



# Meole Brace School

8<sup>th</sup> September 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am sorry to have to start the term with such a disappointing letter, but I am afraid the timing is out of my hands. I have to share some difficult news.

As you know, Meole Brace School was inspected by OfSTED on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> May 2023. We are currently in dispute with OfSTED, but as this process continues, the contested report is being published by them. I writing to inform you that OfSTED have judged the school to have 'serious weaknesses' and it is therefore judged as 'inadequate.'

This judgment by OfSTED does not mean the school has been placed into special measures. The overall 'inadequate' judgement has been given to the school because the area of Behaviour and Attitudes has been judged to be 'inadequate' against OfSTED criteria. Although inspectors found many things within Behaviour and Attitudes to be strong, they made findings based primarily on some interviews which they considered supported the judgement. This is the crux of our dispute with OfSTED, as we judge that their response was disproportionate when considered in the context of the school's strengths and the positive evidence the inspectors saw across the school during the two days of inspection. When a school is judged by OfSTED as inadequate in Behaviour and Attitudes then they judge it as inadequate overall, which is what has happened in our case.

A judgement of 'Serious weaknesses' means:

- That although the school has been given an overall judgement of 'inadequate', OfSTED has concluded that our school is giving an acceptable standard of education and that school leaders and governors at our school are demonstrating the capacity to improve.
- OfSTED makes judgements across a series of areas before coming to an overall conclusion. The areas of Leadership and Management, Safeguarding, the Quality of Education and Personal Development are not judged as 'inadequate'.
- It is important to note that Safeguarding has been judged as effective. The report states that 'safeguarding leaders are knowledgeable and driven...staff are vigilant...and when concerns are raised, leaders are tenacious in their actions'.

As you can imagine, as a school we're incredibly disappointed in this overall grading and we know that you will be too.

However, whilst we do not agree with OfSTED's judgment, we have already started decisive and swift actions to bring things back to 'good' across all areas of the school. Even if OfSTED have in our view made a disproportionate and unfair overall judgment, the issues raised by some of our community are still very

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important for us to address. Our own full review across ALL of our pupils shows a very different picture that you may be interested to read (a summary of this is below this letter). Further to this we do acknowledge that there are also other areas raised by inspectors, not connected to the 'serious weaknesses' judgment, that we also want to address.

Since the inspection, amongst other things, we have responded fully to the matters they raise, meaning that we have already made substantial progress towards resolving these areas. Specifically we have:

- Conducted our own in-depth pupil survey across all year groups and used those results to shape our actions. This was to ensure that we were responding accurately and fully to all of our pupils. Parents will be interested to note the stark differences between this large survey and the OfSTED findings.
- Reviewed, renewed and introduced a new updated behaviour policy. Although this had been planned prior to the OfSTED inspection, we have used their feedback as well as the wider perspective of parents, pupils and staff to help shape it further.
- To ensure that all pupils feel fully confident that all staff will take any discrimination issues seriously, we formally trained our staff and pupils in how to identify and report inequality in the workplace (Phase 1 Equality training). We set up our own Equality, Diversity and Inclusion steering group, made up of over 30 pupils and staff, who advise senior leaders on future policy and ensure that the voice of our community is fully known and acted upon.
- To make it simple for all pupils, we added another layer to our reporting systems for pupils, with a new online reporting system for pupils to use. This has been upgraded over the summer holidays to make it is easier for pupils and staff to use, and will be rolled out next week to pupils.
- Over the summer break we have also completed our curriculum delivery plans for this coming academic year – a summary of these is shared with parents at the beginning of each academic year.
- To support our work and make sure our actions address issues fully, we commissioned a variety of expert external business and education leaders. They have been used to ensure our school actions result in rapid changes and improvements.

It is noteworthy that the work that school and trust leaders had already done over the past 12-18 months in this respect is acknowledged by OfSTED in their report. You will remember that our school joined together with the TrustEd group last year, which is a bigger Multi-Academy Trust with much greater capacity and a sharp focus on school-based improvement work. We are all united in our determination to continue to build on the foundations that we have been laying over the past year and to respond quickly and successfully to this report.

