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15 March 2019

Mrs Amanda Ryan  
Principal  
Hillside High School  
Breeze Hill  
Bootle  
Merseyside  
L20 9NU

Dear Mrs Ryan

### **Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Hillside High School**

Following my visit to your school on 5 March 2019, 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 February 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, senior leaders, a group of teachers and a group of governors with a trustee. The chief executive officer (CEO) of Wade Deacon Trust was also involved in some of the meetings. I spoke formally with two groups of pupils and to other pupils informally during lunchtime. I carried out a learning walk in English and mathematics provision with a senior leader. I also scrutinised a small sample of pupils' work. I reviewed several documents, including the school's self-evaluation document and minutes of standards committee meetings. The trust's statement of action and the school's action plan were evaluated.

### **Context**

Wade Deacon Trust appointed a new CEO in September 2018. He has been working closely with the school since taking up his post. Since the start of this academic year, an executive principal from within the trust has been working with you for two days a week. There are no new members of the senior leadership team, but during last term there were changes to leaders' roles and responsibilities. There are new

leaders in the English department. Two new teachers joined the mathematics department in September 2018. Five members of staff have left the school since the last inspection. The school is currently in the middle of a consultation process in relation to a new staffing structure for September 2019. At the start of this academic year, the standards committee was formed. This comprises members of the governing body and representatives and officers from the trust.

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

Prior to the start of this academic year, the trust was not doing enough to ensure that the school would have the serious weaknesses designation removed at its next full inspection. This situation has changed significantly since the appointment of the new CEO in September. The trust is now providing you and your leadership team with the right amount of support and challenge. More importantly, the changes that have been made to roles and responsibilities have sharpened the quality of leadership across the school.

You explained to me how the school is now benefiting from being part of the trust. This view is shared by other senior and middle leaders and teachers. For example, the executive principal who works alongside you for two days a week has experience in leading a school from an inadequate to good Ofsted judgement. You value his support and expertise. The ongoing involvement of the trust's director of mathematics has contributed to the improvements in this department. Leaders and classroom teachers speak positively about being involved in the trust's network meetings. The sharing of ideas and resources within these networks is helping them to improve their practice.

The most significant impact of these new ways of working can be seen in the improvements in the quality of teaching across the school. The leadership of teaching and learning is now strong. Since the last inspection, leaders have held staff to account more rigorously for the quality of learning in their classrooms.

The assistant vice-principal responsible for teaching and learning has only been in this role since October this year, but she has already brought strong strategic leadership to this area. She has raised the profile of teaching and learning in the school. As she states, 'Teaching and learning is now at the forefront of all that we do.'

Teachers speak positively about the three-weekly cycle of professional development that was introduced at the end of the summer term. The programme is based on coaching conversations and the sharing of good practice across different subjects. As one teacher explained, 'We feel more supported and we are given the opportunity to try things out.' Staff also appreciate the way that you and other leaders take their workload into consideration when introducing new initiatives. For example, they believe that the new feedback policy is better for pupils and reduces their workload.

Systematic monitoring procedures are now in place. These include gathering evidence from learning walks, interviews with groups of pupils about their work, and wider book reviews. This means that leaders have an accurate understanding of what is typically happening in classrooms across the school. Evidence gathered on this monitoring inspection supports your assessment that more pupils are benefiting from routinely high-quality teaching now than at the time of the last inspection.

Pupils who met with me had mainly positive things to say about their learning. Pupils in key stage 4 were particularly vocal about the improvements to the quality of teaching in mathematics. However, pupils feel that there are still some lessons where the quality of teaching is not helping them to learn effectively. This variation is evident in pupils' work. Some teachers' strong practice is enabling pupils to learn well and make good progress, but this is not consistent. Some teachers' weaker practice continues to have a negative impact on pupils' learning. Pupils respond well when teachers have high expectations of them. They produce work of a high standard that is presented well. However, a small number of teachers are willing to accept work that is poorly presented or incomplete.

The new behaviour policy has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Pupils told me that it has reduced the amount of disruption in lessons and improved the learning environment.

Leaders' actions are having a positive impact on the progress that pupils are making in Years 7 to 10. This is less evident in Year 11 and it is likely that the outcomes for these pupils at the end of the year will be only marginally better than those of their peers in 2018.

The progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils in 2018 were better than in the previous year. There was a significant increase in the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who attained strong passes in GCSE English and mathematics. Nevertheless, the progress that these pupils made remained well below that of non-disadvantaged pupils across the country with the same starting points. An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding was carried out in June 2018. Leaders have used this to inform the actions that they are taking to ensure that outcomes for disadvantaged pupils continue to improve.

Improved personalised training and professional development for teaching assistants mean that they are more able to provide appropriate support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This has improved the provision for these pupils and enabled them to learn more effectively in the classroom environment. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) works collaboratively with staff to help them to meet the needs of individual pupils during lessons. She believes that she has benefited from greater collaboration with other SENCos in the trust and the sharing of good practice and resources.

The main reason that pupils with SEND are not making good progress is their very

poor attendance. A very high proportion of these pupils do not attend school regularly. There is a similar picture for disadvantaged pupils. Pupils' poor attendance is the one area where there has been no progress since the last inspection. You quite rightly describe this as your 'biggest challenge'. Far too many pupils are not attending school regularly, which is having a significant negative impact on their progress.

There is no doubt that attendance has a high profile in the school. Pupils who spoke with me talked about the school's focus on good attendance. However, leaders' actions are not having any impact on the significant cohort of pupils with very poor attendance. Recognising this, leaders have adapted their strategy this term to have a sharper focus on individual pupils. During the weekly 'attendance summit meetings', staff look closely at the different reasons why individual pupils are not attending school. Leaders' actions are now more personalised in response to pupils' specific issues.

There was some delay in arranging an external review of governance, which meant that a report was not produced until November 2018. This has proved to be of limited use to the school. However, working closely with the trust's new CEO, governors have honed their own practice. The formation of the standards committee at the start of this academic year has been the most significant change. This group, comprising governors and trust representatives and officers, meets monthly. Minutes of the meetings show that members of this committee work together well to hold senior and middle leaders to account. The trust has ensured that the governing body is made up of people who have the relevant skills and expertise to provide leaders with the necessary support and challenge.

Senior leaders, governors and the trust have an accurate view of the school's current position. The trust's statement of action and the school's action plan demonstrate that there is a shared understanding of the actions required for the school to have the serious weaknesses designation removed at its next full inspection. During the inspection, we discussed how the action plan now needs to be honed to provide a more helpful roadmap for the second stage of your improvement journey. Currently, it is not clear enough where the responsibilities lie for monitoring and evaluating the impact of leaders' actions.

Staff value your open and transparent leadership. Those who spoke with me described staff morale as better this year. They spoke of a 'camaraderie' and 'a sense of pulling together for the pupils'. In this positive ethos that you have created, it is clear that staff want to do their best for their pupils.

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 chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sefton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Anne Seneviratne  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**