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Mr S Capper
Principal
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Dear Mr Capper

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Knockhall Academy

Following my visit with Abigail Birch, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Mary Ellen McCarthy, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 8 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 personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils and the quality of leadership and management in the academy.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record of checks on adults working with pupils and other documents relating to safeguarding, child protection arrangements, logs of behaviour incidents and records of attendance and exclusions. They met with you, other senior staff including the academy's designated safeguarding lead and the special educational needs coordinator, teachers, support staff and two groups of pupils. Inspectors met with the Chair of the Governing Body, who is also a representative of the sponsor, the Lilac Sky Schools Academy Trust, and spoke to a number of parents informally before school. They also had telephone conversations with the chief executive officer of the trust, a representative of the local authority who oversees safeguarding issues and a parent who contacted Ofsted during the inspection. Pupils were observed at work in classrooms, at break and lunchtimes and as they moved around the site. Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire) had too few responses for any analysis to be undertaken but the academy's survey of parental views was examined.

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

Context

The academy is larger than the average primary school, with 528 pupils on roll, and it is growing. It now has three classes in each year group in early years and Key Stage 1. The proportions of pupils known to be eligible for additional support through the pupil premium government funding and of those with disabilities or special educational needs are below average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below the national average, as is the number of pupils who speak English as an additional language.

The predecessor school, Knockhall Community Primary School, was judged to require special measures in July 2013. You took up post in January 2014 and the school became an academy in August 2014. Staffing is now becoming more stable after a period of high staff turnover at the academy.

Main findings

Leaders and managers in the academy exercise effective oversight of all safeguarding procedures. Checks on the background of staff and other adults who come into contact with pupils are carried out reliably. Some administrative oversights around the organisation of the single central record of these checks were addressed before the end of the inspection. All policies, including those for safeguarding, behaviour, complaints and anti-bullying are clear, useful and available to parents on the academy's website. They are based on the sponsor's generic policies; while they contain all essential information some do not contain information which is specific to the academy.

A wide variety of opportunities are taken to teach pupils how to be safe. For example there is regular and good use of 'circle time' to explore individual and group responses to any relationship issues that arise. Some classes have written their own rules which they then follow reliably. A weekly 'focus assembly' encourages pupils to reflect on their academy community and how to play their part in maintaining it as a happy and safe place.

There are good systems in place for training all staff in safeguarding and child protection procedures. Training takes place at the start of each academic year and it is refreshed throughout the year by updates and reminders. Staff who join at times other than the start of September receive training as part of their induction. As a consequence staff are well aware of all relevant safeguarding policies and practices in the academy. This ensures a healthy culture of safeguarding and that pupils are well cared for. Staff told inspectors that they feel well supported by senior leaders if they have any concerns about a child's welfare or behaviour.

The significant building work currently underway in the academy presents challenges to staff and pupils. It is being managed well. Leaders ensure all appropriate risk assessments are completed and health and safety precautions taken. There are regular fire practices and staff are updated appropriately about changes in procedures as different parts of the academy become involved in building work. New procedures are practised and their effectiveness evaluated and developed as a consequence.

Pupils of all ages are polite and welcoming. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 are a little more reserved and senior staff are perceptive about the need to show extra care and support for them given their experiences in the predecessor school in more difficult times. The vast majority of pupils move around the academy calmly, although occasional reminders are needed for older pupils when they become a little noisy or run in corridors. Pupils show a very good understanding of the new behaviour policy and its emphasis on rewards through a merit system for good behaviour including showing care and respect for each other and the environment. Pupils wear their merit badges with pride and enjoy the 'lucky-dip' rewards. The use of images of clouds as a visual signal to represent a pupil's current behaviour is successful because it is well understood and appreciated by pupils and applied consistently and fairly. Pupils take on responsibilities within the academy confidently and proudly: some are playground buddies and others are student council members or house or sports captains.