Sarah Godden, our CEO, who is herself an OfSTED inspector said, "We are very disappointed by OfSTED on this occasion. You may have read about OfSTED recently, or about other schools in the papers who have raised complaints to them. We have been working closely with Meole Brace since they joined our trust last year, and we have been supporting them, as with all of our schools, on their school improvement journey. We have found leaders to be determined and successful in their improvement work, and also staff to be dedicated and professional in making changes. We will of course be working closely with the school over the next period, and we feel very confident that the school will respond successfully and rapidly to this report, under the secure and determined leadership of Alan Doust and his team."



Before I close, I want to draw your attention to some of the following positive feedback we received from OfSTED, as I am aware that it may well get overshadowed:

- “The headteacher, along with leaders and supported by the new multi-academy trust, has brought about a range of improvements across the school.”
- “Leaders, including governors, have high expectations of what pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) can achieve.”
- “The school has developed a broad and ambitious curriculum, that stretches beyond the academic.”
- “Across all subjects, leaders have identified the precise things that pupils need to learn and have ordered this knowledge so that new learning builds carefully on the things pupils have already been taught.”
- “The school has a planned personal, social and health education programme to teach pupils about safe relationships, sexual harassment and prejudiced views.”
- “The newly appointed special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), supported by leaders, has worked diligently to ensure all staff have the information they need to support pupils with SEND in lessons.”

I understand from OfSTED that we will be subject to regular monitoring by OfSTED. Once they are satisfied the school has made sufficient progress against the areas they highlight, we will be inspected again to gain an improved judgement. In our case we anticipate this will not be a drawn-out process, and we are determined to work with our school community make this so.

Can I thank our school community for their on-going support, which is appreciated at this difficult time. We want to work in a united and collaborative way with you at this time, and we especially encourage the following:

- Contact us directly about anything you are concerned about, any suggestions you may have, or if there are matters you want explained further. We want to respond fully to your questions and comments and will be putting together a FAQ so that we can share this with everyone. Please email [faqsOfSTED@meole.co.uk](mailto:faqsOfSTED@meole.co.uk) and we will address them in our FAQs feedback.
- Attend in person our update for parents at a parents' meeting on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> September at 6pm at school OR read / watch the PowerPoint from the meeting. I will be sending out a copy of the presentation and FAQs within two working days of the meeting. The purpose of the presentation and meeting is to share on our ongoing plan of action in response to the report.
- Continue to use our established ways of communicating, raising concerns or making comments for any arising matters. Your first point of contact is normally your young person's form tutor.
- Talk to your child and encourage them to raise any concerns, make comments or respond using any of our methods of communication (e.g. face-to-face with staff, email, our online reporting system, etc).

You can access the OfSTED report in full [here](#) and there will be a copy on the school's website in a couple of days.

Thank you once again for all the support you continue to give the school. As I'm sure you can appreciate, staff have been through an incredibly stressful time and we really appreciate your understanding and kindness during the next few weeks.

Mr Doust

Headteacher



## Pupil Survey Summary (July 2023)

### Safety-related questions

A. **I feel safe in school.**

Only 6% of pupils disagreed with this statement.

B. **There is an adult at school I can talk to if something is worrying me.**

17% of pupils disagreed with this statement.

C. **If I was to receive negative comments, then I know how to report this to staff.**

Only 14% of pupils disagreed with this statement.

### Equality-related questions

D. **My school encourages me to respect people from other backgrounds and treat everyone fairly.**

Only 5% of pupils disagreed with this statement.

E. **I understand that everyone has at least one protected characteristic and I have to be careful not to make discriminatory comments.**

Only 3% of pupils disagreed with this statement.

### Behaviour-related questions

F. **My school encourages me to attend well.**

Only 10% of pupils disagreed with this statement.

G. **My school encourages me to behave.**

Only 7% of pupils disagreed with this statement.

H. **The behaviour of other pupils in my lesson is good.**

27% of pupils disagreed with this statement – this is an area of focus for the school and has led to a revised behaviour policy introduced July '23.

I. **Staff deal well with behaviour at our school.**

Only 14% of pupils disagreed with this statement.

