



**Leadership Team:**

Barry Doherty (Headteacher)  
Natalie Hancock  
Alan Trainer  
Daniel Gent  
Yvette Armistead  
Lisa De Bruyn

Friday 23 June 2023

Dear Parents and Carers

I do hope that you have found time to read and absorb the Ofsted report, sent to all families yesterday. Much of what follows will make much more sense once you have read that report in full.

It is fair to say we could not have hoped for a better outcome with Ofsted concluding that, *'There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a graded inspection now.'*

I ought to share with you the fact that just five percent of schools who receive an ungraded inspection end up with this outcome. We are thrilled, pleased and very excited. The visit and the report represent confirmation that our school continues to improve and is on course along its ambitious journey from being a good school to becoming a truly great, or 'outstanding' school.

On 4 and 5 May, the inspection team saw us at our best and whilst a straightforward 'good' outcome would have resulted in an inspection in about four years' time, this outcome means we shall be welcoming a full inspection in under two years. More on this later in my letter.

I was asked many questions about our school during the inspection. I was very clear then and now where our excellence lies and where we need to improve further. In fact, you may recall that [I wrote to you two weeks before our visit](#) took place and set out those areas where we are great and those areas where we need to be better. Rather than repeat myself I urge you to go back to that letter and re-read material that is as accurate and relevant now as it was earlier this year.

### *Our Intrepid Voyage as a School*

I want to use this extended letter with you to set out where we are as a school in a very open manner. I like to use the metaphor of us all being hands on deck and that the success of any voyage or complex sailing ship being dependent on whether the entire crew plays their part.

The powerful tailwinds that accelerate and lie behind the school's improvements and strengths are as follows:

- (1) **The students:** I guess I would say this wouldn't I but... Chippy students are wonderful and every visitor that ever spends time here leaves with a fabulous impression of their confidence, happiness, cooperative spirit, commitment, supportiveness and kindness. Our students, your children, are great and it is why so many of us love working at the school because every day we get to work alongside great young people who will go on to be great adults. When I stand on the door each break and lunch to meet and greet hungry students, I often feel like I have the best job in the world.



*'Pupils share school leaders' high expectations for behaviour.  
Pupils rarely encounter bullying behaviour in school.'* (Ofsted, May 2023)

- (2) **The staff:** CNS is filled with extremely experienced and dedicated people in every part of the school: site, finance, technicians, exams, data, attendance, information technology, cleaning, catering, safeguarding, special educational needs, pastoral care and teaching staff. We are lucky to retain and attract the very best staff so that we can ensure your children have highly effective and specialist teachers in all subjects.

*'All staff are highly ambitious for pupils and support them to benefit from a rich academic experience and a wide array of extracurricular activities.' 'As a result, all pupils achieve highly across the curriculum.'* (Ofsted, May 2023)

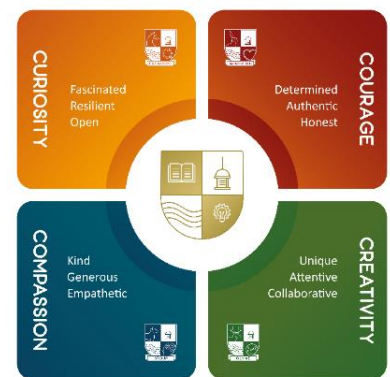
- (3) **Teaching, learning and assessment:** We have clear, understood and consistently applied teaching, learning and assessment principles - based on our high-TEMPO model that stands for task design, explanations, modelling, practice and oracy. The accuracy of teacher assessment in key stages 4 and the sixth form in recent years has enabled students to receive bespoke revision programmes that help each one to overcome difficulties and maximise their potential – recent results illustrating this perfectly.

*'All staff feel empowered, through high-quality training, to do their best for every pupil. There is an established culture of teachers supporting each other and sharing their expertise.'* (Ofsted, May 2023)

- (4) **Student numbers:** Our intake number has risen each year and we shall again welcome a record number of students to our school in September. Whilst this is nice, it also means that we can 'afford' to continue offering a broad and balanced curriculum at a time when *all* schools are under immense financial pressure. We offer the full National Curriculum for all and continue to offer the full suite of GCSE and A levels. As you know, this has meant we have been able to invest in the building, in IT, in social spaces and elsewhere so that we can, quite literally, build a great school with superb facilities (e.g., new sixth form suite, new dining hall, main hall and brand-new computers and screens) for those great students and staff.

*'Pupils enjoy coming to this welcoming and friendly school where they thrive in its safe and supportive environment.'* (Ofsted, May 2023)

- (5) **Our values and beliefs:** It is often debated how non-denominational schools can unite a wide group of people with different backgrounds and values into a coherent community that is committed to the same principles. We have thought very carefully about this over a period of time and you will be aware that we celebrate the values of compassion, courage, creativity and curiosity; alongside the goal that everyone belongs and everyone achieves. These are simple, unambiguous aspirations that successfully capture who we are and what we want to be in a way that we can all embrace.



*'Leaders' work to develop pupils' character is strong.' 'Pupils learn positive character traits through a well-structured programme.'* (Ofsted, May 2023)

- (6) **Student behaviour and attitudes:** The vast majority of students behave respectfully and with great kindness at all times. The vast majority of lessons are able to progress without any interruption. We have the lowest number of suspensions in the school's history – and this is at a time when our expectations have never been higher. We know that some students and some parents or carers find our expectations to be very demanding but we are clear that the best schools, the greatest schools, do not pick and choose high standards; they have to be everywhere and at all times in order to build that routine culture of being the best we can possibly be. The knock-on effect of having students who are like this can be seen in the thriving student leadership programmes (for example, the lauded Ambassador Scheme), very low staff turnover, the eagerness of new staff to join CNS, the wonderful relationships between staff and students, and the vast number of trips and visits that take place at our school – like last night's year 11 prom and Monday's year 11 visit to Thorpe Park...

