

THE INSPECTORS CALL...

AND WHAT'S YOUR FIRST REACTION? VIC GODDARD HAS SOME VERY RECENT EXPERIENCE TO SHARE

This is how it goes: Towards the end of the first half term of the school year, my PA, the irreplaceable Sheila, leans over the balcony and calls to me, "Someone is on the phone from Serco". I look at my watch: 12.27. No need to guess who that is, then.

The wheels start to turn. The first hurdle is to work out how I find a convincingly welcoming and enthusiastic tone of voice. I have practised this in the mirror, believe it or not. Why is it important? Well, I want the caller to think we are confident that we do a good job. That I have faith in the staff and students. And that I am not petrified in the slightest. Only one of those statements is untrue.

I sit myself comfortably at my desk – iPad, notepad and pen, and 1000 yard stare all in place. Sheila transfers the call.

"Right," I say briskly and, I hope, with an air of efficient authority. "Give me the list of stuff you need Mr Ofsted Inspector." After several silent gasps and a quick thought spared for the number of trees that will have to be sacrificed in order to print off my SEF, SDP, DAP, PPGR and all the rest (I think you have to be able to recite all these in alphabetical order before

you're allowed to inspect schools), the phone call finishes with one of the biggest lies I have ever told: "I'm really looking forward to seeing you tomorrow morning."

OK, Vic, breathe. Print off your 'what to do when Ofsted call' checklist. Yes, I have a checklist – and although it may sound efficient of me, it really isn't. I have the list because I know from experience that for the first hour or so after the call every brain cell in my head will be running round in ever decreasing circles shouting 'don't panic!' At the same time, however, first impressions are key, and it's vital that I appear outwardly calm and self-assured, in order to avoid spreading panic throughout the corridors. As it happens, I have total confidence in the staff at Passmores – the only person I worry about in terms of letting the side down is me. This is just my second inspection as a head, and I've read so much about how important the head teacher's relationship with the inspection team is these days. I don't want to let the staff and kids down; they work so hard all year round and so I really need to stay in control of my 'Ofsted Tourette's'.

I send the message to my colleagues that there will be a 'brief staff meeting' at

VIC GODDARD IS HEAD
TEACHER AT PASSMORES
ACADEMY – AS SEEN ON
CHANNEL 4'S 'EDUCATING
ESSEX' SERIES



lunchtime. I might as well broadcast the news of the impending inspection onto everyone's whiteboards – they all know what my innocent summons means. But we still need the meeting. I have to tell them how great they are and how confident I am in them. That it's business as usual, and that Ofsted is just a chance to show us at our 'organised best'.

With half an hour to fill before the meeting, I phone the Chair of Governors and the LA. Pace up and down a bit feeling sick. Print off the SEF. Realise it's all waffle and not 'succinct, accurate and demonstrating impact'. Walk around a bit more. Oh well, it is, what it is.

Single central record next. I know we do this right – this is an easy tick, surely. So why am I scouring this almost indecipherable list of dates, document numbers and other things that we all do as a matter of course? I'll tell you why, because I know I won't find anything to worry me, and that's a reassuring feeling.

OK, there are ten minutes left before the staff meeting. I go and speak to our data manager, Tina (someone I must ensure never leaves me – marriage, kidnapping her children, whatever it takes). "How are our progress grids?" I ask, feigning nonchalance. Thankfully she is calm and they are printed off already. That makes me feel marginally better.

I'm now late for the meeting. I walk in to a gentle buzz of expectation.

"Good afternoon my lovelies," I announce, cheerily. "We have some visitors over the next couple of days..."

I won't go into details, but you know how the next two days pan out. Professionals working hard to show themselves, their children and their school in the best possible light. Nothing left to chance apart from the weather. A job done as well as humanly possible, followed by a sense of relief that this won't happen again for a term/a year/three years/ five years (delete as applicable). And the results? Well, they can wait...

