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23 October 2015

Mr John Hallworth
Executive Headteacher
Washington School
Spout Lane
Washington
Tyne and Wear
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Dear Mr Hallworth

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Washington School

Following my visit with Mark Evans, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 7 October 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 and the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils at the school.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, head of school and other senior leaders, members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and groups of students. Inspectors also visited lessons to observe students' behaviour and attitudes to learning and sampled students' books. In addition, inspectors observed the climate around the school site during social times. A number of documents, including examination outcomes and attendance and behaviour records, were scrutinised.

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

The school's safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.

Context

Washington School is a smaller than average-sized secondary school. Since the school was last inspected, the number of students on roll has fallen. Currently there are 496 students attending the school. The proportion of disadvantaged students, eligible for support through the pupil premium funding, is well above the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those children that are looked after by the local authority. A small minority of students are from minority ethnic groups and speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students who are disabled or have special educational needs is above average. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics. Since the school was last inspected there have been a number of changes to middle leadership positions and some changes to teaching staff, particularly in departments where students' examination outcomes have been weaker.

Main findings

The inspectors' main focus was to establish whether safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and whether the school has effective arrangements in place to promote the personal development, behaviour and welfare of students. The inspection findings raised no concerns regarding either area of the school's work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The school is calm and orderly. The students are polite to one another and respectful of staff. Relationships between staff and students are typically warm and supportive. Year 7 students who are new to the school have settled quickly and told inspectors they enjoy coming to school. Students are respectful of school rules. For example, they wear the school uniform smartly and there is no litter around the school site. In lessons, students behave well and most are keen and confident enough to participate fully. This is because teachers have positive relationships with students and use a wide range of effective strategies to involve them in learning. Lessons usually proceed well and without interruption, which allows students to make good progress. Only occasionally, when clear boundaries are not set, is students' excitement met with repeated reminders to work quietly. The school ensures students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding is developed throughout the curriculum and in tutorial time and assemblies. For example, inspectors observed students sensitively discussing aspects of Christianity linked to a recent assembly about Syria. In addition, inspectors observed students in a Year 10 science lesson considering ethical issues regarding genetic engineering. Following debate and discussion in tutorial time, students were able to speak knowledgeably about the implications of mass migration into Europe and the potential impact this might have in the north-east of England. Students also benefit from numerous trips

out of school and good links have been developed with local industries and further education providers.

Students are knowledgeable about bullying and know what to do if they feel concerned. They have confidence that members of staff will quickly sort out any worries they have. They told inspectors they do hear some forms of derogatory language, but staff do not condone it and take action to address it.

There are good arrangements in place to ensure students are safe when online in school. Students and parents receive good information on the risks of cyberbullying, and information and communications technology lessons regularly help students to understand the potential risks when online at home. The personal, social and health education curriculum is appreciated by students and covers a wide range of topics that inform their personal development. Lessons are supplemented by a range of external speakers. The school does not shy away from challenging topics and introduces students sensitively to the potential risks of abusive relationships, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. As such, the curriculum as a whole prepares students for life in modern Britain effectively.

Attendance at the school is improving, although in 2014–15 it remained slightly below the national average for secondary schools. Further improving attendance remains a key priority for the school. Attendance data is very carefully checked and analysed. The school provides effective support for those students with lower attendance, including the use of mentors and home visits from the attendance officer. Where necessary, the school has pursued prosecutions against families where attendance has been particularly poor. As a result of these targeted approaches, the attendance of disadvantaged students has noticeably improved.

In the past, the level of exclusions from the school has been relatively high. Leaders have monitored the effectiveness of behaviour management systems in the school carefully, and actions they have taken have begun to reduce the number of exclusions. So far this term, there has been one fixed-term exclusion. Nevertheless, ensuring the use of exclusions remains low is also a key priority for leaders.

Leadership and management

Senior leaders have clear and detailed processes in place to ensure students are safe and are aware of potential risks. Checks conducted to ensure the suitability of adults that work in the school are recorded systematically and to the required standard. All members of staff, including those new to the school in September, receive regular training and know what to do if they recognise the signs of abuse or neglect. Recent training has helped staff to understand better the risks posed by extremism and radicalisation. The designated leader for child protection has well-developed links with the local authority and works closely with the police and other agencies to safeguard students. Referrals to the local authority are followed up in a timely

manner. Governors review child protection policies annually and ensure they check training records, risk assessments and safeguarding procedures regularly. Leaders maintain a climate of openness and transparency. The school has a whistle-blowing policy and appropriate procedures are in place for dealing with complaints. Where necessary, leaders review and adapt procedures in light of any issues relating to child protection and/or safety.

Since the last inspection, leaders have adapted the broad curriculum offer in line with national requirements. The change in curriculum emphasis, with fewer vocational and more academic courses, initially led to a decline in overall standards. However, examination results in 2015 show standards have begun to rise. For example, the proportion of students attaining a GCSE A* to C grade in English and in mathematics improved because more students made expected or good progress in both subjects. The gap in attainment between disadvantaged students and their peers in the school narrowed further. In subjects where attainment had been low, there were also improvements. This is because leaders acted decisively to change and improve middle leadership and to replace weaker teachers. Students currently in the school, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are making better progress across a wide range of subjects. Those students that attend the curriculum access provision receive good support and make good progress because teaching is carefully designed to meet their needs. The development of the school library and the introduction of a new reading programme are ensuring that students read widely and often.

The governing body has a committee in place that checks on standards in the school. However, the committee has focused on checking headline predictions for examinations and has not scrutinised sufficiently the progress students make across a wide range of subjects at Key Stages 3 and 4.

External support

The local authority has made an annual check on the school's performance and provided challenge to senior leaders. This challenge has contributed to improvements in attendance and the recent reduction in the number of exclusions. Effective use is made of the local authority safeguarding team to secure additional advice and guidance on child protection and staffing matters.

The school has worked closely with Thornhill School, the partner school in the federation, to develop middle leadership and training programmes to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure the governing body checks regularly on the progress students make across a wide range of subjects at both Key Stage 3 and 4.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector