

Parents of Children of Clarity Independent School
c/o Andrew Fowler
4 Little Fields
Danbury
Essex

Mr R Holloway
Head of SEND Strategy and Innovation
Essex County Council

10th March 2023

Dear Mr Holloway / Mrs Robinson,

RE: Clarity Independent School, Sandon, Essex – Ofsted Report Sept 2022

I am writing on behalf of the parents of the children of Clarity School further to the Ofsted Inspection in September 2022, and the “inadequate” rating the school received. We recognise that you are not Ofsted and you cannot comment on them, but would hope that you will agree to work with us to understand our parents views and why they are important to the long term future of the school.

As parents of neuro-diverse children with ASD, we have all experienced significant challenge when it comes to finding a suitably nurturing, caring and sustainable educational environment for our children. We collectively agree that Clarity Independent School has achieved this above and beyond other educational establishments that we have experienced and feel aggrieved that the school has received what we consider to be an inaccurate, unfair and unrepresentative grading. We have all battled with the challenges presented by sending our children to state schools ill-equipped to support their SEN, and we are all now benefitting from the calmer, safer and more nurturing environment provided by Clarity that is transforming the lives of our children.

The Ofsted inspection took place in September 2022, 4 days after our children returned to school. For many children, returning to school after the summer holidays is an exciting time to re-unite with their friends and make new friends. For children with ASD this time is often filled with a heightened state of anxiety, apprehension, and worry. One of the first points that we would therefore like to raise relates to the timing of the inspection which we feel was wholly inappropriate.

In the report, our children have been described as using violent language and expressing extreme views. We do not consider this to be a fair and reasonable representation of our children and have had no school reports, discussion or evidence of such language or views expressed at all. We reject the assertion that they use violent language and have expressed extreme views and would ask that evidence of this is provided to us as parents.

It has been detailed in the report that the School’s preferred method of managing such behaviour is through reflective discussion and that this leaves the children *‘feeling confused as to what is acceptable in everyday life.’* However, as parents we all agree that a neuro-diverse child who is displaying a heightened sense of anxiety and thus

more susceptible to such behaviour would absolutely not benefit from immediate correction or indeed punishment, and that the school is following a process that works. The school's reflective approach and use of sensory areas to restore our children to a regulated state of mind is one that we support. While this may be at odds with Ofsted's preferred route to punish, we consider that Ofsted's methodology is only appropriate in a neuro-typical environment and should not be utilised in a SEN environment. Rather than focus on ticking regulatory boxes, Ofsted should recognise the school's success and mark their score up not down. We collectively support the school and their judgement around the handling of meltdown situations / poor behaviour.

Following the inadequate rating, the Essex SEN team chose to set about contacting all of the parents to advise that the school was "running out of money" and "under the threat of closure" and that they would "support us in relocating your child". This was unwelcome and created unnecessary concern and panic among us parents who feel our children are better served remaining at the school. It also demonstrated a lack of engagement with the parents and consideration for what we believe is best for our children, and indeed a lack of consideration of our views that should have been fairly represented in the Ofsted report. It is our collective view that our positive views were overlooked in favour of the Ofsted inspectors 2-day whirlwind review.

While we accept that the school needs to review certain procedures and guidelines in order to ensure they conform with government protocol, we absolutely do not share the Ofsted inspector's view that this school is in any way inadequate and indeed take the opposite stance, believing that the school is a shining light in the troubled world of SEN provision.

We urge you to take note of our views and position and would encourage you to continue to appropriately support this school by making it available to the vast number of children in Essex who are in need of specialist provision. Taking heed of Ofsted's report and subsequent action that might lead to the closure of the school, could significantly disrupt the lives of our children and we feel would be grossly negligent.

As such, we would ask for your support in 3 ways:

1. By continuing to work with us as parents to support the school by continuing to offer children places.
2. To listen to our parents' views and take an objective stance on Ofsted's views.
3. Through trusting our parent views and our belief that this school is the right environment for the long-term benefit of our children who ultimately rely upon Essex County Council to make decisive and informed decisions.

We understand that Ofsted have a job to do. But we as parents have a job to do to ensure that our children are able to continue to thrive in this school. We are committed to working with you and would be open to further discussion around how we can work collaboratively to achieve our objective as parents and your objective as the Essex SEN team committed to the best outcome for our children.

Yours Sincerely

Parents of Clarity Independent School

This letter has been written by Andrew Fowler. If you are in agreement with the content and would like to sign this as a show of support for the school, please do so below. It is Andrew's intention to present this to Essex County Council's SEN team in March 2023

Name: Andrew Fowler

Date: 10/3/2023