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10 July 2015

Mr Martin Knowles
Headteacher
The Oldham Academy North
Broadway
Royton
Oldham
OL2 5BF

Dear Mr Knowles

No formal designation monitoring inspection of The Oldham Academy North

Following my visit to your academy on 9 July 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the academy.

Evidence

I met with you and with other members of your leadership team who have responsibility for child protection and safeguarding. I also met the teacher who oversees the progress of children who are looked after by the local authority, a group of students, a group of staff, three representatives of the sponsor and the governor who has responsibility for safeguarding. I scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. I considered a safeguarding audit that has recently been undertaken by the sponsor, along with information provided by the local authority. I read the responses from parents and students to surveys conducted by the academy, considered the minutes of the governing body and read case studies relating to students who had been persistently absent from the academy. I reviewed the academy's arrangements for teaching students about safety, toured the academy and made brief visits to a few lessons.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy's safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.

Context

The Oldham Academy North is sponsored by E-ACT. It is smaller than the average-sized secondary school, however, the number of students enrolled at the academy is increasing. Almost all the students are from minority ethnic groups; the majority are of Bangladeshi heritage. The vast majority of students speak a first language other than English. The proportion of students who are disadvantaged, and therefore supported by the pupil premium, is much higher than the national average. The pupil premium is funding for those students who are eligible for free school meals and for children looked after by the local authority. The proportion of students who are disabled or identified as having special educational needs is lower than the national figure. A higher-than-average proportion of students join the academy at times other than the normal transition points. There is a full complement of staff at the academy and several new appointments have been made who will take up post at the start of the autumn term.

Leadership and management of safeguarding

Leaders and governors have developed a culture in which safeguarding is of paramount importance. There is clear evidence of cohesive teamwork in the academy's drive to keep students safe. The academy's policies fully reflect statutory requirements. Procedures for staff recruitment include appropriate vetting of the suitability of adults employed by the academy to work with children and young people. Governors have also been subject to rigorous checks and they have received the required training to ensure that the academy's recruitment processes are robust. The governing body ensures that the academy's single central record is complete and that information is maintained securely. Safeguarding is a standing item at governing body meetings: leaders and governors take their duties very seriously.

The academy's systems for child protection are effectively led by the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) who is supported by two deputies, one of whom has particular expertise in on-line safety. A dedicated team of child protection officers has detailed specialist knowledge of different aspects of safeguarding, such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation. They provide current and relevant guidance for students and staff. There are effective communication systems at the academy that enable rapid action to be taken whenever child protection issues arise. The academy maintains detailed records of its actions: these indicate that leaders have taken swift action in response to potential safeguarding concerns raised by any members of staff or students. The academy has sought appropriate support from the local Prevent officer and from the local authority designated officer when safeguarding concerns have necessitated referral.

There is an effective system by which students can report online any concerns they may have; this is valued by students, who state that their reporting leads to any issues of bullying being dealt with swiftly. Students also feel comfortable about speaking directly to staff, especially their form tutors and the behaviour managers. Staff are clear that their positive relationships with students and their alertness to changes in students' demeanour or behaviour are at the heart of maintaining a safe environment.

The academy's surveys of students' views confirm that the overwhelming majority of students in the academy feel safe. Students who spoke with me confirmed that they have 'someone to turn to' in the academy if ever they feel unsafe. They appreciate the academy's introduction of assemblies and tutorials which focus on different aspects of British values, including democracy, the rule of law and respect for people of different faiths and cultures. The topics that have been covered are highly relevant and include homophobia, sexting, extremism, domestic violence and child sexual exploitation. The Equality Act 2010 is fundamental to the academy's promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students have been provided with a substantial amount of information. Teachers have evaluated the impact of the assembly and tutorial programme at the point of delivery; the academy's leaders recognise the need to revisit the themes that have been explored to ensure that students have good opportunities to reflect on how their knowledge affects their behaviour, attitudes and feelings of safety.

Prominent displays around the academy promote its ethos and reinforce messages about the importance of self-esteem, inclusivity and mutual respect. The academy's innovative 'futures programme,' which is your brainchild, aims to develop students' resilience and their capacity to deal with different situations. This programme is a good indicator that the academy's approach to safeguarding includes a clear focus on equipping students with the knowledge and experiences to make appropriate decisions to keep themselves safe.

A key aspect of the academy's approach to safeguarding is ensuring good attendance. The proportion of students who are persistently absent has reduced and is well below the national figure. This is due to a concerted effort to make learning enjoyable, alongside the provision of support and involvement of external agencies in cases where students' attendance is low. The academy makes use of appropriate sanctions in its drive to ensure regular attendance. Leaders have also focused on reducing the incidence of fixed term exclusions, particularly of boys, and this has also been successful and contributes to these students' safety. Behaviour around the academy was calm and purposeful during this inspection. Students state that staff supervision is always good at lesson changeover and during social times; consequently, there are no areas of the academy where they feel unsafe. Students commented that, on occasions, their learning is affected by low-level disruption but that the rigorous use of the behaviour management system has led to considerable improvement.

The academy monitors the safety of students when they are working online and has taken swift and effective action in response to the occasional hurtful use of social media. Staff and students are clear about the acceptable use of mobile devices and about the penalties for any instances of unacceptable use. The academy does not currently block unsuitable website content in relevant community languages.

The academy's site is safe and secure. The entrance to the building is well supervised and visitors' credentials are carefully checked. Movement around the academy is calm and sensible. The governing body ensures that fire evacuation procedures are effective and that they are regularly undertaken. Risk assessments are completed appropriately and students are taught about health and safety, including when using equipment in technology subjects.

The substantial number of parents who responded to the academy's recent survey are overwhelmingly positive about their children's experience. They think that behaviour is good, that bullying is dealt with effectively and that their children are safe.

External support

The local authority and the sponsor work closely with the academy and together ensure that staff receive appropriate, up-to-date training on all aspects of safeguarding. Some of this training has been delivered by officers of the local authority. Representatives of the sponsor and the local authority are members of the governing body's monitoring committee through which they provide well-documented challenge to you and your senior leaders. A representative of the sponsor has a substantial presence at the academy and supports your work on safeguarding through a programme of quality assurance. Channels of communication are clear between the academy and other agencies such as the local Prevent team and the local authority designated officer for safeguarding.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that students are given good opportunities to reflect on the programme of British values that has been introduced, including its relevance to their feelings of safety.
- Pursue arrangements to block unsuitable website content in relevant community languages.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Oldham, to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Chief Executive Officer of E-ACT. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector