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Dear Mr Howard

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Mayfield School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 15 November 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 November 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, Sara Staggs, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), James Stuart, HMI, and I discussed with you, other senior leaders, governors 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. We also spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences, talked to staff, visited lessons and scrutinised school 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 progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

You started in your role of headteacher at the school in September 2022, shortly before the graded inspection in November of that year. Since that inspection, there have been significant changes to the leadership of the school. This began by increasing the number of leaders in the primary phase, allowing for a greater focus on teaching and learning, and particularly on reading. More recently, the school has appointed an executive headteacher and a deputy headteacher on secondment from a local multi-academy trust. There have also been a large number of teaching staff appointed since the last inspection, particularly in the senior phase. For this monitoring visit, I focused on those areas judged to be inadequate in the previous inspection: behaviour and attitudes; and leadership and management (including safeguarding). However, we also gathered evidence around the other priority areas of the school that related to the quality of education and personal development.

The previous inspection highlighted significant concerns with safeguarding. These concerns have been addressed and safeguarding is now effective. There is now a designated safeguarding lead (DSL) for both the primary and secondary phase and a team of deputy DSLs. This is helping to ensure that when a concern is raised, help is rapidly sought and secured. There has also been a focus on supporting staff with how to appropriately identify and log concerns that they have. As a result, the DSLs have an accurate picture of the risks that pupils face, and this is helping to keep pupils safe. The increased capacity of the team is also helping to ensure that processes are followed more closely, such as ensuring that pupils in alternative provision are safe. There are other areas relating to safeguarding that still need to be improved, such as ensuring that registers are taken promptly and accurately. It is also important that all pupils feel that there are adults in the school whom they can talk to. Currently, this is not the case for some pupils.

Improving pupils' behaviour and attitudes has also rightly been prioritised by leaders and it is here that we can see that the most significant progress has been made. There is generally a calm and orderly atmosphere around the school, both in and out of lessons. Very few pupils are now truanting from lessons and disruption in class is far less common. Staff comment that the difference is dramatic, and they now feel safe in school and well supported by leaders. However, at times, there is a lack of consistency in how poor behaviour is managed by staff. Pupils know that, as a result, behaviour will be worse in some areas of the school than others.

The number of suspensions has fallen sharply as behaviour has improved. Some pupils who would previously have been suspended are now taught in the 'Odyssey' building, where they are provided with much more intensive support. However, these pupils are currently taught a narrower curriculum and are only in school part time. While this is meeting the needs of these pupils at the moment, the school must do all it can to get these pupils back into school full time so that they can benefit from a broad and ambitious curriculum. Leaders have also acknowledged that there needs to be an

improvement in the attendance of pupils in the senior phase more widely. This is especially true for the most vulnerable pupils, where persistent absence is common. Leaders are taking what appear to be effective actions to address these concerns, but the impact of these actions will need evaluating over the course of the year.

During the last inspection, pupils raised concerns about the use of derogatory and discriminatory language in the school. As a result, leaders have increased the time spent on personal development and put in place a thorough programme to teach pupils the effect that such language was having on their peers. These actions are starting to have an impact. It is now clear that the use of such language is no longer tolerated, and pupils know that this is the case. However, pupils still worry that this is not a school where it would be okay to be different in some way, and they do not always report concerns about the way they are treated as they feel it would not be handled sensitively.

Pupils across the school are offered a broad curriculum, and leaders are ambitious for what this curriculum should achieve. However, leaders have identified that these ambitions are not yet shared by all staff. In too many lessons, especially in the senior phase, pupils are given work that is not ambitious enough. Too much time is spent on activities that are not supporting pupils to learn more. GCSE examination outcomes were low in 2023, and leaders report that they were disappointed with outcomes in the primary phase as well. Leaders are taking action to address these concerns. There is a well-planned programme of continuing professional development (CPD) which is tailored to the needs of individual members of staff. Staff say that they are keen to engage in this CPD and that they can see its value. The school has also had ongoing external support from local multi-academy trusts, who are working with middle leaders in both phases of the school to help them evaluate and develop their curriculum. However, these changes are in the earliest stages, and this work needs to continue. The school's governors are aware that improving both the planned curriculum and its delivery now needs to be a priority. They are providing effective challenge to school leaders and helping to drive improvement in this area.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of governors, 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

Mark Enser
His Majesty's Inspector