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Nick Morley
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Dear Mr Morley

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of The Harbour School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 19 September 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 December 2022.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, Shazia Akram, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, other staff, the chair of trustees, the chair of the local governing body and a representative from 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. I also visited the campuses of The Harbour School, visited lessons, met with staff and pupils, looked at examples of pupil's work and scrutinised a range of documents. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to be no longer judged as having serious weaknesses.

The school should take further action to:

- develop improvement plans further, outlining clear and measurable actions to improve the school in line with the areas for improvement highlighted in the previous inspection. Those responsible for governance should hold the school to account for the pace of improvements and offer effective challenge and support.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Since the last inspection in December 2022, there have been significant changes in staffing, including in the leadership of the school. This includes your own appointment to the role of headteacher. You joined the school in September 2023 along with 17 other new members of staff. Prior to this, there had been a period of interim leadership. There have been a number of other senior leaders appointed, who bring with them considerable experience, knowledge and expertise. However, vacancies still remain, with some staff currently working in an acting capacity. Trust leaders have now centralised recruitment processes with the aim to further stabilise the staff team.

You continue to consider the appropriateness of the school's curriculum in meeting the needs of pupils. Since June 2023, investment has been made to develop teacher subject knowledge in the core subjects of mathematics, phonics and English. Each campus now has a curriculum focus team that includes senior leaders and subject leaders. While there is ambition for pupils in key stages 2 and 3 to follow a broad and balanced curriculum, planning for the core subjects is newly in place and is not yet fully embedded. Attention is now needed to sequence the knowledge and skills that will form the curriculum across the foundation subjects. This needs to include implementing an approach to ensure that pupils learn about different faiths and cultures.

The curriculum for older pupils is sequenced towards relevant qualifications and vocational pathways. Where pupils require a highly bespoke and individualised approach to their education, a new and thoughtful curriculum is being implemented. This includes support for reading. This approach is very new, and the impact of this work is not yet fully evident.

Staff understand the importance of overcoming pupils' barriers to reading. The school has recently adopted a phonics programme. Staff have only recently completed training to deliver this. Developing a consistent approach to the teaching of reading is an ongoing piece of work to ensure all pupils have the reading expertise they need to access learning.

As the new headteacher, you have been clear about your intention to review the school's behaviour policy. Notable inconsistencies across the campuses remain in the behaviour and attitudes of pupils and in the expectations of staff. You have a focus on continuing to stabilise the staff team with support from the trust. There are also plans for new staff to complete training in the school's positive approaches to supporting behaviour.

Alongside the need to continue establishing consistency of expectations for behaviour, you and the trust recognise the need to improve the school buildings and learning environment. While the trust has invested in work to secure some repairs, there is a recognition that many more improvements are urgently needed. You, the trust and the local authority are continuing your discussions about this to ensure pupils have a school provision that helps them to learn and achieve.

A high priority since the previous inspection has been to stabilise the staff team. This meant that the trust's initial implementation plan focused on this. To increase the pace of change it is now important to construct plans that clearly articulate the key improvement priorities for the school. This will support leaders at all levels to be accountable for delivering the necessary improvements. Those responsible for governance also need to assure themselves about the pace of change and offer effective challenge and necessary support to the school.

Rightly, there has been a sharp focus on improving safeguarding processes. Following the inspection, whole-staff training was swiftly organised to ensure that all staff understand their responsibilities. The school has benefited from the appointment of a new designated safeguarding lead (DSL), who has brought local experience and knowledge. Systems have been streamlined so that key safeguarding information is now recorded and acted on in a consistent way. Further training is planned to ensure that all staff consistently record with the same level of rigour, and that relevant context and/or follow-up action is included in every record. Records reviewed as part of this visit showed that the team of DSLs take swift action, and that they escalate concerns appropriately to ensure pupils get the help they need. The team of deputy DSLs now have clear roles and responsibilities, which are carried out across all campuses.

Collaboration between the school, the trust and the local authority is positive. The DSL team in school appreciates the close links and regular meetings with the local authority teams. You also value the ongoing professional discussions with the local authority to secure appropriate support to develop the individual provision to meet the needs of the most complex pupils you support.

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

Yours sincerely

Jo Petch
His Majesty's Inspector