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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Liz Garman
Head of School
The Grange School
Redvers Road
Christchurch
Dorset
BH23 3AU

Dear Mrs Garman

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of The Grange School

Following my visit to your school on 5 November 2019 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the 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 previous monitoring 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 March 2018. 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.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2018.

- Improve pupils' outcomes at key stage 4, so that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, gain the qualifications that they need to move successfully to the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- Improve the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils by:
 - urgently raising attendance, particularly for those pupils who are persistently absent from school and for disadvantaged pupils
 - ensuring that all pupils behave well in lessons and at other times
 - enhancing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - evaluating the effectiveness of actions taken to raise pupils' attendance rates to ensure that they are having the required impact
 - ensuring that the curriculum offers pupils of all ages and abilities a suitable range of subjects and qualifications, so that they are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - embedding the improving practice seen in some subjects across the curriculum
 - insisting that pupils take greater pride in their work and complete it to a high standard.

An external review of the school's use of 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 5 November 2019

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and groups of pupils. The inspector visited a small number of lessons. The inspector met with two members of the local advisory board (LAB), the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Twynham Learning Trust and the director of standards for the trust. The purpose of the inspection was to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions being taken by leaders and managers towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the joint headteacher arrangement has been changed. One of the two joint headteachers left the school at Easter 2019, the other continued as headteacher. She is currently leading the school.

In September 2019 the senior leadership of the school was restructured. An 'extended leadership team' was formed.

No new teaching staff have arrived, eight members of staff have left, some of these were temporary staff. No new Year 12 students were admitted to the sixth form in September 2019. The remaining Year 13 students will complete their courses and leave in July 2020.

The trust board has made changes to the governance of the school. The trust's scheme of delegation has been modified. The local governing body has been renamed as a local advisory board. The local advisory board has less responsibility for finance and human resources. These functions are now being carried out by the trust's central team.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

The headteacher and members of the LAB have ensured that staff share a common understanding of the purpose of the curriculum at this school. From the senior leaders through to middle leaders and teachers, staff speak enthusiastically about the mission of the school to enable all pupils to 'have a seat at the table of opportunity'.

Although this is a small school, senior leaders have preserved the number of subjects that pupils are able to choose in key stage 4. In key stage 3 pupils are still able to study a wide variety of subjects. Curriculum leaders have reviewed the sequence of the curriculum, weighing up what pupils learn and when they do it. This is leading to improvements in teachers' planning. Teachers in English and

mathematics have consolidated the improvements in the quality of their work in their subjects. The proportion of pupils attaining a standard pass in both English and mathematics rose in 2018 and 2019.

Science teachers have thought through their plans carefully to establish the key ideas that pupils need to have understood in order to master each topic in physics, chemistry and biology. Pupils take pride in their written work and try hard to present it well, even when they find this difficult to do. Science teaching emphasises the need for pupils to recall the ideas they have previously been taught. There is a consistent approach to checking pupils have remembered the key points from previous teaching.

The science curriculum is given extra breadth by events such as a recent 'Faraday Challenge' engineering activity for Year 8 pupils at a local school. Pupils rose to the challenge of designing and building a bridge before successfully making a presentation about how they approached the task.

In September 2019, senior leaders introduced a new strategy for encouraging pupils to read more. This strategy was trialled in the summer term and has now been introduced successfully for all pupils. Teachers have been well trained and consequently the strategy is being applied consistently. Reading sessions take place across the school at tutor times and so all pupils are being exposed to a far wider experience of reading than in the past.

The school's process for the assessment of pupils' knowledge and understanding is not well developed. Teachers apply a variety of techniques to check whether pupils have understood their work in class. However, the process for collating and using this information across the school is not yet effective enough, particularly in key stage 3.

Senior leaders have introduced new strategies to raise the rate of pupils' attendance. For example, staff use a more rigorous system for tracking individual pupils' attendance and they follow up absence more rapidly than in the past. Staff provide effective extra support for particular pupils in each year group with a history of low attendance. These strategies have been very successful for Year 7 and Year 8 pupils. Their rate of attendance is now above the national average. Disadvantaged pupils' rate of attendance has also increased significantly. However, the rate of Year 11 pupils' attendance is still too low.

