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Mr Jonathan Logan,
The Workington Academy
Stainburn Road
Workington
Cumbria
CA14 4EB

Dear Mr Logan,

No formal designation monitoring inspection of The Workington Academy

Following my unannounced visit to your academy on 24 May 2016, 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, behaviour and welfare of pupils attending the academy.

Evidence

I spoke regularly with you throughout my visit. I also spoke with a wide range of staff, including the academy's senior leadership team, leaders with responsibility for safeguarding, pupil welfare and attendance, members of the academy's local area board (LAB) and of the multi-academy trust (MAT), including its chief executive officer. I spoke to supervisory staff and bus drivers collecting pupils at the end of the day. I spoke separately to two members of the MAT executive board about how they investigate complaints made about the academy. I talked informally to pupils from all year groups and I selected five pupils to meet with more formally. I visited a wide range of lessons which included pupils from Year 8 to Year 11. While in lessons, I took the opportunity to look at pupils' work books. I observed pupils moving around corridors and socialising outside lessons.

I scrutinised an extensive range of documentation, including external reports, case studies of vulnerable pupils, academy information on pupil achievement, records

and logs of behaviour and exclusions. I scrutinised the minutes of LAB meetings. I examined the academy's single central record of recruitment checks.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

The academy opened on 1 September 2015 when two predecessor schools merged. The academy is part of the William Howard Trust. The academy has not yet been inspected. The present headteacher joined the academy when it opened. A deputy headteacher was also seconded by the trust to Workington Academy. When the academy first opened, about one fifth of the teaching staff had not been employed by either of the predecessor schools. The academy is currently undergoing a structural reorganisation of its leadership team. In September, the academy will have two deputy headteachers.

Workington Academy is an average-sized school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is well above average. The academy has strategically resourced provision for pupils who require physical or medical support or have life-limiting illness. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage.

You, leaders and managers of this academy and of both its predecessor schools have worked very effectively to ensure a smooth transition to one new institution. Pupils are very complimentary about the impact of all the hard work that has gone into ensuring that all pupils feel safe and secure in their new environment. Pupils wear their new uniform proudly and have begun to identify themselves as Workington Academy pupils very quickly.

Safeguarding procedures are effective because staff care deeply about the well-being of pupils across the academy. Most pupils accept that they too have a very important role to play in ensuring that all are safe. Systems to support effective safeguarding are rigorous. Staff are well trained and respond professionally if they have any concerns about a pupil. Staff have a good understanding of how to work positively with other agencies that have an interest in protecting children.

Pupils are well taught about how to identify dangers in their wider worlds and how they can minimise risk. All the pupils I spoke to said they knew how to get good advice and would confidently ask for advice or raise concerns. Pupils' emotional well-being and mental health are rightly high on your staff's agenda. They do much work with classes to raise pupils' awareness of domestic violence, sexual

exploitation, social media, low self-image and low self-esteem. Individual pupils who need specific guidance are identified quickly and support is effective.

Pupils know that victimising others due to their sexual orientation, race, religion or disability is morally wrong. Pupils say bullying based on prejudice happens occasionally around the academy. When they describe it, they describe name-calling. They are, however, very confident that these incidents are reported and that they are dealt with rigorously. Pupils are able to give examples of how the content of some of their lessons have been changed in response to incidents of bullying. They say that this too is very effective in reducing the problem.

Despite narrow corridors and a complex site, pupils are beginning to move around the academy calmly and in an orderly fashion. Your vigilance in ensuring that staff monitor the movement of pupils is helping this and as a result pupils feel safe.

When pupils describe misbehaviour around the academy, they talk mainly about 'play fighting'. Despite not generally being intimidated by this, pupils would like this practice to be stopped. Incidents of more serious misbehaviour, when they do occur, are well managed by you and your staff. However, the rates of exclusion are high. I understand that you intend to make further improvements to systems to manage behaviour, rewarding good behaviour and ensuring sanctions are much clearer.

As pupils arrive and leave the academy, and at break and lunch times, they generally behave well. There are plenty of adults around and I note that you have plans to provide further training for academy supervisory staff. These members of staff say that the behaviour of most pupils in the academy is good; however, there are some whose poor behaviour is difficult to manage.

Pupils say that incidents of misbehaviour in lessons that interfere with their learning are not common. They say that when misbehaviour does occur in class, it is usually because pupils are bored. Pupils are quite clear about which lessons are not disrupted by poor behaviour and they link this to high-quality teaching.

When I visited lessons, I noticed that there was a considerable contrast between them. In some, pupils were working enthusiastically. Their books showed they cared about their work. They were obviously enjoying their learning. In other lessons, however, pupils looked disengaged and the pace of learning was slow. Poor standards of work in these pupils' books were not challenged by their teachers.

You and your senior leadership team have a good understanding of how well pupils are achieving. You described the considerable additional teaching and support that Year 11 pupils are currently receiving in preparation for their examinations. You acknowledge that this is required to compensate for previous weak teaching. You also acknowledge that the academy cannot sustain this level of additional support.

You and your leadership team say that the quality of teaching is improving but there is still much to do to ensure that pupils learn well in all lessons.

The gap in achievement between pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged and those who are not is wide in your academy. There is also a larger than usual gap between the performance of boys and of girls.

The attendance of about one fifth of pupils is poor. This has a negative impact on their learning. Your staff are well aware of the problem. They are having success in getting younger pupils to attend well; however, your staff find it difficult to quickly change the attitudes of older pupils. Pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged have the weakest attendance. The safeguarding of these poorly attending pupils is not compromised because care staff are both vigilant and determined to check up on pupils. I note that you have a process in place to employ, from September, an additional member of staff with specific responsibility to improve attendance.

Occasionally a few academy pupils attend alternative educational providers in your area. Placements can be part time or full time. These providers offer different types of education and support which are of benefit to those pupils who are not achieving well enough. Your staff maintain frequent contact with these providers and with pupils when they are away from the academy. Your staff ensure that these pupils are well looked after and that they are making progress.

Throughout my visit I was aware that academy staff take the care and well-being of pupils very seriously. In addition, the majority of pupils behave well. There are, however, a few pupils who present considerable challenges to staff when they try to manage their behaviour. It is clear that you fully understand the need to improve the attitudes of these particular pupils and also improve the overall quality of teaching. You are ambitious for this academy and passionate about improving it for the benefit of the community of Workington. You and your senior leadership team have a clear understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. The good start the academy has made is commendable. You are beginning to implement the next phase of an academy-wide improvement that focuses on the aspects that need to improve quickly.

External support

The MAT has provided high-quality support and direction for this academy and its predecessor schools. The MAT took responsibility for the two secondary schools in Workington, both of which were providing an inadequate level of education. Strong leadership and determination supported both of these schools out of special measures. The subsequent merger of the schools into this new academy was well managed. The MAT leadership team and the academy's LAB continue to offer good-quality advice and guidance to the headteacher. They also provide rigorous monitoring of the impact of the work of the academy.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase pupil attendance and rates of progress by improving the overall quality of teaching so that pupils, more widely, enjoy their learning and engage more enthusiastically with a broader range of interesting learning activities.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the chair of the local area board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cumbria. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Neil Mackenzie

Her Majesty's Inspector