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Mr Craig Walker
Headteacher
Northfield School and Sports College
Thames Road
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Dear Mr Walker

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Northfield School and Sports College

Following my visit to your school on 20 March 2017, accompanied by Mark Evans Her Majesty's Inspector, 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 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 arrangements and the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils at the school.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised documentation relating to child protection arrangements and the school's record of checks on the suitability of adults to work with children. Records of attendance and behavioural incidents, as well as the school's arrangements for following up absence and incidents were also examined. School policies, curriculum documents and safeguarding checks were reviewed. The school's work to support pupils in learning how to stay safe was investigated. Inspectors observed and spoke with pupils at the start and end of the school day, breaktime and lunchtime as well as meeting with several groups of pupils formally. This included some pupils who are 'peer supporters', some members of the junior leadership team, as well as pupils who have been supported by the school to improve their behaviour. Inspectors visited classrooms and learning spaces,

including the inclusion base, to ascertain pupils' attitudes to learning. Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, senior and pastoral leaders and a group of teaching and non-teaching staff. Inspectors also met with a representative of the local authority.

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

Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Leaders and managers have developed the curriculum effectively to meet pupils' personal development needs and to ensure their welfare and safety.

Context

Northfield School and Sports College is much larger than the average-sized secondary school. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is just above the national average and the school has a specialist provision on site for pupils who have visual impairment. The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is in line with the national average.

Main findings

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You have created a strong culture of safeguarding at the school. Regular and effective training for all staff ensures that they are up to date in their knowledge and understanding of safeguarding. For example, staff can confidently articulate the signs and symptoms of extremism and radicalisation which would lead them to report concerns about pupils' safety. Records of child protection concerns and ongoing safeguarding cases are detailed and of high quality. They demonstrate the school's vigilance in following up concerns about pupils. The school has strong and effective links with a wide range of relevant outside agencies when working with pupils and families who need additional support.

Appropriate checks are conducted to ensure the suitability of adults to work with children and school recruitment procedures reflect current safeguarding guidance. You ensure that induction procedures for new staff include an appropriate focus on safeguarding responsibilities. At the time of this inspection, you had not ensured that the dates of your checks on the suitability of adults were collated into one single central record, to comply with the most recent guidance. However, staff worked quickly to address this administrative issue so that the single central record met requirements by the end of the inspection.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum is effective in supporting pupils' personal development and welfare. The 'guidance' curriculum, delivered through dedicated lessons and assemblies, is comprehensive in addressing the personal and social issues relevant to pupils. This is further developed through different subjects. High-

quality teaching in religious education supports pupils' moral and spiritual development through the exploration of issues such as the nature of forgiveness. Younger pupils cited recent teaching in drama lessons, linked to the poem 'Timothy Winters', which helped them appreciate the impact of unkind words or deeds. Pupils demonstrate tolerance and respect for others, including for those with disabilities or from different backgrounds. They have a good understanding of risks to their safety through, for example, alcohol and substance misuse. They were reflective, with an inspector, in identifying online safety risks and the implications of issues such as sexting. Their work in guidance sessions has helped them to understand the dangers of self-harming and increased their ability to manage stressful situations.

Leaders are not complacent about bullying. They have encouraged an open culture where bullying and the prevention of bullying is a regular topic of discussion. Pupils demonstrate an extremely thorough and mature understanding of the different forms that bullying can take. Leaders have ensured that pupils have access to a range of systems to report concerns about bullying. These include online reporting, 'bullying boxes', a group of trained 'peer supporters' who can help pupils who are reluctant to report issues to staff and an anti-bullying coordinator who oversees the school's work in this area. Pupils report that incidents of bullying are rare. Inspectors spoke with a wide range of pupils from different year groups. Every pupil asked by inspectors indicated that a trusted adult was available to them and that issues are tackled promptly by staff. Pupils speak highly of the staff 'guidance teams' who provide them with advice and support in relation to day-to-day matters and concerns.

Leaders recognise the need to support pupils' mental health and well-being. Key members of staff have received training from the Samaritans and this is being extended to include more staff and parents. Pupils and their families have access to a range of counselling services and this has been increased over the current academic year, eliminating any waiting lists for pupils. Realising the prevalence of mental health issues among children and young people in the local area, leaders are working closely with the local authority, public health services and other schools on a programme of training for staff and pupils. This is to build pupils' resilience and their ability to cope when circumstances get on top of them.

Pupils benefit from extensive opportunities to develop their leadership skills and this contributes effectively to their personal development. The school's 'junior leadership' team are proud of their work. They appreciate the responsibility for decision-making which is devolved to them by senior leaders, for example, in choosing the school's adopted charity. 'Reader leaders' and 'digital leaders' provide support to pupils and encourage the culture of concern for others. Student council representatives recognise the importance of their recent work to ensure that pupils, particularly those who might be worried about reporting concerns, have a range of avenues to access support where they are anxious about issues within or beyond the school.

Pupils conduct themselves well around school. Corridors and shared spaces are orderly and well-supervised during breaktimes and lunchtime. Pupils and staff appreciate that senior leaders are highly visible around the school and staff are confident to call on senior leaders, when they are needed, to help to address unsuitable behaviour. Leaders and staff are particularly watchful at the start and end of the school day to ensure that pupils' behaviour, as they enter and leave the school and access public transport, is appropriate.

The vast majority of pupils demonstrate good attitudes to learning. They appreciate and take advantage of the opportunities the school provides for them through involvement in, for example, the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. Where pupils demonstrate this positive approach to school, their work is well presented and their conduct in lessons reflects their ambition and determination to achieve well.

However, a significant minority of pupils, particularly in lower-ability groups in key stage 3, do not exhibit consistently strong attitudes to learning. They talk when they should be listening to the teacher and do not respond quickly to teachers' instructions. This is reflected in their work, which is too often untidy or incomplete. Leaders are aware of these inconsistencies and are providing support to staff who require additional help to manage pupils' behaviour. Leaders have recently worked with a group of staff volunteers, and with the junior leadership team, to develop a new 'behaviour for learning' policy. This clarifies leaders' expectations of pupils' behaviour and conduct and is scheduled for implementation across the school after the Easter break.

Where pupils have been excluded from school, or have found it difficult to comply with the school's code of conduct, leaders provide the right support to get pupils back on track. These pupils feel they are treated fairly and with compassion by leaders. Where pupils attend alternative provision, leaders keep a close check on their progress and their personal development, attendance and welfare. Leaders have ensured that pupils accessing the school's 'inclusion base' experience a high-quality curriculum for their personal development and welfare, as well as a demanding academic diet. The proportion of pupils excluded from school reduced significantly in 2015/16 and was closer to the national average. However, current records show a recent spike in the number of exclusions as some newer pupils have struggled to adjust to leaders' high expectations of behaviour and conduct. Leaders have a thorough grasp of the reasons for the exclusions and recognise the need to improve this position.

Leaders are ambitious for the achievement of vulnerable pupils. They know pupils well and work hard to overcome barriers to their learning. Good-quality classroom-based support for pupils who have complex special educational needs and/or disabilities allows them to access the curriculum alongside their peers. Disadvantaged pupils are given iPads to support their preparation for national assessments and are provided with transport to allow them to attend after-school revision classes. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is below the

national average for other pupils and improvement so far this academic year has been slight. Leaders are tenacious in following up non-attendance, acting quickly where support is required from other agencies to help families. Leaders recognise, however, that they need to do more to ensure that the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is not affected by low attendance.

External support

The local authority has worked closely with the school and provided support for leaders as they have reviewed and improved the curriculum for pupils' personal development and welfare. This has enabled the school to develop strong links with other agencies, including counselling and mental health services, and has increased the support available for pupils with mental health needs. However, the local authority's recent assessment of the school's performance did not take sufficient note of the attendance of groups of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, when judging the quality of pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare.

Priorities for further improvement

- Eradicate inconsistencies in pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning in lower-ability groups.
- Improve the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals so that it is in line with other pupils nationally.
- Continue to reduce exclusions so that they are no higher than the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector