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22 November 2017

Mr Gareth Rowe  
Principal  
Discovery School  
Blandford Street  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE1 3BT

Dear Mr Rowe

### **Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Discovery School**

Following my visit to your school on 8 November 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in May 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, the chair of the board of trustees, a representative of the sponsor and the sponsor's chief executive officer, pupils from Year 9 and Year 10 and students from Year 13. I looked at the school's security checks on members of staff and also evaluated the trust's statement of action and the school's improvement plan.

### **Context**

Since the school was last inspected in May 2017, you have been appointed as permanent principal in September 2017 following a brief period as principal designate. You conducted a full school audit and, as a result, you and the chair of trustees have restructured your senior leadership team. You have appointed a new leader to overview the use of pupil premium funding, provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and the provision for the most able pupils. Four members of your governing body have left, and your chair of trustees, with the support of the sponsor, has recruited new governors in key positions.

## **The quality of leadership and management at the school**

Your commitment and focus are crucial to the school's recovery. The review you led as designate principal highlighted deep shortcomings in the school's performance. Under your determined leadership, the school is beginning to undertake a programme of structural changes which started shortly after your permanent appointment in September 2017.

You have worked closely with your very knowledgeable chair of trustees and have well-prepared plans in place to address the school's shortcomings and tackle the areas for improvement identified in the May 2017 inspection. All key stakeholders, including members of the governing body (trustees), know that considerable challenges remain and the school must further increase the pace of improvement to secure better outcomes for pupils. Governance of the school is becoming a strength. Both the sponsor and the trustees are fully aware of the degree of urgency needed for close monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the recently introduced systems and procedures.

Your newly restructured leadership team is eager to begin a phase of development work to improve the curriculum, strengthen the quality of teaching and secure better attendance and outcomes for pupils in your school. The senior leaders are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Your chair of trustees has strengthened the governance and structured it skilfully so that it provides appropriate challenge and support to senior leaders in their areas.

You have comprehensively improved the systems for tracking and analysing attendance. You have made some staff changes to allow capacity for your senior leader to effectively identify and support pupils who do not attend regularly. You can now identify issues with attendance for specific groups of pupils to allow you to target intervention more effectively. As a result, although still below national averages, overall attendance for this year to date shows improvement. You agreed with me that there is a need for further staff training to use the school systems even more effectively.

Following the inspection in May 2017, you revised your curriculum in order to provide more breadth and balance. As a result, in September 2017, you added geography, German and physical education to the curriculum. You and your senior leaders are aware of the need to include art and to further expand physical education as soon as it is financially viable to do so.

You have introduced new systems to track and monitor pupils' progress and to provide teachers with appropriate information so that planned learning activities meet pupils' varying needs and abilities. You have also closely linked performance management to professional development and the tracking and monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning. You recently introduced a regular quality assurance cycle so that you can monitor the impact of these changes on the quality of

teaching and learning and outcomes for pupils and students in the sixth form.

You have sought external support from two local schools. This has helped you to gain a clear view of what is required to drive improvement in your school. The support provided for staff at all levels, including yourself and your senior leaders, has allowed you to shape clear improvement plans and procedures for the school in order to tackle the areas of concern identified during the last inspection.

The inspection in May 2017 recommended a review of the school's use of the pupil premium. You acted swiftly and a review has been undertaken. As a result, a number of actions have been identified. You have begun to implement some of these actions, but at a slow pace. Leaders recognise that improvements have not happened fast enough and that more urgency is now needed in implementing and embedding the plans for the provision for disadvantaged pupils, as well as for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and the most able.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Newcastle upon Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dimitris Spiliotis  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**