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Mr Alex Foreman
Principal
Duke of York's Royal Military School
Dover
Kent
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Dear Mr Foreman

No formal designation monitoring inspection visit of the Duke of York's Royal Military School

Following my visit with Catherine Old, Her Majesty's Inspector to your school on 11 January 2017, 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 for the time you took to discuss safeguarding 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 safeguarding at the school.

Evidence

Inspectors considered evidence that included:

- discussions with groups of pupils, both formally and informally
- discussions with school leaders and staff
- observations of lessons, including personal development lessons
- discussions with governors and a review of school policies
- observations of sports activities
- documentary evidence including case files, complaints and exclusion and attendance data.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

The Duke of York's Royal Military School is a smaller-than-average 11 to 18 boarding school with 504 pupils on roll. The school converted to academy status in 2010, from its predecessor status as an independent boarding school. The school has links with the military going back 200 years and has well-established traditions in military music and military ceremonial activities. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds, with a higher-than-average proportion of pupils supported by the service premium. The current principal took up his post at the beginning of January 2017.

Safeguarding

Leaders have maintained the effectiveness of their safeguarding procedures. Records of checks on staff are thorough and fully in place because leaders ensure that they follow the up-to-date guidance when appointing staff. There are regular updates for all staff on key aspects of keeping children safe. At key points of the year, staff receive additional detailed training, including on their duty to prevent radicalisation and female genital mutilation. As a result, staff are vigilant and report concerns about pupils' welfare promptly. Staff are especially positive about the new online system used by the school, which allows them to share concerns in both the boarding and academic provision. Governors exercise annual oversight of this critical area and have a named governor for safeguarding. Leaders work closely with the local authority children's services so that referrals are timely and evidence is well recorded. Leaders have also taken steps to further secure the site so that previous areas identified as out of bounds for pupils are now entirely inaccessible to anyone but staff. However, both leaders and governors recognise that they need to review the impact of the new systems more systematically and regularly.

Senior leaders have improved the school's personal, social and health education programme. There is an appropriate focus on developing pupils' understanding of sex and relationships, as well as guidance on how to be safe online. Pupils are confident in explaining terms such as consent and safe sex and understand the risks of grooming. There are good systems in place to support pupils in their free time and pupils are very clear about the rules. All pupils spoken to report that they are confident about using social media securely. They are able to describe effective strategies to stay safe online and report that the assemblies and lessons in school help them avoid the perils of life online. The personal, social and health education development programme reinforces the school's ethos so that pupils have a very well-defined sense of right and wrong. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. However, leaders recognise that a few pupils miss out on some key advice and guidance when they join the school mid-year or mid-phase and are taking action to rectify this.

Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those who have social, emotional and mental health needs, are well supported. The special educational needs coordinator has established effective systems to identify and

assess pupils so that these pupils receive appropriate support. Staff report that they are well aware of the different needs of pupils. Pupils say that the additional help they receive is making a positive difference and are especially upbeat about the bespoke support for their social and emotional well-being. There are good systems to check that these pupils are making progress in their studies, although at this stage of the academic year many pupils have yet to reach their targets. Leaders have taken appropriate steps to improve provision, especially in terms of providing specialist counselling services. The special educational needs coordinator works with the local area services for special educational needs and/or disabilities. The coordinator has commissioned further support from the local authority specialist teaching services, as well as from an educational psychologist. As a result, teachers are increasingly adept at meeting pupils' needs. However, leaders agree that additional links with local services, such as the early help team, would further improve the quality of support that pupils receive.

Governors are very supportive of the school and have worked effectively with leaders to improve how well the school communicates with parents and carers. The new website and the now well-established use of email mean that parents report that the information they receive is timely and sufficient. The school website meets the required standards for academies. Policies are reviewed annually and governors have ensured that some policies, including the behaviour policy, have versions in pupil-friendly language. Governors recognise that, in the past, both parents and staff were unable to share concerns efficiently. Consequently, they have established a clear procedure for whistle-blowing in which staff are fully trained. Governors are also increasingly aware of staff morale through their regular visits, including that of the support staff who, in the past, did not receive sufficient attention. However, governors are not yet reviewing leaders' impact on staff morale well enough because they rely on anecdotal evidence to form judgements. Governors are also not considering parental complaints effectively, so that their evaluation of these is not systematic or thorough. As a result, governors recognise that they need to sharpen their practice and there is a review underway to improve the way they work.

Leaders have improved the systems to manage pupils' behaviour. The rewards and sanctions system introduced in the last academic year is now fully embedded. Pupils recognise that the system now prizes positive behaviour, as well as reinforcing good discipline. They understand the rules and, in lessons observed by inspectors, pupils' behaviour was very good. Pupils are confident in talking to visitors and sharing their views. The new approach to managing conflict using restorative justice techniques is understood well by pupils. However, both fixed-term and permanent exclusions remain too high, well above the national average. Leaders have taken steps to increase pupils' access to counselling and other support, as well as using the school's internal exclusion processes more effectively. Leaders acknowledge that more work is required to analyse which strategies are most effective and improve links with local area services to ensure that those at risk of exclusion receive appropriate and timely support.

The new principal has a clear vision that builds on the proud military traditions of the school. Despite the very short period of time he has been in post, he is clear about the strengths and weaknesses of the school. He is committed to reducing rapidly the number of pupils who are excluded from school and working more closely with other providers beyond the school gates. He has quickly grasped that the school would benefit from scrutiny by external professionals and has commissioned reviews of key aspects of the school's work. The principal is also working closely with the governors to refocus their work and ensure that the governing body is more effective in scrutinising the impact of the work of leaders.

Leaders have high expectations. Staff are committed and give extra time in the evenings and on Saturdays to promote a wide range of sports and activities. There is a strong sense of community that underpins the school's motto 'serve to lead'. The pupils are very tolerant and welcoming to those that join them, including those who are different to themselves. Consequently, pupils from different cultures and ethnicities and those of different sexual orientations thrive and do well. This harmonious atmosphere is a great strength of the school, where pupils and staff 'look back with pride' on the work that they do.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that leaders reduce exclusions, both fixed-term and permanent, by making better use of early intervention strategies and additional support from external services in the local area.
- Increase the effectiveness by which governors evaluate the impact of leaders' work and hold leaders to account by:
 - reviewing complaints more systematically
 - increasing the quality and frequency of checks on safeguarding practices in the school
 - assessing the impact of the new systems more urgently.

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

Yours sincerely

Seamus Murphy
Her Majesty's Inspector