

YDA Complaint to Ofsted

We made a formal and comprehensive complaint to Ofsted following the inspection, focusing particularly on the process and the lead inspector's conduct.

Our complaint covered the following areas:

1. Safeguarding

We felt that the inspection process did not consider a full range of evidence of the school's safeguarding culture and procedures. Our Designated Safeguarding Lead, Katrina Watson, was ill with COVID-19 throughout the inspection. While the inspector was able to speak to her on the phone, she was unwell and unable to access materials held securely at school. Also, the report does not show discretion for the fact that we were in the process of migrating to a secure digital system for recording safeguarding concerns and actions.

The Chair of the YDA Advisory Board, a former Ofsted inspector, is trained as a Safeguarding Governor and in Safeguarding Supervision. She has supported Ms Watson in her role as DSL over the past two years, including an audit of safeguarding in October 2020 and termly supervision meetings, the last taking place in October 2021. Arrangements had been made for her to speak with the lead inspector on the final morning of the inspection, but he declined to speak with her or consider evidence of her supervision of safeguarding at YDA. The lead inspector made dismissive, demeaning and sexist/ageist remarks about her.

The lead inspector's behaviour towards the school trustee with responsibility for safeguarding was also rude, dismissive and sexist/ageist. The trustee tried to attend a meeting at YDA on the final morning of the inspection, but was dismissed from the room by the lead inspector. This trustee is an experienced school governor and government solicitor, who felt that his behaviour and comments were "autocratic, chauvinist, ageist and discriminatory."

2. Fire Safety

We feel that the inspection report misrepresents the nature of the suggestions recommended in a risk assessment we commissioned in September 2020, which was undertaken by Adrian Quintao, IFE Registered Fire Risk Assessor. This was a full fire-safety risk assessment that concluded no major improvements were needed. There were a number of minor suggested improvements. Some of these had been actioned, but others were still outstanding. We recognise that this falls below best practice and have immediately actioned all suggestions. Adrian Quintao also conducted another full fire-safety risk assessment in the immediate aftermath of the inspection. We sent his report to Ofsted and have shared it with you.

3. Discretion for transition as schools recover from the COVID-19 pandemic

Ofsted guidelines suggest that inspectors use their discretion in regards to transition measures as schools recover from the impact of the pandemic. The lead inspector was surprised that the school continued to promote mitigating strategies to prevent the spread of COVID-19, commenting that "Covid is over in most education settings." We felt that there was little discretion shown for transition in the report's criticism of careers advice, technology education and subject-specific continued professional development for academic teachers.

Careers:

During the inspection, the inspector was shown a PSHE curriculum that included the following units:

Year 8: aspirations, alternative career choices, the world of work

Year 9: employability, sources of career advice in the performing arts and alternative careers, including students registering with and using Careerpilot, an impartial online careers service designed for 13-19-year-olds, with the Gadsby benchmarks in mind. The current Year 9 registered with and began to use Careerpilot in October 2021.

Year 10: preparing for the world of work

Year 11: recognising and celebrating success, transition and new opportunities, aligning actions with goals.

In addition, all KS4 students have individual meetings with the Head of Dance and Academic Director to discuss their options and routes beyond YDA; a member of staff has the dedicated role of supporting students and parents through the process of applying for their next place of study in Year 11.

The inspector advised that impartial careers information must be delivered by an independent, external advisor, preferably face-to-face. The inspector did not recognise Careerpilot as an acceptable transition provision.

Technology:

During the inspection, the inspector was informed that ICT was introduced as a discrete subject at KS3 in September 2019; this was ‘paused’ in March 2020 when the school switched to a full remote learning curriculum. Throughout the period of remote learning, students were offered a full timetable of live lessons using computer technology, primarily through Google Classroom; all students’ digital literacy and ICT knowledge developed hugely – it was inherent to delivery of every aspect of the curriculum. In this specialist school’s context, while students did participate in daily dance classes via Zoom, this aspect of the curriculum was most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The loss of live dance training, also had most impact on students’ well-being and mental health. On the return to school, delivery of an enhanced dance curriculum was identified as a priority in the recovery curriculum, as well as the core academic subjects. In planning the transition/recovery curriculum, leaders bore in mind the abundance of technology education offered during the period of remote learning and the relative paucity of dance education. Consequently, the decision was made to enhance dance provision from the spring of 2021 and to reintroduce Computing as a discrete subject in summer 2022, with particular emphasis on coding; from March 2021, digital literacy and ITC were promoted through other academic subjects, particularly Mathematics, where a variety of computer programmes are utilised.

Following the inspector’s advice that he would not consider provision before the pandemic, during remote learning or show discretion for transition provision, we decided to bring forward plans to reintroduce computing as a discrete subject to January 2022.

Subject-specific continued professional development for academic teachers

The inspector did not consider CPD programme in place before the pandemic or the training that members of staff received in mental health through the pandemic. We also felt that the information-gathering process was impaired as when canvassing staff on subject-specific professional development, the inspectors did not speak to the maths teacher, the science teacher or the lead English/history teacher about their CPD or membership of professional subject-specific organisations. Any CPD undertaken by dance staff was not taken into consideration.

4. We also complained about the fact that the Ofsted inspection process excludes any ‘deep dive’ of the specialist subjects at a specialist school. Although the lead inspector visited one ballet class and one musical theatre class for a few minutes each, neither inspector had any in depth discussion with dance staff, including the Head of Dance.

5. Conduct

In addition to our complaint about the lead inspector’s conduct toward the Chair to the Advisory Board and one of our trustees, we also complained that his conduct had fallen below the standards in the Ofsted Code of Conduct in several areas:

- Unprofessional and ableist comments made to senior members of staff during a difficult and stressful inspection, when the SLT had been open about the upset and anxiety they were feeling
- Dismissive and sexist language used regarding female members of staff who work for the Department for Education
- Making a racially insensitive and discriminatory comment to a YDA student who is from an ethnic minority background

Ofsted formally responded to our complaint with a detailed letter from a Senior Inspector on Monday 1st March – none of our complaints about the process of the inspection were upheld. Regarding our complaints about inspector’s conduct, the Senior Inspector wrote:

“I am sorry to hear of these concerns. Ofsted's approach to handling any concerns about conduct is to refer them to the inspector's regional business manager to take forward as part of our internal contract management arrangements. I can confirm that your concerns have been passed on in this way. As such, it would not be appropriate to comment further on the outcome of this process. However, I can reassure that inspectors are required to complete mandatory training on equalities before they are able to inspect for Ofsted and that this training must be renewed periodically.”