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Mr Ian Dawson
Headteacher
The Thomas Cowley High School
School Lane
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Dear Mr Dawson

No formal designation monitoring inspection of The Thomas Cowley High School

Following my visit to your school on 15 September 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and the time you took to discuss behaviour in your school.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with the no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills was concerned about behaviour at the school.

Evidence

Inspectors considered evidence that included:

- observations of pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning in lessons
- observations of pupils' behaviour throughout the day, including discussion with pupils
- documentary evidence
- discussions with school leaders and staff.

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

Leaders and managers have taken effective action to maintain the high standards of behaviour and attitudes identified at the school's previous inspection.

Context

The Thomas Cowley High School is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school with 645 pupils. It is a non-selective secondary school operating within a selective system where approximately 25% of pupils attend grammar schools. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic groups, and far fewer pupils than the national average speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are supported by the pupil premium is broadly average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than the national average. The school has a specially resourced provision for pupils who have hearing impairments.

Since your appointment as headteacher in September 2015, you have made the behaviour and welfare of pupils key priorities. This was universally acknowledged by all staff and pupils whom I spoke with during the inspection. Pupils have responded positively to your high expectations and there has been a marked improvement in behaviour as a result. The atmosphere around the school is calm and orderly. Your core values are centred on teaching pupils a 'can do' attitude and on a restorative approach to managing pupils' behaviour. Pupils say that when teachers help them to see the effects of their poor behaviour they can then improve in the future. You have ensured that the new behaviour policy has been understood and applied consistently by all. You have appointed a talented senior leadership team to help deliver the high standards that you have set. The school's effective governing body shares your high aspirations.

One of the most impressive aspects of the school is the extent to which pupils are involved in school leadership and promoting good behaviour and well-being. The head boy and head girl have responsibility for the team of school prefects who mentor other pupils and help them to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Prefects wear grey jumpers so that they are clearly visible to other pupils at all times and available for support. On the first day of term in September the school opened just for Year 7 and Year 11 pupils so that the older pupils could help the younger ones settle in to their new school. Year 11 pupils are paired with every Year 7 tutor group to continue this support throughout the year. Year 7 pupils spoke highly of this system.

At the start of the day, pupils enter the school calmly and promptly, including the large number of pupils who arrive on coaches. There are a lot of staff visible on the playground to meet and greet pupils. Pupils welcome this. They say it makes them feel safe. They feel assured that there is always a member of staff available if they need them. Pupils are polite, friendly and respectful towards each other and to adults. The start of the day is organised and purposeful and all pupils move straight to lessons when the bell rings. The end of the school day is managed equally well.

Pupils were observed behaving well within lessons. Pupils seen had the correct equipment, listened when others were talking, started work quickly and supported each other with their learning. Pupils take pride in their appearance and work. They wear their uniforms correctly and keep their books well presented and free from graffiti. Pupils who spoke with the inspector agreed that behaviour in lessons is good. They respect and value their teachers and trust them to help them achieve.

There are no bells between lessons but all pupils move quickly and promptly to their next class. Many pupils seen during the inspection showed positive attitudes to learning and an eagerness to get to their next class. One group of Year 11 girls was rushing to their health and social care lesson, which they said they really enjoyed. Pupils were cooperative, polite and happy.

At the Year 10 assembly I visited, pupils behaved extremely well. They listened intently as their head of year set out his high expectations for them. Pupils were reminded about the importance of their appearance, attitude and achievement. A powerful and moving clip about the Paralympics helped pupils to understand the message that they should chase their dreams rather than running away from their fears and always aspire to be the best that they can. This was extremely well received by pupils who gave a spontaneous round of applause at the end.

Pupils behave well at break and lunchtimes. They particularly like the recent addition of football and ping-pong tables in the playgrounds. Activities such as inter-house sport are a regular feature at lunchtimes. Queues in the dining room are short and orderly and pupils all have plenty of opportunities to get food and eat it without rushing. There was no litter seen around the school site.

Pupils say bullying is rare and if it does happen they trust staff to deal with it quickly and effectively. Pupils told me how the school teaches them to be respectful and tolerant of differences. One boy said: 'It's good to be different. It would be boring if we were all the same.' Pupils told me that homophobic and racist bullying would not be tolerated at school. The school's bullying logs support the fact that there are few incidents of bullying.

Leaders have introduced a range of rewards which have had a positive impact on keeping standards of behaviour high, because pupils value and aspire to them. A group of pupils told me that the prospect of receiving rewards has helped them turn their behaviour around. These pupils were proud to show a range of certificates which they had received in recognition for excellence in different subjects and school events. Pupils said that the careers advice and guidance they receive helps them to focus on positive behaviour because they want to be well prepared for their future careers. All pupils who spoke with me said they are proud of their school and there is nothing that they would change about it. Pupils agreed that teachers are the best thing about the school because they are always visible, friendly and approachable. One boy said: 'Teachers are brilliant. You can talk to them and you

can trust them.' Pupils have complete confidence that the school will support them with any problems. A group of pupils described how leaders responded immediately to their concerns about poor behaviour on one of the school buses. A teacher now travels on the bus every night and, as a result, behaviour has improved.

The arrangements for safeguarding pupils are effective. Your single central record meets statutory requirements. Systems are well understood by staff and partnership work with external agencies is good. Pupils unanimously say that they feel safe in school. The recent addition of a lockable fence around the school's perimeter has added to pupils' feelings of security. You have recently appointed two members of staff to support pupils' safety and well-being. They have introduced an impressive programme of early help to support pupils to remain calm and ready to learn, including counselling, support with anger management and advice on issues such as self-harming. These leaders take a proactive approach and adapt the school's personal, social, health and educational programme to make sure that it is responsive to pupils' needs. Tutor activities and assemblies provide additional support for pupils. Leaders have strong links with parents and provide them with advice and support so that they can work in partnership with the school to support pupils' good behaviour. The school's records show that fixed-term and repeat exclusions remain below national averages.

The new behaviour policy promotes the school's values of respect, responsibility and repair. There is a stepped response to managing behaviour. All pupils who spoke with me said that all teachers use the behaviour system fairly and consistently. Leaders have put in place lots of preventative work to support pupils who are at risk of permanent exclusion. There were no permanent exclusions at all last year, having been above the national average for the two previous years. Prior to the inspection the school's latest behaviour policy was not on the school's website. By the end of the inspection the headteacher ensured that the new policy had been uploaded onto the website and was accessible to parents.

Attendance was below the national average in 2014/15 and although it has improved in 2015/16 it remains below national expectations. Persistent absence is above the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and girls is particularly low. Leaders know that this is an area which they must improve. They have raised the profile of attendance with pupils through careful monitoring and linking good attendance to rewards. Pupils told me that assemblies had helped them to understand the importance of good attendance and how it affects their progress if they are absent.

External support

Your work with external agencies to support pupils' behaviour is highly effective. Pupils said that they have found meetings with the school and external agencies helpful in improving their behaviour, because they had a voice in these meetings

and felt able to contribute. Leaders also work closely with the local authority to support pupils' behaviour and to ensure that the authority's target of zero permanent exclusions is achieved and maintained.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve pupils' attendance and reduce persistent absence, particularly of disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and girls.
- Ensure that the school's latest documentation is available for parents on the school's website.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Lincolnshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sally Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector