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30 June 2023

Emma Jordan
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Dear Mrs Jordan

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sir Herbert Leon Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 6 June 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in May 2022.

During the inspection, Sarah Brinkley, Ofsted Inspector (OI), Richard Carlyle (OI) and I discussed with you and other senior leaders and staff, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the multi-academy trust, other representatives of the trust and two members of the interim standards board, 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, tutor time 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 school's curriculum, including provision for personal development. I took account of parents' views submitted online via Ofsted's confidential survey. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Sir Herbert Leon Academy remains inadequate and requires special measures. 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 special measures

Since the previous monitoring visit in February 2023, three new staff have joined the school, taking up key roles. A new designated safeguarding lead (DSL) joined the school at Easter. A new special educational needs coordinator joined the school the day before this inspection, and a new assistant principal began work on the same day as this inspection. A new external consultant is supporting the school's work to improve attendance.

On this second monitoring inspection, we focused on checking leaders' ongoing work to improve safeguarding, leadership and provision for pupils' development. We also considered aspects of the curriculum and pupils' behaviour. We agreed not to place a large focus on provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities or pupils' attendance due to the newness of leaders in these areas, but that these are likely to be a focus for the next monitoring inspection.

Safeguarding continues to strengthen. Since Easter, you have begun to hand over the leadership of safeguarding to the new DSL, with the aim for her to be in a position to fully take over the role from September. This is working well. Safeguarding records show that leaders act to help pupils who are known to be at risk of harm, including making sure that they are able to access external support where appropriate. Checks on the safe use of alternative provision continue to be thorough. You have also tightened up your strategic oversight of vulnerable pupils. Bespoke courses for some pupils at risk of future harm have been strongly valued by those who have attended.

The trust and the interim standards board continue to oversee the quality of safeguarding well. This includes through the recent commissioning of an external review of safeguarding. They also ensure that recruitment checks are completed for all new staff and are recorded appropriately.

The profile of safeguarding continues to be raised among staff. Staff continue to access training in safeguarding. You check their understanding through monitoring the use of your safeguarding systems. Since the previous monitoring inspection, you have also introduced regular opportunities for staff to refresh their knowledge through weekly safeguarding quizzes and scenarios.

Leaders have responded well to the findings of the previous monitoring inspection. Together, your team has revised the school development plan so that there is more focus on developing high-quality provision and more specific references to how this will be checked and monitored. There is more refinement needed as your monitoring gets underway. For example, we discussed the use of the words 'secure' and 'embedded'. All agreed that while an action may have been implemented successfully, that does not necessarily mean it is having a positive, long-term impact on pupils. You are considering refining your thinking further to ensure that you are able to check that your new systems are working well long term.

After the last monitoring inspection, you set up a programme of confidential 'counselling sessions' to gather pupils' views about life at the school, along with their understanding of how to keep themselves safe. You are using reports on the collective themes that emerge from these sessions to plan for future changes. Already, you have identified important gaps in pupils' knowledge of healthy relationships. You have provided a catch-up curriculum this term to fill these gaps. Pupils report that this has been helpful, for example in helping them to understand more about consent. You recognise that there are more gaps to fill. For example, pupils do not recall learning about the safe use of social media and are unclear about the dangers of radicalisation.

Leaders have wisely spent time this term revamping the personal, social and health education curriculum. The new curriculum is more ambitious and bespoke to the school and its local context. You are in the early stages of implementing this but already your monitoring is assuring you that the quality of delivery of the curriculum is better than at the last monitoring visit.

Teachers' more consistent use of sanctions is reducing disruption to learning. Pupils continue to report that behaviour in lessons is getting better because of the new behaviour management system you have introduced. However, many pupils do still report that they experience minor disruptions in lessons on a daily basis. Leaders have tightened up the use of internal exclusion, ensuring that the experience of pupils who are sent out of lessons is more bespoke to their needs. Your focus is on resetting attitudes so that pupils can return more quickly to learning in class. You recognise the need to continue to sharpen your analysis of pupils' behaviour.

You have responded well to pupils' concerns about feeling unsafe in some areas of the school. Leaders have made helpful changes to how pupils use the different spaces around the school at lunch and break times. Corridors are less crowded and more orderly. New outdoor toilet blocks are easier to access. Staff are more visible during duty times. This is starting to create a calmer, happier atmosphere around the school, although pupils told us that 'scraps' were still common as pupils try to resolve issues from outside school in the playground.

Pupils are slightly more confident that homophobic, racist and sexist behaviour would be tackled by adults when they hear it, than they were at the last monitoring inspection. However, the open use of such language and behaviour remains common for some pupils. Importantly, although pupils know that the use of racist language is wrong, many did not believe that the use of homophobic language as 'banter' was an issue.

You continue to tell pupils that staff will listen if they have concerns. Despite this, many pupils, especially girls, remain reluctant to tell adults in the school about sexual harassment or concerns about their own or a friend's safety. The reasons they gave were similar to those heard at the last monitoring visit; girls do not want to be seen as 'snitches', do not want to break confidences, or do not think that staff will listen.

Leaders at all levels are being well supported by the trust. The more organised line-management process you have established, along with ongoing training in leadership and curriculum development, is starting to have a positive impact in the classroom. Learning is not as frequently disrupted and pupils told us that 'some teaching is better' than before. Teachers now have access to bespoke information about pupils' special educational needs that they are able to use to adapt the curriculum to meet pupils' different needs. Currently, however, ambition for pupils' achievement is not typically high enough across a range of subjects. You have plans to address this through a substantial programme of coaching and modelling that is due to start in September, as well as continued support for curriculum leaders as they develop their programmes of study. You continue to establish an approach to prioritising reading across the school. You recognise that more work is needed to refine how you help the weakest readers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of the Academies Enterprise Trust multi-academy trust, the Department for Education's regional director, and the director of children's services for Milton Keynes. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Old
His Majesty's Inspector