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Mr P Cohen
Executive Headteacher
The Academy of Central Bedfordshire
Kingsland Campus
Parkside Drive
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Dear Mr Cohen

No formal designation inspection of The Academy of Central Bedfordshire

Following my visit to your school on 13 September 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 the time you took to discuss behaviour in your school.

This 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 of Education, Children's Services and Skills was concerned about behaviour at the school.

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 discussions with pupils
- documentary evidence
- discussions with school 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 previous inspection.

Context

The academy is an alternative provision free school which provides education for pupils in key stages 3 and 4 who have been permanently excluded, or are at risk of exclusion from their mainstream schools. Up to 100 places are commissioned by the local authority and a further 40 places by middle, upper and secondary schools. The academy operates on two sites approximately 19 miles apart. Currently, 92 pupils attend the academy. Most of them are White British. Approximately two thirds of them are boys. The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is broadly average. The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium (extra funding for those eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority) is above average.

Since the last inspection, facilities have been refurbished on both sites. This year, 12 new staff including two senior leaders have joined the academy. The previous vice-chair of the governing body is now the chair of the governing body.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

At the last inspection, you were asked to ensure that all staff make prompt use of the agreed sanctions and rewards to manage pupils' behaviour. This is now much more consistent across both sites. Pupils understand the expectations of them, and what they need to do to accrue praise slips and points for good behaviour. They know that to enjoy 'level two' privileges, including accessing leisure facilities and off-site visits, they need to behave well for sustained periods of time. They also know that yellow and red warnings for poor behaviour will lead to them losing these points.

Good relations between pupils and staff, and mutual respect for one another underpin the effective management of behaviour. The academy on both sites is calm and purposeful. Pupils conduct themselves well in classrooms, corridors and outside areas. They all wear suitable uniform.

Most of your pupils have been excluded from their mainstream schools due to their poor behaviour. Your staff go out of their way to build positive relationships with them and make them feel valued again. Pupils appreciate the efforts of staff to welcome them into school each morning, and join them in the daily breakfast club. They told inspectors that, 'staff get to know us really well, and even know all of us before we even start attending the academy'. Lunchtimes provide further opportunities for staff and pupils to mix together, chat informally and play table

tennis or football outside. This promotes positive attitudes and adds significantly to the safe, calm and enjoyable environment.

Individual pupils' behaviour is monitored routinely. Daily meetings with each pupil enables their key worker to discuss issues arising from the previous day and ensure that they make a 'fresh start'. Key workers also meet together at the end of each day to review pupils' behaviour and welfare, and identify where further help may be needed. Mutual trust and respect for one another helps pupils to engage fully with staff, develop their social skills and maintain good relations.

Good relationships between pupils and staff were clearly evident in all of the lessons seen by inspectors. Pupils like being taught in very small groups, and value the one-to-one support provided for them. They told inspectors that, 'it's better than our mainstream schools because staff here listen to you and will help you if you're struggling'.

Pupils are reminded regularly of the expectations of them. Staff are adept in motivating and cajoling pupils. They show great patience and tolerance when dealing with difficult situations and getting pupils to complete their work. Pupils showing early signs of poor behaviour are allowed 'time-out' in the recovery room to calm down before returning to learning. A well-established 'on-call' system ensures that pupils leaving lessons are supervised at all times to prevent them from wandering or disrupting the learning of others.

The curriculum, matched well to the needs and interests of pupils, promotes good behaviour and positive attitudes. Pupils enjoy vocational learning in high-quality specialist facilities. Catering, hair and beauty, construction and motor vehicle maintenance are popular with pupils because learning is practical and enjoyable. Pupils understand that gaining awards in these areas will equip them for the workplace. Personal, social and health education, including citizenship lessons are used effectively to explore pupils' personal views and help them to consider how they could modify their behaviour. A wide range of daily off-site enrichment activities help pupils to understand how they should behave in the local community.

Pupils told inspectors that the academy is a safe place to be. They feel free from all forms of bullying. One pupil said, 'Bullying doesn't happen here because we all get on together, we're all in the same boat and we all understand each other.' They also feel that if bullying or fighting should occur, staff would step in immediately to sort it out.

Concerns of staff about pupils' welfare are logged systematically and actions taken to follow them up are recorded in detail. You have clear procedures in place to manage incidents of serious misbehaviour and to safeguard pupils and staff. Your senior leaders demonstrate a clear understanding of the actions needed in the event of pupils being placed at risk of harm. All staff are 'team-teach' trained and work

effectively as a team to manage challenging behaviour, including situations requiring restraint. All incidents are logged systematically.

Pupils who display poor behaviour are referred to the reflection room. You have altered these procedures recently because you feel that not all off-task behaviour warrants a referral, and can be resolved in a different way. The number of referrals made fell significantly last year. However, the impact of these changes has not been evaluated fully to ensure that the proportion of pupils removed from lessons continues to fall.

You and your senior leaders acknowledge that gains made in improving behaviour are not matched by similar improvements in pupils' overall attendance, which remains low. You can point to several examples of pupils with chronic persistent absence in their mainstream schools who now regularly attend the academy. However, your own records show that persistent absence rates remain stubbornly high. This presents a significant barrier to maintaining the academy's overall effectiveness at its next inspection. Raising overall attendance and tackling the persistent absence of a minority of pupils are rightly prioritised in your academy improvement plan.

Priorities for further improvement

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the recent changes made to reduce the proportion of pupils referred to your reflection room to ensure that further improvements are made.
- Take further action to reduce persistent absence so that overall attendance is much closer to 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 Central Bedfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector