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15 July 2022

Luci Windle
Executive Headteacher
Harlow Academy
Nottingham Road
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Dear Mrs Windle

Special measures monitoring inspection of Harlow Academy

Following my visit with John Craig, Ofsted Inspector (OI), to your school on 7 July 2022, 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in January 2022. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the second routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. We discussed the ongoing 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:

The school continues to be inadequate. Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Evolve multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the

director of children's services for Nottinghamshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Watkins
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 7 July 2022

Context

At the time of the previous inspection, the school was judged to be unsafe for pupils. The school was subsequently closed to all pupils for a short period of time. Some pupils returned to the school on a part-time basis while the significant staffing issues were being addressed.

In January 2022, the Department for Education commissioned additional support for the school from the Nexus multi-academy trust. In February 2022, a new board of trustees and interim chief executive officer were appointed to the Evolve multi-academy trust.

A new transition board has been established, to strengthen governance and local accountability. This board comprises elected parent and staff members, with local authority and trust representation.

In January 2022, the executive headteacher was appointed. In February 2022, the head of school, assistant headteacher and an associate school business manager were appointed. Following an intense period of recruitment, leaders ensured that permanent teachers were in place, one for each of the nine classes. A full complement of support staff was also appointed during this time. Healthcare professionals and therapists resumed their work to support pupils on site.

The school fully reopened to all pupils in April 2022.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Leaders and those responsible for governance have acted quickly to provide a safe and stable environment for pupils. They have constructed a robust plan to systematically address all of the recommendations from the previous inspection.

Leaders have revised all of the school's safeguarding policies and procedures. This includes the introduction of a new whistleblowing policy. They have ensured that all staff have undergone appropriate employment checks. Records show that staff training is comprehensive and up to date. Staff express confidence in leaders' ability to act quickly in response to any concerns. Staff spoke positively about the significant changes in the safeguarding culture that have taken place over a short period of time. Staff say that they now feel safe to work at the school. They appreciate leaders' regard for their well-being. Pupils also say that they feel safe and enjoy school. In lessons, and around school, pupils were observed engaging happily and productively with a wide range of learning and social activities. Therefore, in the view of inspectors, the arrangements for safeguarding are now effective.

Leaders recognised that there was much work needed to rebuild trust with parents and carers. They have strengthened home-school communication as a matter of priority.

Parents felt badly let down by the school's previous leadership. The recent responses to Ofsted's parent survey are in sharp contrast with those submitted at the time of the last inspection. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the changes that have been made. Typical comments are: 'The school has come a long way in the last few months'; 'My child is now happy in school'; and, 'The new academy is going above and beyond for our children'.

Leaders reviewed the school's curriculum and concluded that it was not suitable. They have adopted a new curriculum designed to reflect pupils' needs more closely. This includes the introduction of a personal, social and health education programme. The new curriculum has not yet been fully adapted to the school's context. It is in the early stages of implementation. Subject leaders have been identified. However, these leaders have not yet been formally allocated to their roles. They have not yet received leadership training. Currently, staff lack the guidance and support that a curriculum leader can bring. Leaders are clear that the development of an ambitious curriculum is their next major priority.

Reading is a priority at the school. Leaders and staff encourage pupils to develop a love of books and stories. There is an attractive and well-stocked library at the heart of the school. Leaders have recently introduced a new systematic phonics programme. All staff have been trained in the new approach. The books and resources to support the new phonics programme are not yet available in school. Pupils are beginning to respond to the revised teaching methods. However, they are not yet developing as confident readers.

Leaders have ensured that students who currently follow the post-16 pathway are now enrolled on an appropriate programme of accreditations and qualifications. The aim is to ensure that all children and young people become increasingly well prepared for the next steps in their journey towards adulthood.

At the previous inspection, it was noted that exclusions and absences were not being appropriately managed. Since that time, there have been no further exclusions. There is a rigorous process for checking on daily attendance. Leaders have a system to ensure that they know that pupils are safe if they are not in school. All absences are correctly coded on the attendance registers.

Additional support

The new leaders of the Evolve multi-academy trust have worked collaboratively with brokered support from the Nexus trust to secure a plan to urgently improve the school. They prioritised staff and pupil safety. Trust leaders also commissioned an external review of safeguarding. Leaders say that this was helpful in providing a steer towards specific areas of focus for improvement.

Evidence

The inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, other senior leaders, the interim chief executive officer of the

multi-academy trust, pupils, staff and representatives of those responsible for governance.