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31 January 2022

Stacia Pettersen
Interim Principal
Peak Academy
Drake Lane
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Gloucestershire
GL11 5HD

Dear Ms Pettersen

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Peak Academy

Following my visit to your school on 20 January 2022, 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 June 2021. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. I discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the White Horse Federation multi-academy trust, the regional

schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Gloucestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Stephen McShane
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 20 January 2022

Context

Since the previous inspection in June 2021, there have been some staff changes. The principal and the designated safeguarding lead are currently off school. An interim principal took up post in September 2021. One new teacher started in the autumn term and there were some changes in support staff.

The school is overseen, on behalf of The White Horse Federation multi-academy trust, by the secondary director of education. Since the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, the school has received more visits from governors, trust staff and external consultants.

The White Horse Federation remains committed to the improvement of the school. Leaders are discussing the long-term future of the school with the regional schools commissioner.

On this first monitoring inspection, the inspector focused on the steps taken to improve safeguarding and the management of behaviour.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

The trust and the local governing body have reflected and learned from the experience of the school being judged as having serious weaknesses. The COVID-19 restrictions meant that external professionals could not spend as much time in school. However, leaders and governors recognise that even before these, they did not challenge the school enough. They took data and information too much on face value. They have now taken steps to challenge the school more. Leaders and governors remain committed to doing the very best for the pupils, the staff and the school.

The trust acted swiftly to appoint an experienced interim principal. The school's senior leadership team has worked collaboratively with staff to bring about important changes. There have been challenges. However, leaders have taken tough decisions so that the school's improvement journey is not interrupted.

The trust, staff, parents and pupils recognise that the school has changed and improved since the last inspection. Everyone agrees that the pupils are at the centre of all the work the school does. This fundamental value has been renewed, revisited and strengthened.

As a priority, leaders rightly focused on ensuring that processes related to safeguarding are fit for purpose. Leaders have clarified procedures to keep pupils safe. The roles and responsibilities of key individuals are clearer. There is now a team approach to managing safeguarding. Leaders now support and challenge each other when making key decisions and dealing with complex issues. Staff have received a considerable amount of training and this is ongoing. They have been supported, for example, to understand the

management of allegations and the use of software to report concerns. They have also examined the complex issues raised by serious case reviews to consider the implications for their own work. Staff spoken with during the visit recognise safeguarding as a priority. They understand the need for all staff to be alert and report any issue that is worrying. Staff value the feedback they receive when they are concerned about something. The school's own monitoring shows that more staff are reporting concerns more effectively.

As part of their work to improve safeguarding, leaders are developing a greater knowledge of the complex issues that many pupils face. This has led to staff understanding pupils' needs better. As a result, some pupils and their families now receive more multi-agency support.

The management of safeguarding is now more transparent and robust. Governors have increased their knowledge so they can support and challenge more. Staff recruitment procedures have been strengthened. Trust employees and external consultants are on hand to check the school's work and to give advice. The local authority designated officer (LADO) recognises the recent improvements in the way the school manages allegations. These are now dealt with in line with national and local expectations.

There is ongoing work to reflect on the underlying culture of the school and amend behaviour policies and practices. Leaders agree that the school's practice needs further development. It is leaders' intention that the school's focus moves consistently from simply demanding compliance from pupils. Leaders are encouraging staff to understand pupils' behaviour better. They want to instil in all staff a greater understanding that behaviour is often communication. Leaders agree that the priority is for pupils to learn to manage their own behaviour so that they can function better in school and out of school.

Staff are now encouraged to be creative in their approach to pupils and their learning. This is leading to greater engagement from pupils and less confrontation.

Assessments are now in place to identify pupils' emotional and behavioural needs better. Leaders have strengthened targeted interventions. Pupils now work with staff on, for example, attitudes to learning or self-regard. Staff have worked with pupils to develop one-page personal profiles. These profiles give staff the information they need. They describe the kind of behaviours that a pupil might display if anxious or concerned. There is now a greater emphasis on activities to develop a pupils' personal development. Leaders recognise that these new initiatives now need pulling together into a coherent curriculum offer. With the trust's support, leaders are also enhancing the therapy offer at the school.

Staff have renewed their training in restrictive physical intervention. Pupils' risk assessments are up to date. Staff capture accounts of pupil restraints in more detail and more consistently. Leaders have strengthened their follow up. If available, they examine evidence from closed-circuit television. Staff and pupils are debriefed and changes put in place if necessary. Data is scrutinised and shared with trust representatives and governors.

Pupils welcome the recent changes. They talk about how they now go to their own 'safe space' to calm down. They are now confident that staff will give them space, so they become less agitated. Pupils appreciate that sometimes things go wrong, and this results in restraint. They are confident in staff. They say that 'staff really care'.

Leaders have drawn up plans to improve the curriculum and the quality of education. They have started work on these areas. Actions are clear. The plans are detailed and focus on the weaknesses that were identified at the last inspection. However, some of the intended impact is not clearly described. The way in which progress is evaluated is not sharp enough. Governors, senior leaders and trust staff are collecting evidence that actions are completed and changes are in place. However, there is currently no process to draw the evidence together and so satisfy the trust that the overall objectives of the school's improvement plans have been achieved.

Additional support

The White Horse Federation has increased its support and oversight of the school considerably. In addition to receiving regular reports, a director works with the school on a weekly basis. There is additional support from trust leaders in teaching and learning and in safeguarding.

The trust has commissioned external expertise, for example, to assure safeguarding. Leaders and staff make very good use of the support. They are prepared to learn and reflect. They have been receptive to training and new ideas. Leaders and staff have developed new practices and processes to support improvement.

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim principal (who is also the designated safeguarding lead), the senior leadership team, teachers and support staff. The inspector met with representatives of the local governing board and spoke to the chief executive officer and the secondary director of education from the trust. He also spoke with the LADO by telephone. The inspector talked to pupils and the parents who were attending the parents' forum at the school.

The inspector also scrutinised the school's website, school improvement plans and documents related to behaviour and safeguarding.