The proportion of pupils who were persistently absent from school was high last year. Current attendance information shows that this proportion is falling as a result of the strategies that senior leaders have applied. In particular, the recently appointed school-based social worker is helping to improve the attendance of specific pupils who have in the past found it difficult to attend school regularly. The leadership of this area of the school's work is effective. Even though the improvement in the overall rate of attendance is small, leaders' actions to help

particular groups of vulnerable pupils have been successful.

Pupils' behaviour continues to improve. Senior leaders have refined the successful 'Grange behaviours' system that was introduced last year. They monitor pupils' conduct closely and only use exclusion as a last resort. Even so, senior leaders' higher expectations of pupils' conduct over the last two years have led to a high rate of exclusions. The number of incidents of poor behaviour has reduced significantly this year and is limited to a small minority of pupils.

At the suggestion of pupils, senior leaders have introduced an 'excellence card'. Pupils carry this card and staff use it to give them recognition for their good conduct. Pupils understand the reason for introducing the card and appreciate the chance to be rewarded for good behaviour. However, they believe teachers are still not consistent in their application of the rules.

Senior leaders have established religious education as a subject in the curriculum. Pastoral leaders are reviewing the content of personal, social and health education lessons so that they complement the religious education course. Together with a programme of assemblies, these developments have led to an improvement in the provision for pupils' personal development at the school.

The school gives pupils opportunities to develop their cultural awareness through visits outside of school. For example, last year pupils studying GCSE English saw a production of 'Macbeth' in Southampton. All Year 7 pupils have the chance to visit Oxford University. They speak with students about university life and experience a lecture. This encourages them to begin thinking about their future aspirations.

Pupils take part in a good range of sports clubs including netball, football and handball. Last year, senior leaders introduced the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and set up a Young Enterprise programme. Nevertheless, the range of regular extra-curricular activities for pupils remains limited.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The headteacher is building on the work she started as a joint headteacher last year. She has shown great resilience and determination to stick to the task of raising pupils' aspirations. The headteacher has introduced an extended leadership team. As a result, many staff are gaining experience and developing leadership skills as they take on roles that give them more responsibility.

Leaders' responsibilities within the extended leadership team are well defined and so the accountability for improvement work is clear. For example, the leader with responsibility for pupils' behaviour has a clear understanding of his role. He is taking positive action to improve pupils' experience of school life such as by involving the school in a national anti-bullying initiative. This is helping to maintain the momentum of improvement in the culture of the school.

Disadvantaged pupils are receiving extra support through a number of different projects. For instance, a local business is sponsoring an initiative to promote disadvantaged pupils' business skills. This 'Sovereign Award' programme, was launched in September and is providing a small number of pupils with valuable leadership experience. Even so, leaders' strategy for the use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is not well developed. Leaders do not evaluate the effectiveness of their use of pupil premium funding sharply enough.

Subject leaders are now well established in their roles. They are rising to the challenge of developing the curriculum in their areas. Staff feel supported by senior leaders. They know there is a lot of work to do, but they recognise that senior leaders understand and appreciate their workload. Staff morale is high.

The director of standards from the trust works with senior leaders at the school for two days per week. He provides advice for staff as well as training for LAB members. This support is developing leaders' skills and giving members of the LAB the knowledge they need to hold leaders accountable for the performance of the school.

The CEO of the trust has modified the arrangements for the governance of the six schools within it. He has ensured that the role of each level of governance within the trust is clear. Responsibility for schools' finances and human resources is now held centrally with the trust board. As a result of this evolution, the LAB at the Grange School is able to focus more clearly on the immediate task of improving the quality of education.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The headteacher, with support from the trust, has provided coaching and encouragement to school staff. She models high professional standards. As a result, members of the extended leadership team, and other staff, are growing as leaders.
- The CEO of the trust has a clear vision for its work. He has established better accountability and better communication between its constituent parts. He has ensured that The Grange School is seen as an equal partner within the family of schools. Consequently, governance arrangements of this school are more effective.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Even though initiatives have been started to promote disadvantaged pupils' achievement, senior leaders have not evaluated the school's strategy for using pupil premium funding sharply enough or with enough urgency.
- The headteacher makes strenuous efforts to raise the profile of the school within the local community. She has initiated a parents' forum group and frequently shows parents around the school. She has had some success. New governors, who live locally, have joined the LAB. However, the school's efforts have not yet reached a wide enough cross-section of the local community.

External support

Support for school improvement is provided from within the trust and is effective. There is no formal external support for the school.