nevertheless, I was and indeed remain disappointed with the narrative in the report. Many of the statements are generic and not personal to our school, hence us trying to contest some of its details. Having said all this I, of course, have respect for the Ofsted body and accept its recommendations, which we have already started implementing in our school.

Therefore, while we have been in correspondence with Ofsted, I decided to hold off communications with parents. Had I advised that I was questioning certain aspects of the report, this might have resulted in unnecessary speculation, which would not have been healthy or helpful to our school. Moreover, we were bound to confidentiality by Ofsted, and obliged not to discuss any details of the report. I hope you understand my stance on this matter.

Inevitably, the school's first Ofsted report for 14 years will give parents food for thought. However I would ask you to consider the following important points.

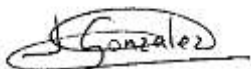
- If you value our school because we consistently achieve excellent progress for all our children, no matter their starting point, then St Vincent's is still the right school for you.
- If you value our school because every child is cared for individually and personally, then St Vincent's is still the right school for you.
- If you value our school because we are a strong community, where governors, staff, parents and children have a strong voice on their education, then St Vincent's is still the right school for you.
- If you value our school because we deliver a curriculum deeply rooted in the Catholic values underpinning all we do, then St Vincent's is still the right school for you.

During the two days of inspection, the children's comments to the visitors made me feel exceptionally proud. Equally, the feedback from parents was very good and it was clear that many of you value our ethos and nurture of your children.

I would like to personally thank the team of dedicated staff in school and our voluntary Governing body. The opportunities they provide, their leadership and teaching is truly remarkable.

I hope you find this letter reassuring and helpful.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mrs Gonzalez', with a horizontal line underneath.

Mrs Gonzalez  
Headteacher