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Paul Ramsey
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ramsey

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Sir William Ramsay School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 13 March 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 inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in June 2022.

During the inspection, Mike Boddington, Ofsted Inspector, and I discussed with you and other senior leaders and staff, governors and the local authority 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 visited some lessons and an assembly and met with groups of pupils and staff. We scrutinised a range of documents and records relating to behaviour, safeguarding and the schools' curriculum, including the provision for personal, social and health education. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Sir William Ramsay School 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

Since the previous inspection, there have been some staffing changes. The capacity of the senior leadership team has been strengthened through the appointment of a deputy

headteacher. However, we discussed the challenge facing you moving forwards, as your other deputy headteacher leaves the school imminently.

You and other leaders are making progress towards the essential improvements needed in the school. You correctly identify that there is still much to do. On this first monitoring visit, we focused on checking the impact of leaders' work to improve safeguarding and the personal development and behaviour of pupils. This is vital so that pupils feel safe and are confident to report incidents of bullying. We also considered your work to improve the behaviour of pupils. Additionally, inspectors looked at curriculum implementation and the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

You have strengthened the safeguarding team and increased their capacity. Safeguarding is now effective. While pupils are now no longer at risk of significant harm, your work to tackle bullying is at an early stage. Pupils now have named staff that they can speak to if they have a concern. You have made sure that the response leaders take to bullying has been redesigned and strengthened. There are new systems in place for pupils to report bullying and this is beginning to have impact. However, leaders are aware that these new approaches to tackling bullying need to be communicated to parents and pupils more thoroughly. This should increase their confidence in your systems and processes. Leaders have strengthened the curriculum to address some of the school's priorities highlighted at the last inspection. The personal, social and health education curriculum has been improved and includes a focus on discrimination, homophobia and respectful relationships.

Leaders have made a strong start to improving behaviour. Importantly, you have reduced in-school truancy. You correctly identify that where there is stability in staffing, there are fewer disruptions to lessons. However, you know that this is not consistent enough across the school. In the lessons we visited, pupils worked in a calm and respectful atmosphere. You are aware that some unkind and derogatory language goes unchallenged. While behaviour at breaktimes and lunchtimes is improving, there are still incidents of poor behaviour that need addressing more effectively.

Curriculum implementation is improving because you have clarified and raised expectations for staff. You have introduced a common approach, which includes non-negotiables that you expect all staff to include in every lesson. This is helping to build consistency in curriculum implementation. You have rightly strengthened the training programme for teachers. Staff value this. Senior staff and subject leaders are taking important steps to quality assure the implementation of the curriculum. However, there are still many areas of the curriculum where this is not yet strong enough. As we discussed, in some cases this is due to not being able to recruit strong teachers in some subjects. Where staff employed by the school are not meeting your expectations, you are taking robust and appropriate action to support them.

The provision for pupils with SEND is slowly improving, as is the identification of their needs. Teachers are more aware of pupils' specific needs and, where implementation is strong, they are beginning to adapt the curriculum to meet their needs. However, there

are important aspects of curriculum implementation that are not yet effective enough. The work to support the weakest readers is not sufficiently robust. While leaders accurately identify pupils' reading ages, the strategies to support those who have fallen behind are not targeted precisely enough. You have established a period of silent reading at the start of each lesson. However, this time is not used effectively for those who find reading challenging. You have identified that staff need to be trained to teach phonics to support these pupils in the future.

The opportunities for pupils to participate in extra-curricular activities are increasing. You recognise that this is important as it is helping to build pupils' self-esteem and sense of pride in belonging to the school. Leaders and staff provide a wide range of clubs for pupils to participate in and you actively encourage pupils who are disadvantaged to attend them. As we discussed, leaders and staff recognise the importance of raising pupils' aspirations. Some subject leaders have begun to do this by organising trips for pupils in their curriculum areas. However, you recognise the reluctance of some staff to organise visits previously due to concerns about pupils' behaviour. You are working hard to change the perceptions of a minority of staff and support leaders to improve provision further.

You have been outward looking in seeking support to improve. When you have made changes, you have been proactive in seeking feedback about these changes from external sources. For example, in November you commissioned a review of behaviour from the local authority. This report highlighted significant areas of concern and you described how you responded to these immediately.

You and your senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the progress you are making towards your key priorities. Governors are keen to support and prioritise their work to support you to make the required improvements. You continue to refine your action plan and seek support from your governors in monitoring its effectiveness and implementation.

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 Buckinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Linda Culling
His Majesty's Inspector