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15 February 2019

Mr Leigh Withers  
Principal  
Marine Academy Plymouth  
Trevithick Road  
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Dear Mr Withers

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Marine Academy Plymouth**

Following my visit to your school on 4 February 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in November 2017. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

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

The school's improvement plan 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**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2017.**

- Leaders and governors must ensure that:
  - teachers' expectations are raised, so that all pupils in the main school and the sixth form reach their potential
  - middle leaders are trained in holding their teams to account so that teaching and learning ensures that pupils make rapid progress
  - the quality of teaching is monitored and evaluated effectively
  - teaching challenges the most able and the most able disadvantaged to reach higher grades
  - teaching of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities caters for their needs so that their progress improves
  - funding for disadvantaged pupils focuses on diminishing the differences between their outcomes and those of others nationally
  - attendance improves, and persistent absence reduces to be at least in line with the national averages overall and for pupil groups.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 4 February 2019**

### **Evidence**

During the day, an inspector met with you and your leadership team to discuss the progress that leaders have made in the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. An inspector visited lessons with leaders and scrutinised pupils' written work across a range of subjects and age groups. An inspector spoke on the telephone with the chair of the board of trustees and met with curriculum leaders, pastoral managers, the designated safeguarding lead and pupils. An inspector also scrutinised documents provided by the school, including the self-evaluation and development plan, information about pupils' safety and safeguarding, and the single central record of checks on staff recruitment.

### **Context**

In January 2019, an interim principal was engaged, pending the imminent appointment of a substantive post-holder. In addition, senior leadership responsibilities have been defined more clearly. The school has continued to commission external support. The management partnership agreement signed with a larger multi-academy trust continues to provide additional capacity.

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

Following the departure of the previous principal, governors have appointed an interim principal who has provided stability and maintained the momentum for improvement. These changes have ensured that there is sufficient expertise and capacity to hasten the speed of change. The revised improvement plan is well devised and focuses on the right aspects for improvement. The leadership team remains uncompromising in their expectations and recognise the enormous potential of pupils.

The school is at a crucial period of transition. Governors are recruiting to the governing body wisely and adapting their structures to ensure that they continue to provide much needed support and challenge. However, it is taking time to address some of the more complex problems that the school faced in the past. Therefore, they have ensured that school improvement priorities remain their focus while plans for the school's future are finalised.

Quite rightly, you have identified the need for pupils to benefit from a comprehensive information, advice and guidance programme so that they make appropriate choices for the future. The recently revamped programme includes opportunities for pupils to hear from higher education providers and experts from a variety of fields. In addition, plans are in place to work more extensively with businesses. Leaders understand that this work needs to be more closely tailored to pupils' individual needs and ambitions. To this end, leaders have conducted an evaluation of current provision and the school

has affiliated to regional careers networks. The impact of these developments will be a focus for future monitoring visits.

Leaders continue to determine carefully the strategies that they believe will lead to an improvement in teaching and learning. These particularly centre on supporting teachers to use questioning effectively to elicit and extend pupils' understanding. The recently introduced 'four habits of learning' provides a helpful framework for teachers and reinforces shared expectations. There is more work to do to ensure that these, and other initiatives, are consistently implemented in classroom practice so that the intended impact is achieved.

Middle leaders recognise their greater autonomy and have received training so that they can fulfil their roles more effectively. They are now more involved in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning within their departments. They appreciate the support of senior leaders, who coach them and validate their judgements. As a result, middle leaders are better able to identify pertinent issues within their subjects. They have begun to modify their plans where they have identified gaps in pupils' understanding. For example, in English, teachers support pupils to structure their writing more effectively. This is having a noticeable impact on the quality of their written compositions. Pupils value the guidance that teachers give them and are proud of their ability to write in a more sustained and ordered way.

### **Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Behaviour across the school continues to improve. This is because of clear expectations and systems which manage behaviour effectively. Where these approaches are employed, teachers have created a classroom environment that is conducive to pupils' learning. Pupils understand the behaviour system and therefore recognise where teachers do not apply this consistently. The support provided for pupils who find behaviour expectations more difficult to adhere to continues to evolve. Leaders have devised innovative approaches to ensure that support is better directed towards pupils who often have complex needs. Central to this approach is the need for pupils to reflect upon their actions.
- Leaders continue to refine accountability and monitoring systems so that there is an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The recent review of the improvement plan, for example, has led to decisions to redevelop parts of the school buildings. These plans are designed to raise the profile of careers education and to provide better support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- Middle leaders are increasingly well placed to lead improvement in their subject areas. The recommendations from the previous monitoring visit have been acted upon and leaders are better able to discuss the impact of their actions. This more precise focus has meant that there is greater clarity over how the curriculum can be modified to provide the solid foundations of learning from which pupils can build.

- Where teachers are confident in using assessment, pupils are clear about the areas they need to improve and take steps to do so. Pupils' work shows that teachers' skills in using assessment to promote progress is improving. Where planning is effective, the most able pupils are challenged to respond with a higher level of sophistication. For example, they can comment on a writer's choice of language or can use subject-specific terminology with confidence.

### **Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Leaders' plans to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils lack precision. The absence of clearly-defined timescales means that leaders are not able to ascertain whether the school remains on track to achieve priorities or whether the plans are having the desired effect. Teachers are aware of the pupils who are falling behind but there are still wide discrepancies in the effectiveness of teachers' planning to meet pupils' needs. This means that there is an over-reliance on additional interventions, particularly at key stage 4, rather than ensuring that pupils receive high-quality teaching from the outset.
- Where teaching is weaker, planning is not well matched to pupils' starting points and misconceptions are not remedied. The most able pupils are not given the scope they need to complete work of appropriate complexity and apply their skills. Pupils who require additional support do not receive it in a timely way. This limits the progress that pupils of all abilities make.
- Leaders' expectations that pupils respond to teachers' guidance is not embedded so that it has the full impact intended. Teachers do not adapt their teaching or amend the sequence of learning to ensure that pupils' understanding is secure before moving on.
- Since the previous monitoring visit the improvement that had been made to support pupils with SEND has stalled. This is partly because of staffing issues but is mainly due to the fact that plans to support pupils are not consistently applied. This means that pupils do not receive the support they need to make the progress that they should.
- Attendance remains a significant issue for the school. Leaders are working to strengthen procedures to monitor and challenge absence more robustly. The increased capacity in the pastoral team enables staff to be more proactive in their approach. Leaders can provide case studies of where these actions are improving the rates of attendance, but it is too early to say whether this will be sustained over a longer period of time.

### **External support**

The school continues to work with a larger multi-academy trust through a management agreement. This agreement has increased leadership capacity and has enabled the school to access relevant support and training.