

HOLLAND PARK

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an Ofsted outstanding and DfE designated teaching school

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4th May 2022

Dear Parents and Carers,

When the Board of Governors of Holland Park School was reconstituted in autumn 2021, it had to deal with a huge number of serious, widespread, historic allegations made by students, parents and staff about the conduct of some senior leaders at the school and about how the school was run.

The Department for Education also made an intervention when it issued the school with a Notice to Improve in November 2021, highlighting financial mismanagement, failure to ensure regularity and propriety in use of its funds, and failure to seek prior approval from the Government for “novel and contentious” expenditure.

The issues the Board inherited had been ongoing for many years and had never been resolved, either when the school was run until 2013 by the local authority (Kensington and Chelsea) or as a single academy trust.

The complaints from students and staff include misleading of Ofsted inspectors, safeguarding flaws that risked the welfare of students, and bullying of students and staff.

The new Board resolved to tackle these matters so that the school could once again be fit for purpose; and instructed an external HR company to independently investigate these complaints. The investigation began on 22nd November 2021.

The allegations are that:

1. There were breaches of safeguarding in respect of both students and staff;
2. There was bullying, discrimination and inequality towards both students and staff;
3. There was discrimination against protected characteristics;
4. There was ineffective leadership and management;
5. Completed staff questionnaires in respect of Ofsted inspection dated January 2020 were withheld;
- 6.a Ofsted investigators were misled during inspections; and
- 6.b There were breaches of COVID-19 Government guidelines and vulnerable/key worker children not being accommodated at the school during lockdown periods.

The investigation was conducted in two stages. First, it reviewed written evidence from more than 100 individuals. The second stage involved the investigator conducting Zoom interviews with individuals identified previously as those with evidence salient to the identified complaints and who were willing to give oral evidence. These were almost entirely individuals who had made complaints. During Stage 2 the investigator spoke to about 25% of those who had directly communicated with her during Stage 1.

The investigator has summarised the findings in a detailed confidential Report to the Board of Governors dated 14th April 2022. A summary of the Report is attached and is also on the school website here: <https://www.hollandparkschool.co.uk/virtual/news/hps-investigation-summary-report-4-may-2022.pdf>. The investigator’s view, based upon extensive and corroborative evidence provided during interviews, is that on the balance of probabilities every complaint is found to have happened.

The Report found that there had been breaches of safeguarding in respect of both students and staff and which included failure to support students who had been victims of peer-on-peer sexual abuse. Very little support appeared

to have been provided to students following traumatic events such as Grenfell and the suicide of a student. The Report also found that there was bullying, discrimination and inequality towards both students and staff. It was found that there was a culture of both fear but also one of favouritism and inequality. Some students were subject to favouritism and singled out for special attention and there was a grace and favour system in place for staff. There was also found to be discrimination against protected characteristics including overt sexism, Islamophobia, racism and lack of knowledge around physical and mental health issues in respect of both staff and students. Staff were subject to detriment after tendering their resignation.

The Report also found that some staff questionnaires in respect of the Ofsted inspection in January 2020 were destroyed. It found that Ofsted inspectors were misled and that some Ofsted staff questionnaires were specifically produced by some SLT members for the purposes of this Ofsted inspection. There were also found to be breaches of Government COVID-19 guidelines and that vulnerable/key worker children were not accommodated at Holland Park School during COVID lockdown periods. The investigation also found that there was questionable expenditure.

We look forward to receiving the findings of Kensington and Chelsea Council's independent learning review, which was commissioned in September.

The Board of Governors has been reconstituted since the events contained in the Report occurred, with almost all Governors appointed since September 2021. However, the current Board deeply regrets that the independent investigation has concluded that these events have occurred. The Board is committed to ensuring that necessary steps are taken to resolve these issues and to prevent any recurrence of such failings in the future.

As you would imagine, we are taking the findings of the Report very seriously. As a result, and after much consideration, the Governors intend to make one referral to the Teaching Regulation Agency and will be commencing a disciplinary investigation in respect of three members of staff. All will be given a full opportunity to respond before any conclusion is reached.

We know that the recent period has been a difficult one for all those at the school, not least while the independent investigation has been ongoing. However, following today, the Governing Body has no plans to take any further disciplinary measures in relation to other staff and hopes that the school will soon be able to move on to a more positive phase of its development and growth.

There will be a series of meetings at the school tomorrow, Thursday 5th May, at which parents and carers can discuss the Report and its findings with members of the Board. These will be held for 20 parents/carers each at the following times, and you can register at the respective links:

- 5pm to 5.45pm (<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/332598289437>)
- 6pm to 6.45pm (<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/332599152017>)
- 7pm to 7.45pm (<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/332599834057>)

Whilst the environment has been different this year, we will also make available counselling support for any student who requests it. To this end, we are increasing available support from Place To Be tomorrow. The school already provides a counselling service for staff. Trustees will also be available to meet with staff to answer any questions.

The future for Holland Park School must be different. Outstanding schools have positive, enriching and caring learning environments, focused on human dignity and flourishing as well as high achievement. The two are central reciprocal components of an outstanding education. Governors are fully committed to this future and have been working hard to create its foundations.

With this in mind, you will be aware that the Governors have made a provisional decision that the school joins United Learning, a successful multi-academy trust, in September. We know some members of the school community do not agree with our proposal. There are also many who desperately want action taken. The Governors' priority and guiding principle is to make sure the school is again fit for purpose and providing the first-class education that students have a right to expect. We believe that the best way for the change to be achieved is through a change to the structure, with the school overseen by a strong, expert academy trust.

The Governors will make a recommendation to the Government after the stakeholder engagement process has concluded; and the Government will then make the final decision as to the school's future.

We would like to thank and commend all those who gave evidence to the investigation. Many of them are still traumatised by their experiences at Holland Park School. Some interviewees were extremely distressed when

revisiting their time at the school. It is their testimony that has made sure these issues have come to light and will lead to the change that is needed.

We hope that the school community will now come together and act as one for the good of the children and young people who attend the school, not least those students who are approaching their exams in this very important term.

Thank you for your support of both Holland Park School and the Board.

Yours faithfully,

The Board of Governors
Holland Park School