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Natalie Wismayer
Principal
Grove Academy
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Dear Ms Wismayer

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Grove Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on Wednesday 19 April 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 February 2022.

During the inspection, Scott Reece, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), Julia Mortimore, Ofsted Inspector (OI), Judith Rider, OI, and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the interim chief executive officer and chair of the multi-academy trust and governors 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 scrutinised a range of documents and records relating to safeguarding, behaviour and the school's curriculum, including the provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE). We also visited lessons, spoke to pupils, looked at pupils' work and observed pupils' behaviour. We spoke to staff and parents and examined responses to the parent survey. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Grove 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.

I am of the opinion that the school may appoint early career teachers.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Since the previous inspection, there have been many positive changes to staffing. There has been an increase in capacity and experience in the senior leadership team. The trustees have temporarily replaced the local board of governors with an interim executive board (IEB), chaired by an experienced leader. You have worked in collaboration with local schools to further develop systems and processes, and this is having impact. The Department for Education is seeking a new multi-academy trust to sponsor the school. This change appears to be imminent.

As leaders have correctly identified the curriculum still requires further work to meet the needs of all pupils. Despite the significant challenges you faced during the pandemic, including operating in temporary accommodation, you have continued to focus on your aims, values and ethos to provide an ambitious and inclusive education for all. Your succinct vision, 'The Grove 5', underpins curriculum development and is a helpful focus for staff and pupils. Leaders have an accurate view of the relative strengths of curriculum implementation. Middle leaders are receiving appropriate coaching to develop pedagogy further. This should help to eliminate in-school variability. Significant progress has been made in some subjects, for example in mathematics, where leaders' detailed curriculum thinking enables pupils to build knowledge and skills over time. This is not the case in all subjects, where further work still needs to be done to build a coherent curriculum. Leaders have focused on improving the teaching of early reading in the primary phase. Training for all staff remains a priority. The support for the weakest readers across the school is not yet sufficiently robust or systematic, and it is not yet having enough impact on these pupils' learning.

Leaders have skilfully improved personal development provision, including what is taught through the curriculum, to address some of the school's most pressing priorities. A coherent programme of PSHE, delivered in tutor time, assemblies and discreet lessons, has a much stronger focus on issues that pupils may encounter in the future.

Leaders have raised their expectations for what pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) can achieve. In the primary phase, teachers adapt the curriculum for pupils with SEND skilfully. Importantly, while teachers are now more aware of the specific needs of pupils with SEND, there is a lack of consistency about how effectively these pupils are supported in the secondary phase. This means that these pupils do not achieve the best possible outcomes.

You have rightly prioritised improving pupils' behaviour and attitudes. Leaders' relentless focus on behaviour management, as part of carefully planned continuing professional development, is supporting improvement. Leaders' clear expectations underpin pupils' understanding of how to conduct themselves in lessons and during social times. As a result, the majority of lessons are calm and purposeful. Occasional low-level disruption still occurs, mostly in the secondary phase. As leaders are aware, this needs to be eradicated so that all pupils can focus on learning effectively. Transitions between lessons

are well managed. Staff are highly visible, and this helps pupils to behave well. Staff manage behaviour in lessons more effectively. When pupils do not rise to leaders' expectations, there are clear, systematic and appropriate responses. Incidents of bullying and the use of racist and inappropriate language are reducing. Leaders' responses to bullying or misdemeanours are proportionate and robust where necessary.

You have strengthened the safeguarding team and increased capacity by bringing in expertise and arranging specialist training. Safeguarding is now effective. Staff and pupils know that safeguarding is a high priority. Members of the safeguarding team are very visible around the school, and this helps pupils to feel safe. All pupils spoken to have a named adult who they can go to if they are worried or concerned. Record-keeping is comprehensive and detailed. While leaders manage cases systematically, they occasionally do not consider cases in sufficient depth. This means that potential risks may be missed. Leaders must ensure that the processes followed enable pupils to maintain confidence in safeguarding staff and systems. The leaders' recruitment strategy and the reduction of external supply teachers have further supported safeguarding, as pupils develop strong relationships with known adults. The new structure of the school day, beginning each morning with a purposeful tutor time, is used effectively. The 'Staying safe at Grove and beyond' programme underpins this, where pupils learn how to stay safe online and in the community.

Members of the IEB are providing strong governance and oversight. They have an accurate view of the school and regularly visit to challenge and support leaders. Members of the trust are giving effective support to leaders by focusing much of their efforts on securing the transition to the new trust. This has enabled school leaders to work on the vital school priorities, including improving the quality of education. Members of the IEB use your detailed action plan to give precise feedback on the measures that you are taking to improve the school. You commissioned a safeguarding review after your previous inspection and acted swiftly on its recommendations. You have also commissioned external consultants to gain objective and impartial views about the school's effectiveness. You continue to be outward looking and collaborative in your approach to school improvement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Slough Association of Secondary Headteachers Education trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Slough. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Linda Culling
His Majesty's Inspector