

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



10 October 2016

Mr Chris Mitchell
The Elstree UTC
Studio Way
Elstree
Borehamwood
Hertfordshire
WD6 5NN

Dear Mr Mitchell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Elstree UTC

Following my visit to your school on 22 September 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection was carried out in response to a complaint which raised serious concerns as to whether:

- Leaders and the governing body are fulfilling their responsibilities with regard to safeguarding.
- The school is making an effective contribution to pupils' well-being.

Having considered all of the evidence, I am of the opinion that senior leaders and governors are fulfilling their responsibilities with regard to safeguarding. The school is also making an effective contribution to pupils' well-being.

Leaders and managers are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- Ensure that a greater number of governors have a broader and deeper understanding of their role in challenging senior leaders as to the effectiveness of

education offered at the school.

- Improve attendance, particularly of the small number of pupils who have a casual attitude to attendance and punctuality.
- Accelerate the review of school policies so that they more closely reflect both the effective safeguarding practice seen in the school and its specialist 'creative' curriculum.
- Develop a consistently effective approach to the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Evidence

I held meetings with the principal, other senior leaders, three members of the governing body, and three members of staff with responsibility for maintaining school records relating to safeguarding. I also met with a group of 14 pupils, a group of five teachers and one member of support staff. I held a telephone discussion with the team manager of the local authority designated officer team. The school self-evaluation plan was evaluated, as was documentation relating to the safeguarding policy and practice, along with information relating to pupils' achievement, attendance and well-being. I also undertook a learning walk in which I observed pupils at work in their lessons. I spoke with pupils as they arrived at school in the morning and during a walk of the school at lunchtime.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection there have been several significant changes at the school. The senior team has been restructured and now consists of the principal, a vice-principal and four assistant principals. A new vice-principal took up her post in September 2016, as did an assistant principal responsible for teaching, learning and assessment. One of the assistant principals has now assumed the role of the special educational needs coordinator. Seven teachers have arrived at the school and 16 have left. You have also recently established a pastoral house system, known as your 'studio' system. Each of these studios is led by a head of studio. Since the previous inspection, two vacancies have arisen on the governing body which have not yet been filled.

Main findings

- You have made sure that safeguarding arrangements are effective in this improving school. Staff understand their role in ensuring that pupils are safe and have the confidence to report any concerns that they may have. Staff also have the necessary knowledge and skills to meet their safeguarding responsibilities. Pupils feel safe and know who to speak to if they have concerns. They told me how much they appreciate their teachers' hard work and efforts to make Elstree UTC a safe place in which to learn.

- You have relevant policies in place, such as child protection, 'Prevent' duty, staff behaviour (code of conduct) and complaints. These are reviewed within statutory timeframes, where appropriate. You are correctly undergoing a wholesale review of policies to be sure that they are even more closely aligned to the specific context and curriculum of the school.
- The single central record is well maintained. You make sure that appropriate checks on adults who work at the school are carried out and that details of these checks are carefully organised and stored. You have a robust system in place that gives you confidence that visitors to the school are also thoroughly checked and provided with the necessary supervision when on the school site. This system is carefully adhered to by the administration staff.
- Evidence seen on this inspection indicates that staff are alert to issues such as radicalisation and other risks that pupils may face. The staff spoken with could explain not only what they would do if they had concerns, but also why this would be the correct action to take. Staff informed me that any referral they make is dealt with well by senior colleagues. Similarly, evidence indicates that staff who teach in the creative specialisms, such as dance and drama, are very aware of, and act upon, the safeguarding protocols related to their particular subject. You have also taken determined steps to protect pupils from accessing harmful or inappropriate websites when they are using the internet in the school building. Pupils explained that this work builds upon their existing knowledge of how to stay safe when online.
- Under the leadership of the assistant principal, who is the school's nominated designated safeguarding lead, child protection issues are dealt with in an efficient way. Communication with other agencies, such as the local authority designated officer, is carried out in a timely way. When the need arises, the school has been proactive when correctly seeking the guidance of local authority officers. Evidence gathered suggests that leaders act on the advice given.
- You have a clear knowledge of the risks faced by vulnerable pupils at the school. You take effective action to support these pupils and work well with a range of external agencies in providing this support. As a result, these pupils are often able to continue in their education and make progress academically and socially.
- Pupils and staff commented on the harmonious atmosphere that exists in the school. Inspection evidence supports their views. Pupils interact well with each other in almost all cases. Pupils explained that they feel safe and know that there are trusted adults to whom they can turn if they need support. It was a distinctive and common feature of this visit that pupils observed that there was almost no bullying. One pupil said, 'We are a diverse school in a diverse industry and we just get on with each other'. Another remarked that 'our differences and achievements are celebrated here'.
- You have invested a considerable amount of time in developing the personal, social and health education curriculum. Key stage 4 pupils welcome this and feel it is already preparing them well for life outside school. However, this is a recent development and the full impact cannot yet be assessed. Older

pupils commented that they are well supported in making their decisions about their future education or employment. However, they also said that they would welcome greater guidance in other aspects of independent living, such as the management of finances. You know that you still have work to do to ensure that lessons in other subjects take full advantage of opportunities to further develop pupils' wider well-being.

- Experienced governors continue to support you in your work. They are aware of their responsibilities with regard to safeguarding pupils' well-being. However, without a full complement of members, the governing body has been weakened. This temporarily leaves it at risk of lacking the depth and breadth of knowledge that it requires to probe and challenge the school's work effectively.
- Pupil attendance, while improved, remains too low. You track this with care and have taken further action to improve it, for example by having a manned sign-in desk for sixth form students as they arrive each morning. You have also introduced your 'studio' system. This is already proving popular with pupils, who see it as 'bridging a gap' between year groups. The heads of studio already command the respect of pupils. It is, however, too early to judge whether these developments are sustaining improved attendance across the school.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities remains an area in need of improvement. In the time since the previous inspection the responsibility for this area has been permanently filled. The previous lack of consistency in the leadership had held back the improvements that needed to be made. As a consequence, the achievement of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities remains too low.
- Since your permanent appointment in March, you have led a concerted drive to improve academic standards. Recently published examination results indicate that you are being successful in this in many subjects, including English and mathematics. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving as you and your senior leaders rightly challenge practice that is not good enough. You recognise that there is more to be done to offer the most able pupils and disadvantaged pupils the opportunities to excel.

External support

You have rightly sought the support of external agencies, such as the local authority and police, to ensure that you understand the local community in which the school sits. You have been proactive in working in partnership with a range of professional bodies in seeking additional support for individual pupils. This guidance is helping you to provide well for pupils' differing needs.

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

Yours sincerely

John Lucas
Her Majesty's Inspector