

M.

The  
McAuley  
Catholic High School  
and Sixth Form  
DONCASTER

The McAuley Catholic High School & Sixth



**March i88**  
**Measurement**

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I often reflect upon a question a former Chair of Governors asked me on my very first day as Head at another school; "How will I know that staff, parents and students like you?" I replied, that I wasn't aware that headship was a popularity contest.

I am reminded of that on occasion; when some colleagues strike as part of national action and I'm told that "they're just avoiding work!"

When, as a matter of routine, the Local Authority issue penalty notices for unauthorised attendance, I'm accused of "being heartless and uncaring". When parents appeal against my decision to permanently exclude a pupil and I'm told that "I have failed their child!" When I close the school because of snow and I'm told that "a couple of snowflakes didn't stop them from getting to work".

Most of this issue was going to explain the 17 factors that I have to measure when looking at snow lying on the ground (hence GROMET) but recent tragic events seem to be more pressing. I'm referring, of course, to the death of Ruth Perry, the Head at Carshalton Primary who took her own life after the visit of OFSTED in January.

The story has been all over the news but a reflection I read on Saturday morning summed it up. It is written by a parent of a child in the school.

"This week we learned the horrific, unimaginable truth. Ofsted had downgraded the school (my children go to) from "outstanding" to "inadequate", purely on what its inspectors judged to be failures in relation to safeguarding. The report made abundantly clear that this was the responsibility, and failure, of the senior leadership. That, of course, meant Mrs Perry. This destruction of her professional reputation in one word had broken her – put her under "intolerable pressure", according to her sister, Julia.

As parents, when told by the government's schools inspectorate that there are "serious" safeguarding concerns, we must take such a judgment seriously. Yet, as parents, our eyes have also now been opened to the realities of Ofsted inspections, and the dreadful toll they take on hardworking, dedicated, caring teachers all over the country.

The outpouring of grief, and of despair and fury from teachers on social media, has been staggering. These aren't just teachers, of course – they are people, and so many of them have suffered mental torment because of the stresses of Ofsted. And if you think that's weak, well, you've clearly never had to spend much time looking after young children. These are strong, resilient people who take on the burden of one of society's toughest and most valuable services.

She continued in frighteningly honest terms...

I can't lie: Ofsted's inspection verdict of outstanding was an attraction for us to send our children to Caversham. As parents we must also be honest and ask ourselves whether if Mrs Perry were still here today we would be angry about the report suggesting there have been serious lapses in the school's safeguarding procedures. The answer is almost certainly yes. No doubt some would be very vocal about it too."

**The Guardian, Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

The second part of her letter sums up the experiences of many who lead schools. We take the job exceptionally seriously, after all we are charged with a massive responsibility; the safety, welfare, well-being of every child as well as deploying everything we do to make sure that kids achieve the best from themselves. Parents are correct to expect nothing less.

The difficulty many who work in schools have with OFSTED is not that we shouldn't be accountable nor that findings shouldn't be reported but the apparent simplicity of measuring and judging something as complex as a school within the constraints of 10 hours on site.

In McAuley's case, summing up the experiences of 1500 students and 200 staff over three sites in 50 form times, approximately 100 lessons per hour supported by SEND staff, Nurture, Emmaus, Engage, Year Leads, lunch clubs, after school clubs, Buddies, chaplaincy. When OFSTED judge the school you've worked hard to improve deliver a single grade judgement and, rightly, the book stops here but, boy, it hurts!

The beating heart of a school cannot be measured, weighed or graded. Watching girls' football teams not only take part but win? Where's the value judgement on selfless acts of fundraising, in Calais or at a Food Bank, of Ash Wednesday services, Lenten Liturgies, Mansion Masses, Pilgrimages as well as drama and music performances and dozens of school trips?

How do you put a measure on the success of one of our most vulnerable taking a place at university, a parent choosing this school because she knows that her son's profound needs will be met.

The pressure on all the staff at McAuley to get it right is enormous. In many ways that is counter-balanced by positive and constructive comments from parents/carers and pupils. All I ask is you consider there may be other ways to measure a school as good.

God Bless  
John Rooney  
Headteacher