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Mrs Rita Alak-Levi
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Alak-Levi

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Hertsmere Jewish Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 3 July 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 January 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, the acting deputy headteacher, who is also one of the designated safeguarding leaders, the curriculum leader and six members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair. In addition, a meeting took place with a school improvement partner from Hertfordshire local authority to discuss the advice and support given to the school.

I visited lessons jointly with you and looked at a range of pupils' workbooks. In addition to speaking to pupils during lessons, I met with a group of pupils more formally to discuss their learning and many aspects of school life. I spoke with parents and carers at the start of the school day, held an open meeting with a group of parents at the end of the school day, and made myself available for private discussions with parents. I considered the 30 responses to the school's recent parent survey and the 15 emails received from parents during the inspection. The

47 responses to the school's recent staff survey were also scrutinised. I reviewed a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation, information about pupils' progress, the school's checks on staff, child protection and safeguarding procedures and policies. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement and action plans were also evaluated.

Context

Since the full inspection, carried out in January 2019, one of the two acting deputy headteachers has been on leave of absence. You took on your role as headteacher permanently at the time of the previous inspection, having been acting headteacher from February 2018 to September 2018, then interim headteacher until January 2019. There have been no other significant changes to the staff team.

An associate governor has joined the governing body. The school is due to become an academy on 1 October 2019, joining the Jewish Community Academy Trust. When this happens, the trust will become the appropriate authority.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Leaders and governors have acted swiftly to address the areas for improvement that were identified at the previous inspection. Immediately after the inspection report was published a 'next steps' meeting took place and over 250 parents attended to hear how leaders and governors were planning to move the school forward.

Focused actions have taken place to strengthen the culture of safeguarding by ensuring that any safeguarding concerns are dealt with quickly and confidentially, with information shared on a 'need to know' basis. Leaders and governors have reviewed the staff handbook and revised the codes of conduct for both governors and staff. Following training provided by the local authority, governors and staff have confirmed their understanding and commitment to adhering to these policies and behaviours. As a result, leaders have clarified their high expectations and all staff and governors now have an in-depth understanding of what is expected of them. Furthermore, you monitor closely to ensure that the codes of conduct are followed consistently, and expectations remain high.

A code of conduct has been developed for parents, which has been shared at parent meetings and is also available on the school's website. This ensures that all parents know the school's expectations regarding confidentiality and the sharing of information.

Leaders have developed the school's personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum to include more opportunities for pupils to discuss and consider personal safety and well-being issues. Pupils who spoke to me agree that they feel safe in school. Work in pupils' books shows that they are taught an effective PSHE

curriculum, which supports them to develop an age-appropriate understanding of risk and what to do if they have concerns about their safety or the actions of others.

Leaders have taken steps to develop a more open relationship with parents. Parents appreciate that you meet and greet pupils and their families at the beginning and end of the school day. Leaders have put strategies in place to communicate more effectively so parents understand the reasons for leaders' actions to improve the school. Regular parents' coffee mornings have been introduced to give parents the opportunity to discuss and find out about all aspects of school life. Following these events, the questions asked and leaders' responses to them are made available to all parents. Leaders have reviewed and publicised the school's complaints policy so that parents understand and can follow the procedures necessary to ensure that their concerns are dealt with systematically and fairly.

You have tightened up the systems for recording and following up any concerns, whether from parents, or staff. Likewise, behaviour logs are well organised and enable leaders to monitor any emerging patterns or incidents that need further action. Concerns and incidents are now recorded systematically by staff. I looked at a sample of recorded concerns during the inspection. The school's chosen systems include what actions are taken, by whom and when. Records also identify appropriate next steps. This increased rigour ensures that pupils are safeguarded effectively.

The stronger aspects of safeguarding that were identified in the previous inspection have been maintained. For example, there are thorough recruitment checks and vetting procedures made on all adults who work in the school, and regular safeguarding training takes place for staff, which enables them to understand fully their roles and responsibilities in relation to keeping pupils safe.

Most parents told me that they are beginning to understand leaders' actions more clearly and agree that governors and staff act with increasing professionalism and integrity. The school's recent parent survey also demonstrates that most parents are positive about leaders' actions to improve the school. However, other parents still feel unclear about the reasons for leaders' decisions or the difference leaders' actions make. Equally, some parents remain unsure about how to raise any concerns that they have and uncertain that these will be considered and dealt with appropriately.

The governing body is committed to improving its effectiveness. Prior to the previous inspection, the local authority had commissioned a review of governance and has continued to support governors to work through a rigorous action plan to improve the work of the governing body. Governors have received training from the local authority and this has increased their understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Since the previous inspection, an associate governor has joined the governing body. His experience of governance in other schools is helping governors to consider different systems and ways of working. The governing body has

appointed a new clerk to ensure that the minutes of meetings are recorded accurately and fully. As a result of this training and advice, governors are using their increasing skills and knowledge to support and challenge leaders more effectively. This is reflected in the minutes of meetings, which demonstrate that governors are beginning to ask the right questions about all aspects of the school's work to hold leaders rigorously to account so that the school moves forward quickly.

Governors are mindful that you are relatively new to your substantive role and are keen to support you and other leaders as you continue to improve the quality of education for pupils. Additionally, governors are seeking ways to engage with parents further so that more understand governors and leaders' actions and in doing so, have increased confidence and trust in the work of the governing body.

Leaders have focused on supporting teachers to set high expectations of what pupils can achieve across all subjects, so pupils sustain an interest in their learning and achieve as well as they can. Subject leaders have led training on challenging pupils consistently in different subjects. Leaders monitor teachers' plans to make sure lessons help pupils, including the most able, to learn in greater depth. Lessons observed during the inspection show there is good consistency in the quality of teaching because teachers plan together closely. Teachers provide challenging work routinely for pupils and use effective questioning skills to encourage pupils to deepen their learning. Pupils told me that their teachers set work that 'makes us think'. Work in pupils' books also demonstrates that most pupils are challenged effectively and make strong progress over time. Leaders monitor the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. Leaders provide accurate and effective feedback to staff. There are increasing opportunities for teachers to see and share good practice throughout the school.

The local authority has been effective in the support and guidance it has provided for leaders and governors. The recommendations and reviews carried out by the local authority have helped leaders and governors to sharpen school improvement planning and focus on the right priorities to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Following the monitoring inspection, I made the following judgements:

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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

In order to address the issues identified in this monitoring inspection, leaders and governors should take action to:

- Further improve communication with parents to build their confidence in the school's leadership by:
 - ensuring that parents are well informed about the steps that leaders and governors are taking to improve the school
 - working with parents to ensure that they understand the school's complaints procedure, so parents can follow it closely if they have a complaint and feel more comfortable about approaching staff or governors with any concerns.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Webb
Her Majesty's Inspector