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Timothy Knapp
Headteacher
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Herefordshire
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Dear Mr Knapp

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Whitecross Hereford

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 13 and 14 December 2022, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in March 2022.

During the inspection, Gwendoline Onyon, Ofsted Inspector (OI), Huw Bishop, OI, Geoff Renwick, OI, and I discussed with you, other senior leaders, governors/trustees and other staff the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also carried out visits to lessons, held meetings with teachers, pupils and support staff and scrutinised safeguarding documents. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Whitecross Hereford remains inadequate and has serious weaknesses. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation:

You, together with leaders, staff and governors have acted swiftly to address the issues highlighted since the last inspection. The weaknesses identified were related to safeguarding and those responsible for governance effectively fulfilling their delegated duties in relation to creating a strong culture of safeguarding at your school.

The improvement and action plans you have drawn up, following the previous inspection, are fit for purpose. You have sought external support and checking of the school's safeguarding processes and procedures to make sure they meet statutory requirements. You have acted with urgency to address and implement all suggested strategies. During discussions with me, you and your colleagues have expressed your high expectations of everyone in creating a secure and robust culture of safeguarding.

You have now completed all relevant and necessary pre-employment checks on all staff and governors at the school. You have made sure that all files are up to date and include the appropriate checks. The single central record has been updated to include these checks. However, the single central record lacks some detail. While all checks are accurately recorded in staff's personnel files, the single central record does not always reflect this same level of detail. In order to further strengthen the single central record, you should ensure that all checks and who performed them are accurately reflected on the single central record.

You have recruited several new governors. The new link governor for safeguarding has the relevant expertise to offer appropriate challenge to you and your colleagues on safeguarding practices. For example, the new link governor has made suggestions on how safeguarding practices can be optimised. Those responsible for governance now have a much sharper and clearer oversight of the practices in school. Some very new governors would benefit from further training to ensure they fully understand their roles and responsibilities.

Staff who are employed at the school receive regular and detailed training about safeguarding processes and procedures. This includes regular topical updates. Your staff are knowledgeable about contextual issues within the local community and the wider Herefordshire area, for example. However, agency staff do not yet receive this same training. While they have a basic understanding of safeguarding from their employers, they have not got the sharp insight that your staff do. You have recognised this, and full training is planned for all staff at the start of the new term.

Staff know what procedures to follow if they are worried about a pupil. The safeguarding team effectively records and investigates every concern they are alerted to. Leaders work well with external agencies to ensure that children and families receive the support they need. Staff know the pupils and families well. Staff regularly use the positive relationships they have with pupils to ensure they are cared for and nurtured. For example, staff in the kitchen give extra food to pupils who they know face financial difficulties.

During this visit you explained that there is now a new electronic system in place for all staff and visitors to sign in and record their attendance at school. While most staff regularly use this system, some do not. You should now ensure that all staff consistently use the new system in place.

Pupils are confident that there is a trusted adult in school who they could turn to if they were ever worried about anything. They speak about feeling safe and demonstrate secure

knowledge about how to keep themselves safe in everyday situations. For example, they spoke to us about online safety, dangers from criminal exploitation and healthy relationships. Pupils told us that staff care for them and make sure they are safe.

While effective processes and procedures have been introduced to strengthen safeguarding practices, more needs to be done to fully embed these across the school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Hereford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Bianka Zemke
His Majesty's Inspector