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7 September 2021

Nicholas Froy  
Headteacher  
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Suffolk  
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Dear Mr Froy

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Bury St Edmunds County Upper School**

Following my visit with Damian Loneragan, Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop and John Mitcheson, Her Majesty's Inspectors, to your school on 30 June to 1 July 2021, 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 to improve the school 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 January 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. We discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

Having considered 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 Unity Schools Partnership, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Wilson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 30 June 2021 to 1 July 2021**

### **Context**

The school joined the Unity Schools Partnership multi-academy trust in July 2020. An interim headteacher has been in place since April 2021. A permanent headteacher and two deputy headteachers will take up their positions in September 2021. The local governing body was reconstituted in March 2020, with several new members joining at this time. An additional monitoring inspection in February 2020 judged that safeguarding remained ineffective.

Following the reopening of the school to all pupils in March 2021, attendance has been lower than expected. However, no pupil 'bubbles' have had to isolate due to COVID-19. There has been no major impact on staff attendance due to COVID-19.

During this inspection, inspectors focused on safeguarding arrangements, leaders' actions to support pupils' personal development and behaviour and to develop the curriculum. Year 11 pupils and students in Year 13 were not in school during the inspection.

### **The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation**

Following the additional monitoring inspection of February 2021, leaders and the Unity Schools Partnership (the trust) have acted decisively to improve the safeguarding procedures and culture in the school. Pupils now say they feel safe. They know who to report concerns to and are confident that staff will act on concerns appropriately. Safeguarding is now effective.

The interim headteacher has ensured that all staff are aware of how to recognise the signs that a pupil is at risk of harm. Leaders have provided training for all staff, including about the risks posed by county lines. The interim headteacher carries out regular checks to ensure that staff understand different aspects of safeguarding and know what to do. Safeguarding is now seen as everyone's responsibility. Staff are confident in their ability to recognise and report concerns. They know that these are now followed up appropriately.

The designated senior leader for safeguarding (DSL) and the three alternate DSLs have appropriate, up to date training. Scrutiny of safeguarding records show that recent concerns have been acted on appropriately and swiftly. Records of the actions taken by staff are accurate and detailed. Referrals to agencies, such as social care, are swift, so that pupils get the help they need to keep them safe quickly. More staff are being trained to act as DSLs. Along with regular training and updates for all staff, this is ensuring that knowledge of safeguarding matters no longer rests with a small number of individuals in the school.

The local authority and the police now have greater confidence in how leaders respond to concerns and work cooperatively with partner agencies. They have seen a shift in staff's attitude to establishing a whole-school culture of safeguarding. They recognise that much of this change has taken place in a short time. Leaders are working hard to ensure that procedures and practice become firmly embedded.

In both recent inspections, improvements to make the site secure were recognised. However, pupils still did not feel safe. This has changed. Pupils who spoke to inspectors are confident that leaders keep them safe. Staff supervise pupils well. Procedures are in place to ensure that visitors are easily identifiable and suitably supervised. Planned building work will strengthen further the arrangements to limit access to the school site.

This term there has been an intensive programme of assemblies, visiting speakers and form tutor sessions to increase pupils' understanding of all types of risk. Pupils have found these sessions very useful. They recognise that leaders have had to include these sessions to make up for patchy coverage of this important content in the past. Pupils now know how to recognise and respond to a range of risks. They know the risks that are currently prominent in the local area, for example county lines.

Leaders have ensured that next year's curriculum plans for pupils' personal, social and health education include sessions on how to stay safe for all year groups. The programme promotes many aspects of pupils' personal development effectively. However, careers education and learning about the world of work are currently underdeveloped. Pupils are not yet accessing a coordinated programme of high-quality careers advice and guidance. Pupils in the sixth form receive a limited access to careers advice and work-related learning.

Leaders have established procedures to monitor pupils' absence. Leaders are ensuring that they know pupils' whereabouts, and they are identifying potential safeguarding concerns. However, attendance remains low for a small minority of the school's most vulnerable pupils, and leaders have not made significant inroads into improving this.

