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Mrs Barbara King
Principal
The Ockendon Academy
Erriff Drive
South Ockendon
Essex
RM15 5AY

Dear Mrs King

No formal designation monitoring inspection of The Ockenden Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 23 September 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 leadership and management in respect to the welfare and safeguarding of students at the academy.

Evidence

I scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. I met with the Principal, senior leaders, class teachers (including those that have been recently appointed), teaching assistants, support staff, the school's social worker, three members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and groups of students. I evaluated attendance records, behaviour logs, reports to governors, parental surveys, support programmes and case studies of students who the academy are supporting. I made short visits to several lessons, looking at students' exercise books and talking with students about their experiences at the academy.

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

The academy's safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.

Context

The Ockenden Academy is an average-sized secondary school which has an increasing number of students on roll. The proportion of disadvantaged students is above average. Most students are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is above average. The academy was last inspected in February 2014, where its overall effectiveness was judged to be good. The leadership and management of the academy, together with the behaviour and safety of students, were judged as outstanding. Two Year 11 students tragically died in separate incidents between August 2014 and February 2015. Both incidents were widely reported by the national press. Students, staff and the local community received significant support from Thurrock local authority in the months following both incidents.

The academy places student welfare at the centre of all that it does. This starts as students arrive each morning; you lead the way, positioning yourself at the entrance to the academy. Along with senior colleagues and support staff, you greet the students warmly. Those who the staff know to be vulnerable are looked out for and their welfare is checked. Many students reciprocate the greetings, telling staff their news or simply saying 'good morning'. The start of the academy's day is orderly, calm and welcoming.

Well-organised and effective systems are in place to track, monitor and support all students. Year team leaders, led by a vice principal, meet daily with support staff to assess the day and identify which students need additional help. This team makes decisions about precisely what kind of support an individual student will need and who will provide it. Parents are frequently contacted to keep them informed. Students value the support that they receive and are confident in the staff. They cite incidents where teachers and support staff have helped them to resolve issues quickly and without fuss.

The support that the academy provides for students takes many forms. It ranges from broad and clear information and guidance about careers and future education to individual counselling sessions. Leaders have deliberately built a specialist team of support staff which includes a parental liaison officer, trained counsellors and a social worker, employed solely by the academy. This team works closely with teachers, year team leaders and senior colleagues to provide help for the students who need it. Students are known to this team as individuals and relationships are extremely positive. Many students actively seek out the services of the school counsellors, some informally via drop-in sessions and others by arranging for one-to-one sessions. Students with emotional and behavioural challenges are very effectively supported by this team, who tailor their packages of support to match the needs of the individual. Rates of exclusion are very low. The academy uses internal isolation for the small proportion of students who fall short of the academy's high expectations of behaviour. This is also monitored carefully and any 'repeat isolations' result in a support package being provided so that the student can return to their learning quickly. The support team also works well with the local police youth officer,

with a shared aim of preventing vulnerable students from becoming involved with the criminal justice system. This officer has established a close working relationship with the academy and reports that behaviour in and around the academy has improved significantly in recent years.

The academy prioritises the safeguarding of students. Staff are well trained and have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. Those teachers who have recently joined the school are equally well prepared for safeguarding their students, both in lessons and around the academy. The procedures for making a referral are also understood by staff. You take responsibility for receiving all referrals and work with colleagues to determine the immediate course of action. Where external agencies become involved, the academy ensures that it is represented. Notes, minutes of meetings and records of actions are well documented.

Governors have a clear understanding about their role in safeguarding students. A link governor has regular contact with senior leaders, who provide clear information about referrals, the academy's responses and the progress made. Governors are regular visitors to the school and are committed to the students' welfare. The close working relationship between the governing body and all of the senior leadership team is a contributory factor to the high quality of the care and support that is provided for students.

External support

Thurrock local authority has provided good quality support for the academy. During a very difficult period of time, specialist local authority staff were regular visitors to the academy, working alongside staff and students as they came to terms with the dreadful loss of two students. The academy requested an external review of all safeguarding procedures. The local authority regard the safeguarding procedures in the academy to be very strong. School leaders and local authority personnel have continued to work closely to maintain contact and continue to offer support to those who need it.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Moodie
Her Majesty's Inspector