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Aidan McGovern
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Dear Mr McGovern

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Greyfriars Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 24 January 2023, 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 May and June 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, other staff, trustees, the CEO and other leaders of Unity Education Trust the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. I discussed with you and other leaders the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also scrutinised the school's rapid action plan, documentation related to monitoring of safeguarding, and documentation related to the work of the school improvement board. I met with curriculum leaders for English and history, the trust's head of school effectiveness, the headteacher and the trust's director of education to discuss the way that the quality of education is being improved. I also visited a range of lessons and spoke with teachers, support staff and pupils. To inspect safeguarding, I met with the trust's standards, behaviour and outcomes lead and the school's safeguarding leads, including the parent support adviser. I also scrutinised the school's safeguarding action plan, the school's single central record of recruitment and vetting checks, and the school's records of concerns and analysis thereof. I have considered all this in coming to my judgements.

Greyfriars Primary Academy 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.

Safeguarding is effective.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes to leadership. When the previous headteacher and assistant headteacher left the school in June 2022, the trust's head of school effectiveness stepped in to support leadership of the school until you were appointed as headteacher in September 2022. At the same time, a member of staff took on the role of assistant headteacher. You have worked with trust leaders and staff at your school to remedy the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. You are bringing about considerable changes to the culture of the school. This culture change has improved conditions for pupils to learn, to make friends and to feel safe. Staff, too, feel supported and much happier. Although progress has been made to improve the quality of education, there is more that needs to be done to ensure that the improvements to pupils' educational experiences are sustained and of the highest quality.

You and your team have set out to improve the way that reading is taught. Leaders and staff know that reading is an important foundation for pupils to learn successfully in other subjects. Since the beginning of the academic year, you have fully committed to putting a systematic phonics scheme in place. This scheme requires a significant investment of time, energy and resources to be implemented well. So far, staff have been trained, and pupils have been assessed and placed into the appropriate groups for their stage of learning. Staff are still getting to grips with the teaching approaches set out in the scheme. Leaders are checking which aspects of teaching need to improve. Currently, pupils who are behind in their reading receive some opportunities to practise during the school day. However, they do not yet consistently receive additional teaching support to catch up. This aspect is one of your next priorities as the phonics scheme becomes firmly established.

At the previous inspection, the design and delivery of the curriculum in other subjects was an identified area of weakness. Since then, you have adopted a staged, subject-by-subject approach to strengthening the curriculum. New subject leaders are supported to take ownership of their curriculum areas. Leaders and teachers have received training in what a high-quality curriculum should look like. There is a realistic and manageable timeframe to bring about sustained improvements to the curriculum in each subject. Some subjects, such as history, are leading the way. Your intention is to set the standard which other subjects and subject leaders will then emulate. Therefore, some subjects are still at a much earlier stage of development.

The early years curriculum has also undergone a significant change. Since the previous inspection, trust and school leaders have improved the curriculum so that it now sets out, in more detail, what children will learn and experience. There are more planned opportunities for children to develop their language and communication skills. To bring this ambition to fruition, you have identified additional training to help staff to support children to engage in conversations, learn to take turns and convey their thoughts

successfully. You are also currently looking at how the learning environment can be adapted to maximise opportunities for children to learn. This is an ongoing project that will take more time to get right.

You have made changes to the support provided for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The previous inspection found that the identification of pupils' additional needs and target setting was lacking. The special educational needs coordinator has more time to fulfil her role. She has worked with teachers to ensure that targets now closely match pupils' needs. Staff have also received training so that they are better placed to provide pupils with SEND with the right support. Your checks show that while most pupils with SEND are being supported well, this is not consistently the case. You and your team are planning the next steps to improve the provision for pupils with SEND further.

Pupils' disruptive behaviour was commonplace at the previous inspection. You have sought to bring about a positive culture change in the school so that pupils can get the most out of their learning experiences. This includes leaders having a more visible presence throughout the school day. Since your appointment, you have worked with the behaviour lead to set out precise expectations of how pupils should behave in and around the school. You have made expectations very clear to staff and pupils. You have ensured that routines, coupled with easy-to-remember mantras, are taught to pupils. Pupils have plenty of opportunities to practise 'getting it right' and they are praised for doing so. When I talked with pupils and observed them in lessons, it was clear that they liked learning the routines. The simplicity and clarity of these expectations are particularly beneficial for pupils with SEND. Pupils say that teachers are fair, giving appropriate consequences when needed.

The well-being of staff has increased with these positive changes in pupils' behaviour. There are still some pupils for whom the new system, culture and ways of working have yet to have the desired impact. Consequently, some lessons are still occasionally disrupted by a few pupils' poor behaviour. However, you and your team continue to work with these pupils and their parents to ensure that every pupil is supported to improve their behaviour.

A top priority for you and your team is to ensure that safeguarding approaches and systems are suitably rigorous. Safeguarding leadership capacity has increased. A team of five people who are trained to lead safeguarding support and challenge each other when safeguarding concerns arise. All staff have received additional training on how to identify the signs of harm and contextual issues which may affect pupils and their families. Staff have been given additional guidance so they know what to do when they have a concern. This includes how to report concerns using your chosen electronic reporting system. Staff appreciate the regular safeguarding meetings that help them to learn and remember more about safeguarding practice. Safeguarding records demonstrate the increased timeliness of sharing and following up any concerns. During my discussions with pupils and teachers, it was clear that pupils feel confident to share concerns and that they know how to keep safe, including when online. The school's single central record is up to date.

You have set up comprehensive audits, reviews and monitoring opportunities to ensure staff remain vigilant and take the right action to make sure that pupils are safeguarded from harm. This includes additional advice and support from colleagues within the trust. As a result of these improvements, safeguarding is now effective.

Trustees, including members of the school improvement board, have focused on remedying the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Their work with you and other school leaders has helped to translate the actions set out in the rapid action plan into practice. Improvement has proceeded, despite some barriers, such as staff absence. The trust has set up additional opportunities for staff to learn from and support each other, for example for the designated safeguarding leads and with the early years networks.

Leaders have gained a greater depth of understanding as to what needs to change from external specialists, such as in early years. Improvement planning is clear, but also flexible. Your thinking rightly changes as improvement progresses and required next steps become clearer. This reflective approach ensures that progress is sustainable. Further improvement is aided by the team approach that strengthens staff well-being, commitment and drive.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of Unity Education trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Norfolk County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Hannah Stoten
His Majesty's Inspector