

14 December 2015

Mr Jon Ford
Principal
Downham Market Academy
Bexwell Road
Downham Market
Norfolk
PE38 9LL

Dear Mr Ford

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Downham Market Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 3 December 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, aspects of the effectiveness of leadership and management in the academy, and the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils at the academy.

Evidence

I met with you and other senior leaders, heads of house, the Chair of the Governing Body and groups of pupils from Key Stages 3 and 4. I scrutinised the single central record of recruitment checks of staff, and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. I conducted a telephone discussion with a representative from the local authority. I reviewed a number of academy policies and your records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance. I also visited a number of lessons, unaccompanied, to observe pupils' attitudes to learning.

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

The academy's safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.

Context

There are 1,368 pupils on roll. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs is

below average, but an above-average proportion of pupils have a statement of special education needs. You have reviewed your leadership structure and replaced an assistant principal in charge of operational matters with an assistant principal with responsibility for achievement. You have appointed new heads of history and science. There was a 20% staff turnover over the summer holidays in 2015.

Your recruitment checks on the suitability of staff employed at the academy are robust. All members of staff regularly receive updated training on the safeguarding of children, and staff who join the academy midyear are risk assessed and receive full training as soon as is practically possible. Members of the governing body have ensured that the academy's safeguarding policy is reviewed regularly and kept up to date. Members of staff with whom I met knew the systems and procedures for making referrals relating to safeguarding, and knew the names of the designated child protection officers. There is also a suitable 'whistleblowing' policy in place which enables members of staff employed at the academy to express their concerns relating to matters of public interest.

You have established a 'respect agenda' which is displayed around the academy and which is known by both staff and pupils. These expectations apply equally to staff who work at the academy and pupils. Because all academy stakeholders contributed to producing these guidelines, there is a greater sense of ownership and a shared responsibility in their implementation.

Although the majority of pupils in the academy comply with its code of conduct, a small proportion do not. You have established suitable systems and procedures for meeting the needs of these pupils. You have set up two different resourced bases to which pupils can be referred: the 'withdrawal room' and the 'internal exclusion room'. These resources are only used when teachers have implemented their own sanctions and they have been unsuccessful. These resourced bases are managed by suitably qualified staff and offer pupils the opportunity to reflect on their own behaviour. You monitor the pupils who are referred to these rooms, identifying, their different pupil groups and other variables, and you produce regularly updated reports which enable you to identify trends over time. Key members of staff, including heads of year and form tutors, are also involved in this process so that appropriate support and intervention can be provided. You evaluate the impact of any actions taken. Your records also indicate that the proportion of pupils excluded for fixed periods of time is being reduced year on year. Pupils' attendance has also improved over time, and is now slightly below the national average.

Pupils told me that they witness low-level disruptive behaviour in some lessons. This takes the form of talking when the teacher is talking and the inappropriate use of mobile telephones. This behaviour is often linked to the quality of teaching they experience, and is more likely to occur when the lesson is being taught by an agency teacher who is covering a staff vacancy or absence. During my visits to lessons, I witnessed a few incidents where pupils were not fully engaged in their learning.

You have set up clear systems to tackle any bullying that occurs in the academy. You record in detail the profile of the victim and the perpetrator, the type of bullying, the location of the incident as well as the time of day, including the journey to and from school. Your records indicate that the number of recorded incidents of bullying is decreasing year on year. Pupils demonstrated a very good understanding of the different types of bullying and are clear how to report any bullying incidents. They also spoke positively about your 'pupil voice' pupil representatives who are based around the school at break and lunchtime, and to whom pupils can report any concerns they might have. Pupils were confident that when they do report bullying, it will be dealt with. Records shown to me during this inspection demonstrate that you monitor the well-being of the victim two, four and eight weeks after the incident has taken place.

You promote pupils' personal development and well-being through your support systems and your personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme. This programme is delivered through your tutoring arrangements which include lessons delivered to combined groups of pupils from Years 7 to 11. Your 'theme of the week' is carefully linked to your academy's respect agenda and you make good use of tutorial time and assemblies to cover important topics. These include self-respect, taking risks, drugs and alcohol awareness, and bullying. You also promote fundamental British values well through these sessions.

As Principal, you receive weekly updates on pupils' behaviour and attendance to enable you to monitor trends over time. Members of the governing body also receive regular reports of matters relating to pupils' behaviour, attendance and well-being. One of the link governors carried out a review of the academy's PSHE programme and reported the findings to the relevant governors' committee. Governors have also ensured that the academy's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements.

External support

The CWA Academy Trust conducted a review of behaviour and safeguarding arrangements at the academy in March 2015, and the academy has acted on its recommendations.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve pupils' attitudes towards teachers who cover staff vacancies or staff absence.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Norfolk, the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector