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28 November 2016

Mr Jason Roberts  
Gateacre School  
Hedgefield Road  
Gateacre  
Liverpool  
Merseyside  
L25 2RW

Dear Mr Roberts

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Gateacre School**

Following my visit to your school on 9 November 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.

### **Evidence**

I scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. I also met with the headteacher, senior staff, groups of pupils, the chair and another member of the interim executive board and representatives of the local authority.

I considered a range of documents summarising the actions taken by school leaders and the local authority in response to the previous inspection in May 2016, when safeguarding was judged to be inadequate, including: records of training for staff in safeguarding; the local authority audit of safeguarding procedures in the school; attendance records; procedures followed in recruiting staff; schemes of work relating to citizenship and personal, social and health education; school policies relating to safeguarding and case studies of how the school has supported pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

## **Context**

Gateacre School is larger than the average-sized school, with a sixth form. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is well above average. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support the educational achievement of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and for children looked after by the local authority. The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. A very small number of pupils attend alternative provision at Basetech Training, Award Education and Employability Solutions.

Most pupils join the school at the beginning of Year 7 and leave at the end of Year 11, unless they choose to pursue their post-16 studies in the school's sixth form. The school has in the past had some difficulties in recruiting staff, particularly to leadership positions.

Gateacre School was inspected in May 2016. Overall effectiveness was judged to be inadequate and therefore the school is now subject to special measures. At that time, safeguarding was found to be ineffective. The headteacher at the time of the inspection has since retired and a new headteacher took up post in September 2016.

Gateacre School is now subject to an academy order from the regional schools commissioner. The local authority is currently working urgently with the regional schools commissioner to broker a sponsor for the school.

## **Safeguarding**

Even though you only took up the post of headteacher in September, you have already had an immensely beneficial impact on this school. You made the safeguarding of pupils your key priority, wasting no time in sorting out the very poor practice that was evident at the time of the previous inspection. You have successfully established a culture of vigilance; safeguarding procedures are now robust. As a result, the potential for pupils to be at risk has markedly diminished.

Your approach to tackling the deficiencies revealed at the time of the last inspection has been multifaceted. All staff have benefited from thorough training, including that related to protecting pupils from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. This has reinvigorated staff's awareness of safeguarding, highlighting their crucial role in helping to keep pupils safe. For example, during my visit I spoke to supervisory staff, who, without exception, were aware of the most recent guidance from the Department of Education, such as 'Keeping children safe in education', and all said they had found the training really helpful. These members of staff were happy to have been included in the training: under the previous administration, their contribution to the effectiveness of safeguarding had been utterly neglected.

After the previous inspection, school leaders quickly established a 'safeguarding team' of staff, whose names are displayed very clearly on notice boards around the school and at the main entrance. As a result, this team has a high profile, helping to ensure that all staff, parents and pupils know whom to approach if they have concerns of a safeguarding nature.

There is an increased sharpness to procedures; for example, sixth formers now have to sign out when they are leaving the building and all visitors to the school are presented with safeguarding information. The single central register of staff complies with all requirements, and statutory guidance on safer recruitment is followed with precision.

Improvements to the recording of pupils' absence are particularly worthy of mention, especially given procedures at the time of the previous inspection were found to be so lax. Staff now use the correct register codes and follow up any absence, including that from alternative provision, assiduously. During my visit, staff could give a clear account of how they routinely monitor pupils' absence and as a result they have a much better grasp of which pupils are at risk through non-attendance at school. Staff are quicker to spot patterns of poor attendance and intervene more effectively when problems arise. As a result, although the rate of persistent absenteeism is still too high, it has reduced markedly since the previous academic year. All pastoral staff now have performance management targets to improve pupils' attendance; as such, you have successfully created a climate of accountability that has dispelled the culture of complacency so prevalent before.

There are some notable strengths in the school's practice. For example, the school works productively with other agencies to support vulnerable pupils and the school counsellor provides invaluable assistance to those pupils experiencing mental health problems or emotional difficulties. The school's filtering systems to protect pupils when using information technology are exemplary and comply with the very latest guidance in this respect. Any concerns arising from, for example, pupils' use of the internet, are followed up robustly and the school now makes referrals to the appropriate agencies with alacrity.

The governing body at the time of the previous inspection has been disbanded and an interim executive board has been constituted under the auspices of the local authority. The members of this board bring considerable expertise to their role. A member of this board, who is a governor of other local schools, has responsibility for safeguarding and holds frequent meetings with your staff. She then reports back to the interim executive board regarding the effectiveness of the school's procedures. In this way, appropriate checks and balances have been built in to ensure that the safeguarding of pupils remains a top priority.

Pupils I spoke to during my visit were unanimous that the school has improved considerably since your arrival. Pupils expressed the view that staff now seem to have higher expectations. For example, pupils are not allowed to pass the 'red line'

at the entrance to the school unless they have all their equipment. Pupils appreciate the fact that, as a result, less time is wasted in lessons, for example by pupils asking the teacher for a pen or a pencil.

Most pupils that I met during the visit remarked that teachers had become, in their words, 'stricter'. They welcomed this development as less time in lessons is taken up with teachers having to deal with pupils' poor behaviour. Pupils behave well in general, mingling sociably with one another at break and lunchtimes. Pupils I spoke to said that bullying is rare and dealt with effectively. A number of pupils went further and commented that they felt incidents of bullying had declined since September.

All the developments mentioned above are positive signs that the school is moving in the right direction. Safeguarding procedures now meet requirements and you have successfully established a culture of vigilance, adhered to by all staff, regarding pupils' safety and well-being. As a result, pupils are safe in school on a day-to-day basis and staff are far more alert to safeguarding issues.

The school has been less successful in making sure that pupils assess and manage the risks they may encounter in the outside world. This is because the school's programmes for teaching citizenship and personal, social and health education have for a long time been ineffective in this respect. Pupils do not always make the connection between what the school is telling them, for example regarding keeping themselves safe online, and how they should behave outside school. As a result, a minority of pupils still take risks regarding their safety, for example through 'sexting' or accessing inappropriate material on the internet.

### **External support**

Immediately after the previous inspection, the local authority swooped into the school, conducting a 'root and branch' audit of all safeguarding procedures. The local authority team came up with a set of proposals for immediate implementation and has revisited the school to ensure that appropriate action has been taken. This team also delivered comprehensive training in safeguarding. The local authority is now satisfied that safeguarding is effective and has offered further support, for example in revising aspects of the curriculum, as mentioned above, to ensure that pupils have better regard to their own safety.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Embed improvements to procedures to monitor absence so that rates of attendance continue to rise to at least the national average.
- Improve the curriculum so that pupils are able to manage risks effectively and thereby take more responsibility for their own safety, particularly when outside school.

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

Yours sincerely

Joan Bonenfant  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**