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Mrs I Abrahams
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Abrahams

No formal designation inspection of Great Barr Academy

Following my visit with Sandy Hayes, Her Majesty's Inspector, and with Ofsted Inspectors Bernice Astling, Graeme Rudland and Paul Topping to your school on 13 and 14 December 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

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 wished to determine the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the school as concerns had been raised to Ofsted, and was concerned about aspects of the effectiveness of leadership and management in the school, and personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils at the school.

Evidence

The inspection took place without any notice to the school. Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and evaluated the policy and practice of safeguarding. They met with the headteacher and with other leaders, including those responsible for safeguarding. An inspector met with the chair of the academy council and representatives of Shaw Education Trust (SET), which sponsors the school. Inspectors held discussions with groups of pupils, both formally and informally, and met with members of staff. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site.

Inspectors visited lessons, tutorial sessions and an assembly. An inspector evaluated the curriculum planning for personal, social and health (PSH) education and other information relating to pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. The school's self-evaluation and its improvement plan were also considered. Inspectors

reviewed the responses made to the school's own parent and staff surveys.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Inspection findings raised no serious concerns about pupils' personal development or the effectiveness of those aspects of leadership and management that were inspected. Inspectors did identify areas of work where further improvement would strengthen the overall effectiveness of this school.

Context

Great Barr Academy converted to an academy in December 2016 and is sponsored by SET. The predecessor school was inspected in June 2016 and the overall effectiveness was judged to require improvement. The headteacher, who was appointed in June 2015, has made numerous changes to staffing. Leadership posts have been restructured and additional pastoral staff have been appointed. The school is currently fully staffed. Governance has changed as a consequence of the school joining SET, and the chair and vice-chair of the academy council are recent appointments.

Great Barr Academy is an above-average-sized school and has a sixth form. Half of the pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals, which is above the national average. Nearly three quarters of the pupils are from minority ethnic heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is double the national average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is below the national average. The school has low stability because one in five pupils change schools during their secondary education.

In 2017, Year 11 pupils made one third of a grade less overall progress than the national average. There was some variation for groups of pupils. For example, pupils who speak English as an additional language made one fifth of a grade more progress than similar pupils nationally. However, disadvantaged pupils made half a grade less progress than other pupils nationally. Almost half of pupils achieved a standard pass in GCSE English and mathematics. Current pupils are making the rates of progress leaders expect of them, and an increasing proportion are exceeding this. However, leaders identify that disadvantaged pupils are not making sufficient progress. Also, pupils with high prior attainment are not yet performing as well as those with similar starting points nationally.

Inspection findings

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at the school. Staff receive regular and effective training, which contributes to their vigilance. Arrangements to ensure safe recruitment of staff are robust and effective. Staff use well the school's system to

make referrals of any concerns they have about pupils. Leaders with designated responsibility for safeguarding respond to these referrals in a timely manner. They are tenacious and rigorous when following up referrals they make to external agencies. Leaders make sure that vulnerable pupils receive appropriate support. Detailed records are kept about actions taken. Leaders reflect on the effectiveness of their work, and how interventions support pupils and their families.

Great Barr Academy is at the heart of a strong network of external agencies that work within the local community. This reflects the school's outward-facing safeguarding culture. It also informs the way leaders respond to issues within the local area, for example in shaping the content of the PSH education programme to reflect issues of high local priority. Pupils say that they feel safe in school, although some younger pupils comment that older pupils can be boisterous at social times, which makes them feel uncomfortable. Pupils recognise that there are adults at school they can talk to if they have any concerns about their own welfare, and that staff respond promptly to these concerns. Parents are confident that pupils are safe when at school.

Leaders have developed a wide range of provision aimed at promoting pupils' PSH education. Pupils are well informed about how to keep themselves safe in a wide variety of situations. For example, they can talk confidently about the potential risks of the internet, gang culture, knife crime and legally available mood-enhancing substances ('legal highs'). They understand risk and how to act in ways to reduce it. Pupils report that they enjoy this learning, particularly the full-day programmes. Sessions are enriched with visitors to the school, for example theatre groups. Teachers also deliver aspects of the PSH education programme through tutorial sessions and assemblies. The tutorial sessions vary in their effectiveness. Leaders' focus has been to develop high-quality resources and experiences. They are currently less clear about the specific impact of these sessions on pupils' personal development and welfare.

Leaders are taking decisive action to improve pupils' attendance. Leaders identify and target effectively support for pupils whose attendance gives cause for concern. For example, form tutors discuss with pupils the impact that low attendance can have on their progress. Leaders and academy council members regularly evaluate the effectiveness of actions to improve pupils' attendance. Pupils with high and improving attendance are incentivised by rewards. The reward system keeps attendance high profile around the school. As a result of leaders' clear determination, pupils' attendance is improving over time, including for disadvantaged pupils. The additional pupil premium funding the school receives has effectively supported disadvantaged pupils' attendance. For example, pupils are encouraged and engaged by the ACE curriculum programme. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities attend school less frequently than other groups of pupils. The recently appointed special educational needs coordinator monitors the attendance of these pupils and is shaping the provision to support their attendance. For example, the integrated support unit is effectively meeting the additional learning

needs of pupils. However, this work has not yet had a demonstrable impact on attendance.

Leaders have established clear daily attendance routines to check on the whereabouts of pupils. Staff take prompt action to follow up unexplained absences from school and prioritise those pupils who are vulnerable. Leaders have clear policies that are rigorously enforced when pupils transfer to other schools. The staff's resolve to ensure that pupils' destinations are secure before removing them from the school's role is not diminished by the complexities arising from pupils who move abroad.

Staff implement consistently the school's clear systems to record and sanction pupils who are late to school. Staff make a concerted effort to encourage pupils to move promptly to their lessons around the large school site. Despite these actions, too many pupils are either late to school or to lessons. As a result, the start of some lessons is disturbed by late arrivals. Leaders recognise that further improvements in pupils' punctuality will continue to improve school routines.

Staff oversee well pupils' arrival, and movement around and departure from the school site. The school site is large and there are many social areas that are accessible to pupils. In areas of the site that are subject to less high levels of staff supervision, younger pupils note that older pupils are sometimes silly and boisterous. Most pupils move calmly and sensibly, and wait patiently, when corridors become quite congested between lessons. A few pupils become overexcited in such situations, for example in stairwells. Pupils do respond positively to staff instructions and reminders of expectations about their conduct. At breaktimes, social areas become busy, but pupils' behaviour is generally positive. Pupils note that staff respond extremely promptly and effectively if there are any disruptions to this, for example inappropriate physical interaction between pupils. The incidents of such behaviour are reducing over time. Pupils are polite and courteous and greet visitors appropriately. Pupils are very well presented, and wear their uniforms smartly and with pride.

Pupils respond well to teachers in lessons as a result of the positive relationships that exist. Pupils recognise that teaching is getting better. They say that their teachers are caring, interested in them and supportive of their needs. Pupils engage well when lessons are stimulating and interesting. Their attention wanders when lesson activities are less challenging. Pupils are keen to contribute in lessons, particularly where teachers direct their questions effectively. If teachers ask questions more generally to the whole class, those pupils who are more keen to participate can dominate the discussion. This means that other pupils have fewer opportunities to contribute and develop their learning in this manner. Occasionally, teachers do not tackle promptly pupils who are less involved in their learning.

Leaders make sure that classroom displays promote positive conduct and learning. Staff note that the school's culture has successfully promoted improvements in

pupils' behaviour in lessons. For example, pupils benefit from reminders of different ways to overcome problems before asking staff for help. This supports the development of pupils' resilience and independence. Pupils are also reminded of the school's approach to rewarding them and the consequences of not meeting expectations. For example, pupils enjoy the competitive aspect created through the school's learning 'league tables'.

There are strong links between the school and alternative off-site providers. Regular meetings between alternative providers and school leaders support a good exchange of information. For example, the school effectively monitors the progress of pupils who attend alternative provision and ensures that they are kept safe. Leaders note that these pupils benefit from their bespoke curriculum. Comprehensive record systems have been recently established. These are not yet sufficiently developed to enable formal analysis of these benefits, for example as to how pupils' attendance or conduct has changed. As a result, members of the academy council are not yet able to hold leaders to account for the effectiveness of alternative provision.

External support

Leaders make good use of the support available to them from SET. This support is sharply and effectively focused on school improvement priorities. For example, recently recruited leaders in mathematics have been well supported. Leaders' development of highly effective systems to monitor pupils' progress has benefited from input from SET officers. SET also provides opportunities for staff to develop their teaching and leadership skills, such as opportunities to share practice with colleagues from other schools. School leaders benefit from external validation of the judgements they make about the school's effectiveness. Leaders continue to consider the needs of the local community through maintaining effective links within the local area school network and regularly hosting multi-agency meetings.

Priorities for further improvement

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- detailed analysis of records and other information is used to further improve behaviour around the school
- pupils' personal development and welfare are further supported by the PSH education programme
- pupils' punctuality to school and to lessons improves.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the academy committee, the chief executive officer of SET, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rob Hackfath

Her Majesty's Inspector