*'...pupils develop a sense of responsibility and learn how to maintain respectful relationships.'* (Ofsted, May 2023)

In contrast, our voyage is slowed or buffeted by the following headwinds:

- (1) **Student absence:** The success of our students in recent years is closely tied to their excellent attendance. For example, students in the current and previous year 11 cohorts had and have the best attendance of all year 11s in local schools. However, attendance amongst our younger students is, by comparison, poor and one simply cannot be our best self if we miss too many lessons and have little continuity of education. You will be aware that I have [written to you](#) about this before, and whilst the schools that most rapidly return to pre-COVID attendance levels will soar in the years to come, the opposite is also true. Five years ago, as many as two hundred students at CNS secured 100% attendance each academic year - this year it will be about thirty students - that's just three percent of all students.
- (2) **The influence of social media:** On balance, my colleagues and I recognise that social media is, for many students, the most destructive part of their life. This is particularly sad given that it is something that adults can do something about *if we are determined to do so*. You may recall I wrote to you about this in December (on the back of the Channel 4 Kate Winslet award-winning drama, [I Am Ruth](#)) - I know that my comments resonated with many of you. The impact of social media on student absence, anxiety, harassment and student relationships is all too obvious. Every day (and sometimes all day), my colleagues and I are reacting and responding to its use and misuse outside school hours - and see the effects it has on the confidence, happiness and wellbeing of a small but significant and growing number of children in our school. We see the sadness and misery of its victims, the exasperation of their parents and carers when lives are turned upside down, and an all-round frustration that there is no magic wand to make it all go away. In some ways we equate the availability of mobile phones and social media to youngsters as akin to throwing them the keys to a car with the expectation that all will turn out okay...

*'Pupils rarely encounter bullying in school.' 'A few pupils are affected by ongoing friendship disputes, particularly online. Leaders are addressing this and supporting pupils to develop more mature and appropriate attitudes to social media use.'* (Ofsted, May 2023)

### **From a Good to a Great School**

In [my whole school assembly and tutor time activities](#) in the week after Ofsted (called 'The Sum of our Parts'), I deliberately drew attention to some of the greatest human achievements in history. This was so that I could emphasise that the greatest achievements rely on the commitment and collaboration of an entire community and not the few. This was no coincidence of course and I wanted to plant the seed with them and you at that time to begin thinking about the next stage of our journey as a school. In short, it needs ALL OF US - every single member of staff, student, parent and carer.

### **Great Staff**

Yesterday, I asked colleagues to think about their own contribution to our school in terms of what they currently do and ought to be **maintained**, what needs to be **improved**, and what has to **change**. I can assure you that we are not going to be sitting back and instead we have begun to sharpen our thinking about how we can directly contribute to the establishment of a truly great school at CNS. Great schools are filled with great staff who are prepared to be supported and challenged.



### **Great Students**

At the right time we shall also invite students to ask the same kinds of questions. Whilst every student has things they might maintain, improve or change, the ratios of all three are different for all students. Some students need to improve or change very little, others a great deal. We cannot make them but we can try to engage, inspire and motivate them to do so. Great schools are filled with great students who are prepared to be supported and challenged.

### **Great Parents and Carers**

But the journey will falter if we stop there and that is why it also falls on you as parents and carers. You are not passive observers or mere customers; we are in this together and we know that the schools who are closest to their community thrive more than others. Whether its routines for home learning like homework, reading and revision; behaviours and attitudes; the use of social media or attendance – what needs to be maintained, improved or changed? The timing is great and allows us all to go into the summer with a common goal to refresh, re-set and resume the journey as a community. Great schools are filled with great parents and carers who support and challenge.

### **School Improvement Planning**

In the coming weeks, you will hear more from me about the future and ways in which you can get involved. In the first instance we have identified the following areas that will be our priority in the next few years as we look forward to the next Ofsted inspection.

Beneath the goal **'everyone achieving'**, our emphasis will be broad, but with a particular emphasis on: the provision and classroom adjustments for children with diverse and special educational needs; entirely closing the gap between the outcomes of the most and least disadvantaged students; ensuring we provide more opportunities for students to think deeper and harder for longer; extending how and when students read for pleasure and independence; and ensuring that students' engagement, enjoyment and success is equally high in all subjects, every single day.

Beneath the goal **'everyone belonging'**, there will continue to be many threads, but with a special emphasis on: minimising the negative impact of social media on students' happiness and welfare; improving individual and overall attendance across the school; and extend leadership opportunities for our students.

### **And finally...**

We are not going to be driven by the goal of being graded 'Outstanding'. What we have here instead is a sense that we shall continue on a journey or voyage together. If it coincides with that outcome then that will be lovely, but if we are all committed to the journey of good to great improvement it will matter very little if an inspection team confers that judgement on us in a few years' time. It's the journey and not the destination that matters.

Thank you for bearing with me and I do hope you have found this longer than normal letter to be frank, exciting and ambitious. We approach the summer holidays and we have much to be pleased with and thankful for these last few years - but we also have a chance to go again and will do so with renewed rigour and vigour. Our best days lie ahead and there is much to do.

Yours faithfully



Barry Doherty  
Headteacher