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Anthony Fitzpatrick
Headteacher
Barnwell School
Barnwell
Stevenage
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Dear Mr Fitzpatrick

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Barnwell School

Following my visit to your school on 9 July 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with the no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the Chief Inspector was concerned about behaviour at the school. It was carried out with no notice.

Evidence

Inspectors considered evidence including:

- observations of pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning in lessons
- observations of pupils' behaviour throughout the day, including discussion with pupils
- documentary evidence including the behaviour and bullying logs
- discussions with leaders and staff.

Having evaluated all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Behaviour and safety requires improvement.

Context

There are currently 1,316 students in the school and the majority are of White British heritage. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The proportions of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs and are supported through school action are below average. The proportion of students leaving and joining the school throughout the school year is smaller than average.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students generally have positive attitudes to learning, but this aspect of behaviour still needs to improve for it to be good overall. Behaviour in lessons does not consistently have a good impact on the progress students are making for two main reasons.

Firstly, a minority of students still disturb the learning of others. This is mainly in Years 7, 8 and 9. Where disruption was observed it included calling out and talking when the teacher was giving instructions or when other students were answering. The work being undertaken to make students more aware of the sort of low level disruption that is detrimental to learning has not yet had time to eliminate it.

Secondly, where behaviour is not disruptive but nevertheless does not contribute to good learning, students do not engage in class discussions or volunteer answers to their teachers' questions without significant encouragement. Teachers do not consistently help the development of students' literacy, in terms of their ability to speak well and summarise what they have heard, by overtly explicitly promoting speaking skills in lessons.

Some teachers are still not applying the behaviour policy consistently enough. In general, teachers focus on telling students what they must not do, rather than emphasising the sort of behaviour that will support their learning.

Students behave well around the school. They report that they feel safe on the journey to and from school, which the majority make on foot or by bicycle. They are courteous, friendly, appropriately dressed and they take reasonable care of their surroundings. Punctuality in the morning and at the start of lessons is good. Despite students' obvious enjoyment of the pleasant outdoor environment on a lovely summer's day when the inspection took place, they moved with little prompting to lessons after lunch. They respond well to instructions from all adults, including cover supervisors and staff in the canteen. Additional support for students with particular needs is helping them to follow a full curriculum as soon as possible.

Bullying has reduced significantly and rarely occurs now. This is as a result of regular work by tutors and through assemblies to ensure students understand the consequences of different kinds of bullying and what to do should it occur. On the morning of the inspection, an interesting assembly was taking place that focussed on this topic.

Attendance has improved and is above average. Persistent absence has reduced. The local authority attendance officer supports the school well in working with families that are hard to reach. Attendance in the sixth form is good.

Exclusions have reduced since the last inspection. Students work as ambassadors in supporting improvements in teaching and learning, behaviour and the environment of the school. The behaviour ambassadors are proud of their roles and the difference they are making.

Although not consistently applied by all teachers, leaders in the school support the management of behaviour through a clear behaviour policy that sets out the roles and responsibilities of all sections of the school community. Form tutors and leaders of the three 'colleges' that make up the house system provide good personal support to students and help the improvement process by encouraging competition between the houses.

Senior leaders are checking the extensive data they collect on rewards and sanctions. This includes checking that teachers are rewarding appropriately and students who repeatedly breach the school's behaviour expectations receive the right support to change. Teachers have high expectations and have set challenging targets for the reduction of poor behaviour. These have not been met yet, but the recent initiatives are having a positive impact.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure there is a strong emphasis on developing behaviour needed to promote good learning.
- Improve attitudes to learning by increasing the opportunities for all students to develop their speaking skills and take a more active role in whole class discussions.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire and the Chair of the Governing Body. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector