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Mr Martin Brown
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Dear Mr Brown

No formal designation monitoring inspection of The Sholing Technology College

Following my visit with Catherine Old, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 26 April 2017, 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 at the school.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record, policies and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. Inspectors met with the headteacher and other leaders, groups of pupils and staff, a parent, members of the interim executive board and representatives of the local authority. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during breaktime and in lessons. Inspectors discussed arrangements for welfare, pastoral care, child protection and safeguarding with senior leaders and the special educational needs coordinator. Inspectors also discussed pupils' attendance and behaviour with senior leaders and examined behaviour logs. The lead inspector observed one of the twice-weekly safeguarding meetings of pastoral staff. She also visited a workshop for pupils run by members of the local authority children's services team.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

The Sholing Technology College is an average-sized school with 1,016 pupils currently on roll. The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. A small proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well below average. Approximately a quarter of pupils are disadvantaged. The proportion of pupils included in the register of special educational needs is well above the national average, while the proportion subject to an education, health and care plan or with a statement of special educational needs is well below the national average. A larger proportion of pupils than average join or leave the school mid-year. A small number of pupils benefit from alternative placements at Oasis Secondary School Mayfield, at Compass School pupil referral unit, and at Southampton Hospital School.

Main findings

You responded extremely well when this inspection was announced, 15 minutes before inspectors entered the school. You welcomed the team in a warm, professional and courteous manner. The team noticed that your approach was adopted by all your staff admirably. You have created a culture which is open and welcoming and a sense of mutual trust, respect and support pervades the school. Although this inspection took place without notice, school leaders were able to provide documents requested by inspectors immediately. This illustrates the well-organised and systematic approach to safeguarding at the school.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of good quality. You are committed to ensuring that pupils are safe and that a culture of safeguarding permeates the school. Safeguarding is impressively led by a senior leader with wide experience and strong expertise in child protection. All staff rightly show responsibility for safeguarding pupils in the school. The pastoral team is tenacious in following up any concerns about pupils.

Following the inspection in May 2016, leaders acted rapidly to rectify the administrative errors in the single central record. Inspectors found that this record, which shows the extent of checks on staff who work at the school, meets statutory requirements fully. Leaders' checks on the suitability of staff before they are recruited to work at the school are carried out robustly.

Communication among staff about pupils' welfare is a strength of the school. Staff know pupils well and are alert to any changes in pupils which may indicate a concern. Twice-weekly meetings take place before school to share information

about pupils who are being supported and monitored because they are experiencing some difficulties. These meetings are attended by the attendance officer, the deputy special educational needs coordinator, heads of years, year group mentors, and school leaders for safeguarding, inclusion and behaviour. This enables up-to-date information to be shared appropriately. Staff who spoke to inspectors value how well informed they are about their pupils. The effective special educational needs coordinator, who joined the school in September, has significantly improved the quality of information provided about pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This includes useful advice about how to respond to, and support, pupils' emotional, social and learning needs.

You and your leaders have taken effective action to improve behaviour at the school. Staff appreciate leaders' new approach to behaviour management and have responded well to the training they have received. Most pupils who spoke to inspectors felt that behaviour has improved in lessons and around the school. Pupils attributed improved behaviour in lessons to better teaching across the curriculum and the consistent application of a well-understood behaviour management system. The careful use of approaches in which pupils take responsibility for resolving conflicts (restorative justice) appears to be successfully improving relationships among pupils.

Pupils reported that staff respond rapidly to pupils' use of offensive language or swearing, which, as a consequence, is much reduced. Your behaviour incident log now records homophobic and racist language. Records show that such language is rarely used. Exclusions are reducing, although they still remain higher than national levels. You aim to further reduce the need to exclude pupils by opening an on-site provision, later this term, for pupils at risk of exclusion.

Pupils who spoke to inspectors felt that bullying did not occur often and when it did, it was rapidly tackled by staff. Nevertheless, leaders and governors have noted some concerns expressed by pupils and parents and have made appropriate plans to focus on understanding and responding to bullying during the next few weeks. This focus includes additional training for both pupils and staff.

You and your leaders have developed a wide range of provision aimed at promoting positive mental health and pupils' well-being. This is well supported by your personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum. For example, many Year 7 pupils use mobile phones for the first time when they join the school, and, sensibly, the first topic studied in their PSHE lessons includes the risks of social networking. Your 'child online safety' leaflet for parents on your website offers useful tips to help parents whose children are using social media. You also join meetings where police officers help parents from your school and local primary schools to understand the risks their children might need to deal with online. Your PSHE leaders respond flexibly to current issues by adjusting the curriculum to consider matters which seem to be troubling pupils, such as the dangers of some legally available mood enhancing substances ('legal highs'). Your PSHE programme helpfully includes

assistance for Year 11 pupils on how to revise. Together with a strong pastoral care system, PSHE lessons also contribute to a culture which sensitively supports the development of young people's sexual identities.

Staff know pupils well, have been trained thoroughly and are alert to any concerns, which they report promptly. Detailed and high-quality records show that any concerns about pupils are followed up rapidly. School leaders work well with other agencies to help pupils and families receive the help they need. Leaders ensure that they seek the right advice and support from other agencies and pursue pupils' cases relentlessly when necessary. For example, the lead inspector visited an effective workshop for some Year 9 pupils led by youth workers from the local authority with expertise in helping young people improve their self-esteem. You draw on as much guidance from the local authority as possible. However, when leaders feel this does not meet your pupils' needs fully, you make arrangements to provide what is required to do so. For example, you appointed an attendance officer to carry out home visits and work with families of pupils with high levels of absence. Your team's rapid and rigorous response to pupil absence is beginning to have a positive effect, particularly for some pupils who have previously been persistently absent. You are aware that there is more to do to raise overall attendance at the school to reach national levels, particularly for older pupils.

A small number of pupils attend alternative provision. The school tracks their attendance and progress regularly, working with these providers and other external agencies to ensure that the personalised programmes support the pupils effectively.

Since the previous inspection, governors have checked regularly that school leaders have taken appropriate steps to ensure that safeguarding is effective. Initially, school governors sensibly relied on local authority officers to check that the single central record met statutory requirements. Subsequently, a monitoring committee, made up of school governors and local authority advisers, was set up to run alongside the existing governing body. Its focus was to address the areas for improvement noted in the previous Ofsted inspection report, including the need to ensure that safeguarding is effective. The governing body and the monitoring committee have now been replaced by an interim executive board (IEB). The newly appointed chair of this IEB, previously a member of the monitoring committee, successfully holds school leaders to account for the wider aspects of safeguarding, such as improving behaviour. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding closely monitors the activities of the designated safeguarding leader. This governor has already had some training and more is planned to enable her to check the single central record herself, without reliance on local authority officers.

External support

The Sholing Technology College is supported well by the local authority. Senior officers from Southampton City Council's children and families division have overseen school leaders' work to drive the necessary improvement in safeguarding.

Shortly after the previous inspection, local authority officers conducted a limited review of the school's safeguarding procedures, including the single central register and incident report log. The linked school improvement officer further reviewed safeguarding in September and found that not only was the school compliant with requirements, but a strong culture of safeguarding had been generated in the school.

To help keep parents informed about progress taking place at the school, local authority leaders helpfully post letters and summaries of reports on a section of the school's website called 'our journey to improvement'. Parents can also find updates from the headteacher and letters from the regional schools commissioner about arrangements for the school to join an academy trust. This practice helps to keep parents well informed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue efforts to support and promote better attendance and reduce persistent absence of a minority of vulnerable pupils.
- Successfully implement the plans you have in place to tackle bullying further at the 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 Southampton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Theresa Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector