

OPEN LETTER FROM A PARENT

29th January, 2018

I write this in support of your response to Ofsted. I am the parent of four children, all of whom have been through, or had experience of, the state education system.

The first attended two schools rated “good” with “outstanding features” by Ofsted. My daughter is dyslexic, throughout her education she has struggled with a lack of appropriate support, and she has been penalised continually in examinations for poor spelling. The time and effort invested into written work, compared to other students without learning difficulties, was not reflected in the marks received. My daughter achieved good results at GCSEs through determination and very hard work. For many years this only served to make my daughter feel inadequate in an educational setting, and to lower her self-esteem and self-belief.

My second also attended schools rated “good” by Ofsted. Being tested by an Educational Psychologist for dyslexia, my son was rated in the top 2% for his IQ. He never truly engaged with the education system, seeing it as a waste of time. Once asking “why do we go to school for five years when the GCSE syllabus is only for 2 years, and that’s what they test us on?” He managed to achieve a total of 11 GCSEs at grade C and above with very little effort.

My third child is also dyslexic and attended a total of three schools. The first school rated as “good” by Ofsted. At Key Stage 1 he achieved 2b in Mathematics & P8 in English. Neither the classroom teacher or the SENCO, when asked, knew what a score of P8 meant. In year 3 my son was made to work with the year below within the same classroom as his peers. He chose to work on a table away from other students. When I asked him why he did this, his reply was “because I have to work with the year below and everyone laughs at me because I am stupid!”

He also started resisting going to school and said on numerous occasions he “wanted to go home, he wanted to go back to heaven!” My son was 7 years of age. My son was tested for dyslexia (paid for privately), he also scored in the top 2% for his IQ. I moved my son to another school rated “good” by Ofsted. The school built his confidence by giving him achievable tasks, he went from sitting under a window calling himself stupid to singing a solo in front of 120 people. The head teacher Mr C. made the biggest commitment to my son:

“I will show him what he can do, not what he can’t”

He was true to his word. In year 7 he then attended a school rated “good” by Ofsted. This school was chosen for the excellent lead SENCO. The school then went into special measures and the SENCO was replaced. In 3 years of attending this school my son was achieving lower grades than that of primary school. Despite numerous complaints, his needs were never addressed. One teacher made false allegations against him regarding behaviour, although he never had a detention or letters home. Two teachers even recommended I remove him from their school. He would come home at the age of 16, burst into tears and ask why he was so stupid! No suitable alternative

could be found. My son left with GCSEs graded D and below. He never attended the school prom! He suffers from low self-esteem, struggles in group learning and often will not participate in educational settings. It is this experience that has made me lose faith in education

My fourth child currently attends Gloucestershire International School. She previously attended another state school in year 7. She found it difficult to settle and in the spring term also discovered she was not being given the support required. My daughter is very happy at school and is delighted she now has positive friendships. All of the schools mentioned above complied with safeguarding and whilst I acknowledge these are necessary standards, even when they are in place it is was not a guarantee for the welfare or protection of the child.

I, as a parent, recognise that in the Principal of Gloucestershire International school is the same quality in that of Mr C. These are people who see the whole child and make the system work for that child. The child's well-being is of paramount importance, for then education can truly begin. My daughter reports that the work is becoming progressively more challenging. The Wilderness Centre provides release from stresses of the classroom where children work together, problem-solving by dam building, and creating dens and bonfires. This type of education and environment is invaluable not only for the mental well-being, but for learning to work as a team, problem-solving, communication, and learning to take safe risks through play.

My experience of education is not to value the boxes ticked or approved by Ofsted, but to value those whose inspiration is to open the minds and hearts of others, for the benefit of the individual and the lives they touch. I am grateful to Dan & Sophie Sturdy for their generosity and the opportunities given to my daughter, and for finally having a child who is happy at school!!

Written by a parent of Gloucestershire International School.
Some information has been redacted.

