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17 October 2018

Mr Nick Ward
Principal
Marine Academy Plymouth
Trevithick Road
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Dear Mr Ward

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Marine Academy Plymouth

Following my visit to your school on 9 October 2018, 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 November 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the day, inspectors met with you and your leadership team to discuss the progress you had made in the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. We visited lessons with leaders, and scrutinised pupils' written work across a range of subjects and age groups. We met with the vice-chair of the board of trustees, curriculum leaders, pastoral managers, the designated safeguarding lead, teaching staff and pupils. We also scrutinised a range of documentation provided by the school, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan.

Context

Since the previous inspection, you have taken decisive action to address weaknesses in the quality of teaching and learning. Consequently, there have been

significant changes to staffing at the beginning of this academic year, which have provided the stability needed to support further improvement. In addition, the school commissioned external support to ensure that the plans for improvement were sufficiently challenging. This has developed further, and a management partnership agreement has been signed with a larger multi-academy trust to provide additional capacity.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You, together with your leadership team, are working with determination to improve the quality of education provided by the school. Leaders and governors are committed to ensuring that the school serves its community well and clearly understands its moral purpose in doing so. You have provided meaningful opportunities for pupils in the main school, as well students in the sixth form, to broaden their horizons and explore what they have the potential to achieve. This is supported by colourful displays depicting a timeline of the city's maritime heritage and the destinations of some of your alumni.

You know that the school is not where you want it to be and are honest and accurate in your reflection of the school's strengths and weaknesses. You have made difficult decisions in the interests of your pupils and have worked with commitment. Within a period of turbulence, you have provided the stability to ensure that standards do not drop further. You do not seek to make excuses for underperformance but are focused on strategies to tackle weaknesses in a timely and effective way. For example, your work to refresh your 'Marine Values' and ensure that there are consistent expectations in the way that pupils conduct themselves has not been without difficulty. However, you have remained steadfast to these principles. This has resulted in an environment that is positive and where pupils are ready, willing and able to learn.

You have established a climate that is conducive to learning. Building on this important foundation, you are able to focus on making the required improvements to the quality of teaching and learning. You have demonstrated that planning is becoming more focused and that assessment is increasingly accurate and is used to support pupils to improve their work. You have introduced tighter systems to monitor the quality of provision and these have improved the consistency with which teachers apply these strategies. More needs to be done to ensure that this is a typical experience for pupils. However, tangible signs of a changing culture show that staff have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve.

You are well supported by the governing body, who recognise the positive work that has been done, as well as the challenges that remain. Governors are well informed as to which areas of the school's work are not yet good enough. They do not shy away from asking challenging questions about how these will be rectified. Following the last inspection, they were instrumental in ensuring that leaders had the right advice and that expertise on the governing body was bolstered. They also

established a school improvement committee, which has improved the accountability of leaders. There is regular evaluation of the progress leaders have made towards improvement priorities. Governors have ensured that leaders benefit from a range of networks and resources that will support their actions. This has built capacity to secure more rapid improvement. They have been considered and proactive in deciding the future direction of the school. The decisions they have made are founded on solid educational principles, which they genuinely believe will take the school forward on the next stage of its journey.

You have taken steps to strengthen the quality of middle leadership. Middle leaders have an increasing understanding of their own importance in supporting school improvement and of how to respond to the demands of the new curriculum. They have welcomed the tighter scrutiny on the effectiveness of their work and have valued the training they have received to support them in their roles, particularly in evaluating the quality of teaching. They feel they are able to contribute their ideas and that leaders are supportive of them. This has injected renewed vigour, allowing the establishment of a cohesive middle leadership team with increased capacity to support leaders effectively. You recognise that an important aspect of this development is to encourage middle leaders not to depend too much on overall assessment information, but to evaluate the incremental impact of subject-specific strategies. Crucially, they need to be more precise in their evaluation of the impact of their actions.

Following the external review of the additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils, recommended at the previous inspection, you now have a firmer grasp on how this is best spent. Actions are now more specific so that the impact of strategies can be more clearly defined to inform future expenditure. There is a greater balance between meeting the social, emotional and therapeutic needs of pupils and the newly raised academic expectations. Teachers are aware of their disadvantaged pupils and employ agreed strategies to meet their needs. However, it is too early to see the impact of this on improving academic performance.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement

- You have refined accountability and monitoring systems so that you now have an accurate overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses. You have provided teachers with effective support to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and to meet the demands of the new curriculum. Where necessary, you have taken decisive action to ensure that pupils' experiences are the best they can be.
- The overall quality of teaching is improving, particularly the effectiveness of questioning to probe and develop understanding, encouraging pupils to use technical vocabulary. Staff are clear on what is expected and are responding positively, welcoming the training opportunities provided and the chance to contribute to the development of pedagogy at the school. While pupils'

attainment and progress are not yet good enough, your staff are committed to making the improvements needed. They are outward looking and actively seek to learn from best practice.

- A new assessment system has been implemented and this provides leaders and teachers with more accurate information about pupils' progress. This means that they can monitor progress closely and intervene in a timely way when pupils fall behind. This information is used from the beginning of Year 7 to ensure that deficits in learning are remedied quickly.
- Teachers are more consistently following the school's policy to provide feedback to pupils. Pupils are clear on the areas they need to focus on and say they are now more routinely expected to reflect and improve the quality of their work. They show pride in their ability to do so.
- Since the last inspection, there have been improvements in the way that teachers support pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Teachers are informed of the nature of the provision required and use agreed strategies to support individuals' needs.
- Behaviour across the school has improved, largely due to the implementation of the new behaviour policy. The number of exclusions is reducing and there are clear processes in place to support those pupils who find expectations difficult to manage. You are resolute in ensuring that restorative conversations are held promptly to maintain positive working relationships.

Weaknesses in the school's approach to securing improvements

- There is detailed commentary on planned actions to improve performance in the areas identified. However, there now needs to be greater precision in determining the impact of key strategies towards achieving the overall objective. For example, middle leaders' action plans lack the detail to identify clearly which approaches will most successfully inform future planning.
- You know that there are still inconsistencies in expectations and recognise the need to accelerate progress, particularly in posing suitable challenge. This latter point is particularly pertinent, as pupils who go on to study in the sixth form are not well equipped to respond to the demands of higher-level study. This is because of the gaps that exist in their knowledge and understanding from key stage 4.
- A significant proportion of pupils in several year groups, including in the sixth form, are not yet making sufficient progress across a range of subjects. This includes pupils who are disadvantaged, those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and the most able. Teaching, although improving, is not yet good enough to ensure that all pupils achieve well.
- Despite your work to reduce the number of pupils who are persistently absent, these figures remain too high. In part, this is because the overall figures are affected by a large number of pupils who have complex needs. Staff have been

proactive in providing incentives for pupils to attend more regularly. They ensure that resources are available to help pupils catch up with missed work. Leaders are aware of vulnerable pupils and their families and are working positively with them to promote the importance of good attendance. This has resulted in modest improvements but attendance is not yet good enough.

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 action 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 Plymouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah McGinnis
Her Majesty's Inspector