Behaviour is generally good. The school is calm and orderly. However, leaders have identified a very small minority of pupils in each year group who struggle to meet the school's expectations of them. Some of these pupils have been regularly excluded from school. Leaders have acknowledged that more needs to be done to keep these pupils in school and engaged in learning. New arrangements to support pupils with the most complex behavioural needs are planned for next term.

Pupils are aware of the different forms of bullying and the harm that it can cause. They say that bullying does happen, but when it does it is usually dealt with quickly. There are incidents where derogatory, racist and homophobic language are used by

a minority of pupils. A recent diversity week has helped to raise pupils' awareness of these issues. Leaders are determined to establish a culture where all pupils do not tolerate or accept the use of such language.

Leaders have established a broad curriculum that builds on pupils' previous learning. The curriculum is ambitious for all pupils. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported to access the full curriculum. Leaders know which teachers need more training to better support the learning of pupils with SEND.

Subject leaders are implementing plans that organise important knowledge in a way that helps pupils to use and build on what they already know. Leaders know the subjects where these plans are being implemented most effectively and where there is still more work to do to implement curriculum planning fully. A programme to support those pupils who struggle with reading has only recently been introduced. Leaders know that this programme needs further development so that all pupils can read well.

In addition to safeguarding training, staff have had opportunities to develop subject knowledge and leadership skills in many subject areas. Staff recognise that they needed to improve their knowledge of safeguarding. However, because this has had to be done in a short period of time, it has increased staff workload. However, staff feel that leaders are considerate of their well-being.

New members who have joined the local governing body bring necessary expertise and knowledge of education and schools. Consequently, governors are now providing appropriate challenge and support for school leaders to make further improvements.

At the first monitoring inspection, the school's improvement plan was judged as not fit for purpose. School leaders and the trust have taken appropriate steps to put in place interim plans that address the immediate priorities for improvement. The trust and interim headteacher are working with newly appointed leaders to ensure that detailed, strategic plans are in place next term in order to maintain the current pace of improvement. The school's action plan and the trust's statement of action are fit for purpose.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- A small but significant number of pupils are persistently absent. Leaders' actions have not improved the attendance of these pupils, who are missing out on learning as a result. Leaders should take further action to improve the attendance, so that all pupils attend regularly and remain engaged in learning.
- The behaviour of a small minority pupils results in them being regularly excluded from school. Leaders do not know enough about these pupils' needs or how to

meet them. Leaders should take action to strengthen the school's procedures for supporting pupils and managing challenging behaviour, including eradicating the use of derogatory and homophobic language.

- Careers education, information and guidance are underdeveloped. A coherent, structured programme of careers and work-related learning is not in place. Leaders should ensure that plans for improving this are implemented promptly so that all pupils benefit from high-quality, independent guidance to help them to make informed choices about the next stage of education, employment or training.

### **Additional support**

The trust has ensured that staff have received suitable training to make them aware of their responsibilities regarding safeguarding. The trust has also provided funding to increase the number of staff who can act as DSLs. Trust staff are working with curriculum leaders to help them implement and evaluate subject plans. They are also providing support to ensure that provision for pupils with SEND is effective.

Leaders have ensured that school staff have had access to training from the local authority about a variety of safeguarding issues. The local authority has also contributed to sessions that have taught pupils about a variety of safeguarding risks.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, other senior leaders, representatives of the multi-academy trust, including the chief executive officer, and pupils, staff, members of the local governing body and the chair of the board of trustees.

Inspectors scrutinised leaders' improvement plans and looked at a range of policies and documentation relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance. The lead inspector spoke to representatives of the local authority and the police. The lead inspector also held a telephone discussion with the newly appointed, substantive headteacher.

Inspectors observed learning and scrutinised pupils' work in a range of subjects across all key stages. They considered the 31 responses to Ofsted's survey for staff and the 189 responses to Ofsted's Parent View, the online parents' survey, including the 37 free-text responses submitted since February 2021.