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Michael Milner
Principal
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Dear Dr Milner

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of John Madejski Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 17 July 2024, 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 October 2023.

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, Carl McCarthy, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, as well as the interim chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, representatives from the board of trustees and board of 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 also visited lessons, spoke with pupils and staff, and reviewed pupils' work and school documentation. 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:

- ensure that the attendance strategy becomes more firmly embedded, in order to reduce absence and persistent absence for all pupils, and especially disadvantaged pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Since the previous inspection, there have been several changes to school policies and processes in order to address the issues highlighted in the previous inspection. A new behaviour policy has been accompanied by an overhaul of the school's timetable in order to support your drive for greater consistency around routines and behaviours. You have set school-wide expectations for staff about delivering lessons and supporting pupils with SEND. These decisions have been well considered and have laid the foundation for the further changes that you and your team plan for the next academic year. At the same time, you recognise that there is more work to be done to ensure that these changes are built on consistently by all staff.

Pupils' experiences in lessons have improved, but remain inconsistent. In lessons where teachers connect new knowledge with what pupils have learned before, pupils deepen their understanding. Subject leaders have identified the essential vocabulary needed within subjects. They have mapped out how teachers should introduce the concepts that these key words relate to. You and your team recognise that these stronger examples of teaching practice are not consistent across the school. In too many lessons, teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can learn and the quality of work they should produce. You and your team are aware that, as a consequence of this, pupils are not yet achieving well enough.

The experience of pupils with SEND is also inconsistent. Your team have provided training for staff on strategies to adapt learning to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. Direct interventions for some small groups of pupils are helping them to catch up on aspects of learning that are insecure. However, many teachers do not systematically address gaps in knowledge of pupils with SEND so that they can access new learning effectively. As a result, pupils with SEND are not learning as well as they should. You have planned further professional development for staff next year in order to strengthen teachers' pedagogical knowledge.

The curriculum for personal, social and health education (PSHE) has been reorganised effectively. PSHE lessons are now taught by a small team of senior staff, who have the right subject knowledge to help pupils learn about taking care of their physical and mental health, and to be prepared for life in modern Britain. This has led to a stronger experience of the PSHE curriculum for pupils.

Pupils and staff agree with your analysis that behaviour is improving. New protocols for moving pupils swiftly to and from lessons are becoming more embedded. There are fewer

pupils out of class during lesson time. You plan to build on this progress further by restructuring the school day next year. Fewer lessons are now affected by wilful, disruptive behaviour. Where this does still occur, your team are supporting staff to uphold the school's expectations more firmly. However, in too many lessons there are pupils who are disengaged from their learning. This results in them not completing assigned tasks and not securing new learning effectively. Your team recognises the crucial importance of teachers setting and upholding high expectations of pupils' conduct and learning. This is at the core of improving pupils' behaviour and the quality of their educational experience.

Pupils' attendance has declined over the course of this academic year. You and your team understand that too many pupils are missing out on learning as a result of poor attendance, especially disadvantaged pupils. You have responded to this by putting in place new systems and processes for tracking and following up on absence. Staff identify key groups and individuals who need more support with attending regularly, and have developed strategies to help bring this about. While there have been some individual successes, attendance is still too low.

Since the previous inspection, you and your team have received support from The White Horse Federation trust and also from the local authority. This support has helped you with refocusing the school's approach to attendance, and with the processes of identifying the needs of pupils with SEND. All those responsible for the leadership and governance of the school are acutely aware that changes in leadership over recent years have had a destabilising effect on pupils' experiences. Accordingly, you recognise that this is a critical moment for the school as it goes through the process of moving to a new trust. On the one hand, there is the need for urgent change in order to make vital improvements within the school. On the other hand, sustaining relationships with pupils and families, providing predictable and reliable processes and expectations and ensuring developments are sustainable for staff will be essential in delivering those improvements. Therefore, the school development plan reflects the need to balance these imperatives as you continue to take action to move the school forward.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the CEO of The White Horse Federation trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Reading. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Botting
His Majesty's Inspector