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Yvonne Connolly, St Catherine's Catholic School
Nigel Fisher, St Columba's Catholic Boys' School
Byron Parker and Tim Plumb, Woolwich Polytechnic School for Boys
Stephanie Allen, Erith School

Sir Michael Wilshaw
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

Dear Colleagues,

As you know, I instructed Her Majesty's Inspectors to visit your schools, alleged to be involved in a major incident at Northumberland Heath in Bexley on 19 September 2016. This incident was widely reported in the press as a 'mass brawl' between students, at the end of the school day, involving as many as a hundred young people. The fracas was so serious that seven males between 15 to 21 years were arrested and two teenagers were taken to hospital.

I was deeply troubled by these accounts in the press and wanted to be assured that the necessary action was being taken by the individual schools to promote good behaviour in their institutions and beyond the school gates.

I found it difficult to comprehend how the individual schools did not pick up, at an early stage, that a significant number of students were plotting and planning a fight at the end of the school day. The pastoral and welfare systems of the schools should have been finely tuned to issues of this nature and particularly to the changing atmosphere in classrooms, playgrounds and corridors as students became excited and agitated by the prospect of trouble with other schools.

All my experience has taught me that in good schools, when trouble is brewing, staff intervene and take action very quickly before events take over and escalate. This obviously did not happen in the schools involved in the fracas. This is worrying.

It is clear from the inspections that, with better intelligence, most of the schools could have taken the necessary action to prevent children becoming involved in such outrageous behaviour. Staff could have been quickly deployed to the location of this incident, a well-known gathering place for students after school, so that children could be dispersed in an orderly fashion. Inspectors tell me that one school (St Catherine's) did this and, as a result, prevented their students from becoming involved in the incident.

It is also evident that liaison with the police was ineffective in preventing the incident. The police, it seems, were only called after the trouble had started, which makes me question the effectiveness of your partnership work with the local police force. The police have an essential role to play in working with you in improving

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student behaviour outside school. Given that this was a known potential trouble-spot, community police officers, working with staff from the contributory schools, should have been present in significant numbers at this meeting point.

I am sure that each school will want to review their working relationships with the local police to ensure that similar incidents do not occur in the future. I am, therefore, copying this letter to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner so that he can consider how the borough police can best support schools and contribute to the intelligence school leaders hold about children's behaviour in the local community.

In summary, all schools should take responsibility for the behaviour of their pupils within school and beyond the school gates. I do not need to emphasise to you the potential damage that is caused to the reputation of schools when children behave badly in full view of members of the public.

I am pleased that inspectors found that pupils' behaviour within your school gates is generally positive and that some of you are using this incident to further develop your behaviour management policies.

I will ask inspectors to take note of my comments in this letter and report on your progress when you are next inspected.

Yours sincerely

Sir Michael Wilshaw
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector