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Dear Mrs Lake,

Inquest: Isabel Ann Richardson

Principal
Thomas Leverage

I am writing in reply to your letter, dated November 6, 2015, and report, dated August 28, 2015. In the letter you refer to your earlier correspondence of August 28, 2015. Unfortunately, I never received this correspondence; as you may be aware the school has undergone substantial changes in recent weeks. Please accept my apologies for the resulting delay in replying.

Firstly I would like to formally note my sadness at Isabel's death. The events took place before I took up post as head teacher on July 1, 2015 and so I had no opportunity to meet Isabel, but nonetheless I recognise that the death of anyone so young is a tragedy.

I understand both from your report and from colleagues that effort was made to support Isabel, and that following her death additional measures were put in place to support pupils who may have been affected by it.

Schools are one of a number of agencies that have a duty of care to young people, and it is absolutely right that we should seek to learn any possible lessons from such deeply sorrowful events. In your report you outlined two specific areas of concern.

1. *A Pastoral Team were in place at the School but it was not clear from the evidence as to their purpose, how they worked or whether they were trained in the role they were expected to perform.*

On taking up post I carried out an urgent review of our approaches and within my first two days I implemented a new safeguarding team and structure. I also commissioned Kelly Waters, Senior Advisor for Safeguarding at Norfolk County Council, to audit our approach.

I share your concerns that there were deficiencies in training, oversight, and operational practices that meant conduct may have fallen below the recommended frameworks suggested by Ofsted and the Local Authority.

I have now addressed these issues and have a fully trained safeguarding team in place. I have appointed an Assistant Principal to lead this team and provide feedback to the leadership team on a weekly basis. I have liaised with Norfolk County Council to provide a follow-up audit later this term to ensure the new structures are operating effectively.

I am confident that we are fully compliant with our statutory obligations and that staff now have appropriate training, are aware of their roles and responsibilities, and of the correct approach and procedures to discharge them.

2. *It was not clear that the Pastoral system was robust or structured enough to deal with the problems that Isabel presented.*

I share your concerns that the pastoral system was not structured or robust enough to deal with the complex issues that they at times faced.

This was partly due to the issues I have outlined above, but also because the lack of consistent leadership across the school had resulted in fragmented groups working in isolation, including the safeguarding team.

There were also two instances of individual team members who I believe were not working within the school's safeguarding framework. This has resulted in action being taken through our internal disciplinary systems, which is currently ongoing.

As well as restructuring the safeguarding team, seeking external support and guidance, appointing new staff members, and upskilling key team members we have also used our staff training days to train the whole staff team in safeguarding. We have made physical changes to the school site to improve security and allow for more structured interaction between staff and pupils.

I have sought to change the culture of the school in our approach to safeguarding, to better ensure that we are meeting the needs of all children in our care. Safeguarding is now a standing agenda item for our senior staff meetings and we have an increased level of interaction with a number of external agencies to ensure we have the best possible support for our pupils.

I hope that this goes some way to reassure of the measures we have taken to address the issues you have quite correctly raised.

Should you require any further information or clarification on any of the points I have made please do not hesitate to contact me at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,


PP/ **Mr T Leverage MA(Cantab)**
Principal