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Mr C Currie
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Currie

Ofsted 2010–11 best practice survey: safeguarding in schools

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 29 September 2010 to look at work in safeguarding.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our publication about best practice in safeguarding in schools. The publication will include case studies about individual schools. If Harrow Way Community School is included as a case study, you will have an opportunity to comment before publication. Individual schools will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

Features of good practice

- The priority given to safeguarding permeates all aspects of leadership, management and provision. It is grounded in clear, tangible measures to ensure safety, such as the site security and systems to check the suitability of staff and visitors. The strengths of the school go beyond these operational factors and can be seen in the palpable culture where students learn and develop in a secure and positive learning environment. Extremely positive relationships between staff and students, and a culture of openness, responsibility and respect, form the bedrock of the school's highly successful safeguarding practice.
- The school's rigorous safeguarding procedures are enhanced by multi-layered elements which have very positive outcomes in promoting the safety and well-being of its students. Crucially, these factors include the strong quality of care and support, the school's passion for inclusion, its relevant and highly flexible curriculum and the strength of its internal and outward-facing partnership work. At the heart of the school's safeguarding practice is the priority given to cultivating an ethos where students and staff not only feel safe but readily take responsibility for the safety, and personal and emotional well-being of others.

- Well-considered and effective channels of communication are evident throughout the school and between partners. Consequently, students and staff can communicate any concerns with ease, confident that they will be listened to and issues will be dealt with. Students say they feel very safe. One reason is that staff are accessible and always around if students need them. Peer mentors and prefects enhance this range of support. A strikingly positive feature of Harrow Way is that it is a 'telling school', in the best sense of the phrase, and this culture of openness is nurtured throughout the school.
- The school's simple but effective, 'safeguarding mapping document' charts the nature of staff and external agency involvement with and support for identified students where there are, or have been, safeguarding or related concerns. This document ensures that staff who need to know are kept apprised of developments and the school can monitor outcomes as well as keeping a record of levels of intervention. Communication between key staff is effective.
- Safeguarding training for staff is regular, including induction arrangements with a well-placed emphasis on ensuring that staff are aware of steps they should take to safeguard themselves. Staff have a clear understanding of what they should do if they have safeguarding concerns. Students who are responsible for supporting others are equally clear about the limits of confidentiality and when they need to pass on information to staff. Child protection lead officers are tenacious in ensuring that issues are followed up.
- Inclusion is a particular strength and the school has been very successful in working with a wide range of partners to enhance the range of support and opportunities for its students, particularly those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. These students are extremely well provided for because of the careful and effective way their needs and out-of-school circumstances are assessed, met and monitored. The school and its partners have rightly identified that meaningful partnerships can play a key role in developing the protective factors which allow students to thrive but that they can also contribute to supporting families. Highly effective partnership working, for instance, has ensured that in the past three years there have been no permanent exclusions, compared with over thirty during the previous three years. The school's willingness to take the lead professional role in following assessments carried out under the common assessment framework exemplifies its strong commitment to multi-professional working.
- Partnerships with cluster schools ensure a continuous thread of support as children and young people move through the different phases of education. Transition and outreach arrangements to support this are excellent. Targeted students benefit from the school's 'primary curriculum group' aimed at boosting students' basic skills which is coupled with well-tuned emotional support and pastoral care. This increases self-confidence and esteem and Year 7 students say that it helps them to settle in quickly and that they feel secure and safe in this positive learning environment.

- Initiatives, such as 'Rights Respecting Schools' which is promoted well by a team of student UNICEF peer educators, provide a spur to students to develop a sharply honed sense of personal responsibility. They give them an acute awareness of their rights and those of others, including that of protecting children from harm. This was evident during an assembly where students were considering how they could make a difference to children suffering harm as a result of floods in Pakistan.
- The school actively develops and encourages students' sense of empowerment. They have an acute sense of what is or is not acceptable and act maturely and responsibly as a result. Students are respectful, responsible and thoughtful. Tangible impact is evident in the quality of students' behaviour towards each other. The school has rigorous systems in place for monitoring the presence of visitors and students know what action to take should they have any concerns about anyone on site.
- The curriculum contributes strongly to safeguarding students and they speak highly about the quality and impact of personal, social and health education and citizenship provision. Consequently, for example, students have an excellent and well-cultivated sense of personal safety. They develop a healthy understanding of risk. They can clearly articulate that sometimes risks need to be taken to learn but they also know when risks need to be avoided. They have a very good awareness, for instance, of how to minimise risk in the local community, for example when using mobile telephones and safe routes to take when walking home.

It was a great pleasure to meet you, your staff and students. I would be grateful if you could pass on my thanks for the warm welcome I received and the amount of preparation and work that staff and students put into the visit. The students I met are impressive ambassadors for the school.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop safeguarding in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

John Kennedy
Her Majesty's Inspector