Behaviour in classrooms is good. Relationships between staff and pupils are generally strong and positive. Several examples of pupils making enthusiastic responses to their work were seen and many teachers demonstrated their good knowledge of individual pupils' needs to maintain their interest and engagement. One Year 5 pupil told inspectors that 'teachers make learning fun and challenging'. There are a small number of pupils who have significant additional needs and are supported closely by teaching assistants. Their behaviour is managed well but there are occasional upsetting incidents that disrupt learning briefly. The late identification of the special educational needs of some pupils by the predecessor school has meant that the academy has had to respond urgently in some cases. It is making appropriate responses to these pupils' needs.

The majority of parents spoken with before the start of school were pleased with the work of the academy. They felt their child was happy at school and were often pleased with their progress. Many parents said that the academy is improving and that staff seem to know and understand their children better nowadays. A minority felt that the academy does not always keep them up to date on staffing changes. Some parents are concerned about the degree of staff turnover but, after a period of turbulence associated with the predecessor school's difficulties, this is settling down. Three teachers will leave at the end of this term. New staff have already been appointed, which means that the academy will be fully staffed from January.

Pupils' attendance overall last year was broadly in line with the national average. However some pupils' attendance was low, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds or with disabilities or special educational needs. Overall attendance is better so far this year and persistent absenteeism is falling. There are better systems in place now to address the attendance of pupils eligible for the pupil premium and those with disabilities or special educational needs. These systems emphasise the importance of good partnerships between home, the academy and other agencies.

Lunchtimes are complicated by the building work currently underway. The playground for Key Stage 2 pupils is a restricted and overly busy area. It is supervised adequately but occasionally the lack of space means that there are minor accidents and some boisterous behaviour. These incidents are notified to class teachers who, in turn, inform parents. However, these systems are not always used reliably and parents do not have enough information about what has happened. The play area for younger pupils is calmer and quieter. Lunchtime supervisors are more confident in their role now because they have received further training this term and meet regularly with their line manager.

Pupils are confident that adults keep them safe and look after them. They understand what bullying is and can differentiate between bullying and one-off acts of unkindness. They told inspectors that bullying is rare and said that it is 'dealt with by adults' when it does happen. Pupils trust adults to sort problems out. They find adults in the academy approachable, including you.

Parents are formally welcomed into the academy six times in the year to speak with their child's class teachers and to see the work their children are doing. You maintain an open-door policy to hear about any concerns from parents and you are visible around the site to parents several mornings a week and throughout the day to staff and pupils. Despite this a small minority of parents are not happy about aspects of the academy's work. More remains to be done to convince them and to enable them to work with you and your staff to support your work, to the benefit of all pupils.

External support

The academy's sponsors support its work well. They provide clear policies and procedures to be followed for pupils' learning and welfare, and leadership and management processes. Sponsors know the academy very well: they conduct six formal progress review visits each year and audit the academy's self-evaluation biannually. In the most recent report they rightly described the pupils as 'a credit to the academy'. The sponsors are housed on the same premises and so have a good knowledge of the academy's work on a day-by-day basis. The academy benefits from the trust's six learning network meetings each year, one of which has a safeguarding focus that includes training and updates to legislation, the sharing of good practice and development planning.

Links between the academy and the local authority are good. You are an active member of the local headteacher consortium and keep in touch with best practice in other schools in this way. The academy also benefits from good links with, and training from, the safeguarding team at the local authority. Staff found recent training on child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and the academy's responsibilities under the government's 'Prevent' strategy, which aims to stop people becoming drawn into violent extremism or supporting terrorism, very useful.

Priorities for further improvement

- Review the organisation and supervision of the playground for older pupils at break and lunchtimes and the means by which any incidents are communicated quickly and effectively in the academy and to parents.
- Continue to reach out to the minority of parents who express concerns to enable them to have more confidence in the quality of the academy's work and contribute to its development.

I am copying this letter to the Regional Schools Commissioner, the Director of Children's Services for Kent, the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Chief Executive Officer of the Lilac Sky Schools Academy Trust. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector