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31 October 2016

Mr B Parker and Mr T Plumb  
Co-headteachers  
Woolwich Polytechnic School  
Hutchins Road  
Thamesmead  
London  
SE28 8AT

Dear Mr Parker and Mr Plumb

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Woolwich Polytechnic School**

Following my visit with Joanne Hamill, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 27 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 us and the time you took to discuss behaviour in your academy.

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 a recent incident in the wider community, in which some pupils attending the academy were allegedly involved.

#### **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 academy 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 academy's predecessor school's previous inspection.

## **Context**

Woolwich Polytechnic School is a larger-than-average secondary school. It admits boys only in key stages 3 and 4. The sixth form admits boys and girls. A very high proportion of pupils are entitled to additional funding due to disadvantage. Most pupils have a minority ethnic heritage. Just over half of pupils speak English as an additional language. New pupils arrive throughout the school year, some with little or no skills in English. A very wide range of backgrounds are represented in the school's diverse population. About one-in-four pupils are from a White British background. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs or a disability is broadly average.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

You communicate clear expectations and values for behaviour. Concern for the needs of potentially vulnerable groups continues to be a key consideration when you make decisions about developing behaviour policy. Senior leaders make sure that staff build positive, dependable relations with pupils and parents. Pupils new to the academy, and those who are new to the country, pick up quickly on the attitudes you expect. Year 7 pupils spoken to said they feel safe and welcome. They become 'poly and proud' in quick time. You make sure that parents and pupils who speak English as an additional language have the support they may need to help them understand the academy's culture and procedures. For example, you offer open mornings to parents who speak a wide range of other languages. This enables you to understand how best to support these families. The open mornings also help new families to integrate into the community and raise the awareness of other cultures among your pupils.

You prepare pupils well to take up positive roles in the wider community. You have a clear strategy for minimising the risk of pupils falling under the influence of those who wish to undermine fundamental British values. Some of your ideas have been adopted by other local schools because you have been able to demonstrate their positive impact. For example, you employ an on-site police officer who teaches pupils valuable skills to help them resist negative influences on their behaviour. Pupils spoken to by inspectors could explain what to do if approached to become a member of a gang.

This important work with the police and other agencies also supports you in ensuring that pupils typically represent the school well in the neighbourhood. However, school leaders do not always accurately assess the risk of pupils being drawn into anti-social behaviour outside of school. You recognise that more rigorous analysis of information about pupils' attitudes over time will help you to become even more alert to such risks and intervene when necessary.

Your work to teach pupils how to stay safe when using social media is effective. This gives you the confidence to allow the use of mobile phones during the school day for constructive, educational purposes. You also ensure that pupils understand the rights of people with protected characteristics. For example, some pupils told inspectors how they had been taught to recognise and tackle potential discrimination against people who are homosexual or transgender. This contributes well to the maintenance of social harmony and positive relationships in the academy and the wider community. Girls in the sixth form told inspectors they feel respected and safe, despite being in a very small minority.

This harmonious atmosphere is evident during all phases of the school day, both inside and outside the school building. The 'confident manners' of pupils mentioned in the predecessor school's last inspection remain evident. Pupils interact informally, whilst maintaining the calm and respectful attitudes you expect of them. Your records show that instances of discriminatory behaviour occasionally occur. This has included some instances in which pupils have used racist language. However, pupils spoken to express confidence in your work to tackle any prejudice promptly. They say that they feel equally safe in all parts of the school. They appreciate the ready access available to adult support, when it is necessary.

Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning during lessons. They arrive promptly with the right equipment. Pupils attend your 'Saturday School' in large numbers. This reflects your success in convincing pupils of the importance of their education in their current and future lives.

However, you recognise that not all teachers tackle pupils' concentration lapses in lessons as well as you would wish. Some teachers who are new to the school require more guidance to become familiar with your procedures. As a result, you have prioritised training aimed at ensuring teachers implement the agreed behaviour policy even more consistently. This is a sensible decision. Leaders have also recognised the need to strengthen teachers' understanding of specific issues relevant to your most vulnerable pupils. For example, you plan to provide training to help teachers improve outcomes for pupils with special needs related to attachment.

You have been successful in ensuring pupils and parents are committed to the homework policy. Pupils return homework on time, leaving teachers free to focus on improving the quality of the work done at home. The assistant librarian is delighted with improvements in the attitudes of pupils to reading. They make wide-ranging, adventurous choices to expand their reading diet. The books on offer reflect your commitment to promoting diversity and challenging stereotypes. Some pupils find the access available to the library during break and the lunch period a welcome alternative to other options.

Your work with parents and pupils to promote improvements in punctuality and attendance has been fruitful. Overall absence for the last school year was similar to

the national average for similar schools. Your current information shows that the attendance of pupils with special educational needs or a disability are attending better so far in the current school year. Members of staff work intensively with students in the sixth form to welcome pupils at the start of the day. This helps them arrive in an orderly and positive manner, and also helps them get to lessons on time. You take a firm line on challenging poor punctuality. For example, pupils who arrive late must make up for lost learning in additional supervised sessions. However, your analysis of how rapidly this is improving punctuality is not sharp enough.

When pupils' behaviour is occasionally of more serious concern you act swiftly to ensure pupils are held to account for their actions. The system of sanctions is well understood, as it was at the time of the previous inspection. When exclusions are deemed necessary, you work closely with parents and pupils to decide how best to manage their return to school. You provide good advice about options for parents and pupils to gain access to counselling or mentoring. On occasion, you decide that an alternative provision is the best option for continuing a pupil's education. In these instances, senior leaders visit alternative settings frequently to check on the effectiveness of arrangements for the pupils concerned.

You insist that pupils account for their actions, while providing opportunities for them to learn from their mistakes. You insist that pupils make a positive contribution to the community in order to restore their reputation, if it has been diminished by their actions. You record instances of unacceptable behaviour systematically and keep notes of actions and views related to specific incidents. You involve external partners in the process of dealing with concerns promptly, when necessary. However, analysis of the impact of your work does not enable you to explain sharply enough how well it is reducing the repetition of poor behaviour.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Ensure that teachers, especially those who are new to the school, apply the behaviour policy effectively to re-focus pupils promptly if their concentration lapses in lessons.
- Use behaviour records more sharply when evaluating the effectiveness of the school's work to reduce instances of poor behaviour and to prevent their re-occurrence.

I am copying this letter to the executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Greenwich. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Wright  
Her Majesty's Inspector