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Mr Daniel Fox
Colne Community School and College
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Dear Mr Fox

No formal designation inspection of Colne Community School and College

Following my visit with Brenda Watson and John Wilson, Ofsted Inspectors, to your academy on 24 January 2018, 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 was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, including pupils' personal development and welfare.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record of staff employed by the school and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. They met with you, other senior leaders and two groups of pupils. They also held meetings with the chair of the trust, trustees and the local authority adviser, and held telephone conversations with the director of education from the local authority and some parents.

Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation provided by school leaders about behaviour, attendance and safeguarding. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, visited an assembly, and noted pupils' conduct outside of lessons.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

The school is a larger than average-sized 11 to 18 academy, serving the town of Brightlingsea and its surrounding areas. The vast majority of pupils are White British; very few are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportions of pupils who are disadvantaged or who speak English as an additional language are below the national average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is slightly above average, although the proportion who have an education, health and care plan is broadly in line with national figures. The school is within the Thrive Partnership Academy Trust (TPAT).

The school was last inspected in March 2013, and was judged to be outstanding. The principal at the time of that inspection is now the chief executive officer (CEO) of TPAT. A new associate head of school has been in place since January 2018. The CEO and executive principal are based at the school for three and two days a week respectively. Other trust staff are supporting the school to accelerate school improvement. There have also been changes to the chair of the local governing committee, and the chair of the trust.

Safeguarding

Over the past 18 months, concerns were raised with Ofsted regarding the school's procedures for safeguarding pupils. In response, leaders undertook a review of the school's safeguarding arrangements. This confirmed that all of the statutory requirements have remained in place. The complaints have also been investigated by the local authority, who are also satisfied with the school's safeguarding processes and practice. Inspection evidence shows that there is a strong culture of safeguarding within the school. You and your senior leaders have robust procedures in place to protect pupils from harm. Staff are clear about when and how to make referrals if they have any concerns about the pupils in their care. Your leaders show a good understanding of the school's local issues and the challenges these present. Safeguarding records show that staff are vigilant to the issues pupils face, and report any safeguarding concerns appropriately.

Safeguarding records are maintained systematically. Your team of leaders and pastoral staff, all trained in safeguarding, know pupils well. An inspector sampled some case files of safeguarding incidents. These accurately reflect the reasons for the referral, actions taken, meetings attended, and any other relevant risks to the pupil concerned. The files are orderly, and the actions taken are timely. Staff are appropriately kept informed through updates, briefings and bulletins. There are fortnightly attendance panel meetings that enable staff to review the progress of some of the more serious cases, and to take action where it is needed. Inspectors found that the team works effectively with pupils, parents and carers, and external agencies to protect pupils identified to be potentially at risk.

Leaders, trustees and staff know and understand their safeguarding responsibilities well. A significant number of staff, including house managers, are trained to either level 2 or level 3 in safeguarding. Many senior staff have undertaken safer recruitment training, and all staff have undergone suitable child protection training. The single central record is extremely well maintained. The staff member responsible for this has a thorough understanding and ensures that all statutory safeguarding checks are undertaken and recorded. Procedures for safeguarding are regularly reviewed by TPAT to ensure that staff carry out their duties effectively.

The site is secure and access to main doors is controlled by staff. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in the school and when moving around the school. They explained how they are taught to stay safe, including online. They are aware of current issues, such as child sexual exploitation, and how these have been highlighted through the good use of assemblies, tutor time, and the personal, social, health and education curriculum. These help pupils to foster a better understanding about potential risks to their safety.

Pupils say that behaviour outside of lessons has improved because staff are reinforcing the 'aspiration, resilience, kindness' (ARK) message. Pupils generally move quickly and safely around the site. However, there are some pinch points where pupils are less orderly. Inspectors noted that a small minority do not follow the zoning rules, and behave boisterously even when being observed. Although pupils say improvements are being seen, there are still a number of pupils who are dissatisfied. They would like better social areas at breaktimes, and feel staff need to manage the behaviour of 'a hard core' of pupils more consistently.

You have reviewed your pastoral system, and have introduced non-teaching house managers to coordinate processes. You have a mixture of sanctions and rewards to manage pupils' behaviour. Sanctions involve warnings, detentions and ultimately the isolation room. Pupils say that the system is not yet applied consistently well by all staff. When it is used properly, it works. However, not all staff follow the stages correctly. Your records show that so far this year there has been an increase in the number of exclusions. You explained that this was due to new systems being more effective, and raised expectations from staff, including a refusal to accept poor behaviour. Inspectors saw some evidence of this during observations, but it was not universally seen across the curriculum.

In most classes, pupils behave well and the learning is effective because pupils take pride in their work, collaborate well and concentrate hard. Inspectors also noted that in some lessons, pupils display poor attitudes towards learning. This includes not listening to teachers' instructions, shouting out or engaging in idle chatter, and this can disrupt the learning of others. There are a minority of pupils who do not work hard enough, and while their poor attitudes do not jeopardise pupils' safety, they do impact upon other pupils' learning. In these lessons, staff do not challenge this behaviour effectively, or consistently apply the school's agreed procedures for managing it. Inspectors did note that although leaders receive a daily report on

behaviour incidents, they are not routinely analysing this information to spot patterns so that they can improve behaviour further.

Inspectors asked pupils about bullying, in particular how often it happens and how these incidents are managed. They said that there have been issues on the buses, but 'staff help you out' and your actions have improved matters. Pupils said that things have calmed down since you were appointed, and that the school is now a more 'tolerant environment'. They felt that the few bullying issues that do occur revolve around name-calling, and unpleasantness on social media, with little in the way of racism or homophobia. All pupils could identify a member of staff or an anti-bullying ambassador who they could approach to help them sort things out. The school's records show that the number of reported incidents is reducing.

Attendance is above average and pupils' current attendance shows a significant improvement compared with last year. The improvement can be seen across year groups, and also for different groups of pupils. The number of pupils who are persistently absent has also reduced, meaning the school's attendance team have successfully raised expectations and are getting more pupils back into school. This has helped to safeguard further some of the school's most vulnerable pupils.

Your records show that not all parents and carers follow the school's complaints procedure. Some parents use other means to air their grievances. You feel that this sometimes prevents you from being able to explain exactly what is happening in school, and taking the action necessary to resolve matters satisfactorily. When faced with concerns, you take these seriously, but you have not always ensured that complaints are fully resolved to the satisfaction of all parties. You have established additional forums where matters can be discussed informally, such as the anti-bullying ambassadors, open door surgeries, revised parent forums, and your direct contact number. However, better communication with parents and carers afterwards is required to ensure that matters remain resolved.

Some parents voiced specific concerns during the inspection linked to the school's off-site provision and exclusion records. Inspectors visited the school's off-site provision, and scrutinised exclusion records. The evidence gathered on inspection did not support their claims. However, you acknowledge the need to regain quickly the trust and confidence of a group of parents and pupils who feel disenfranchised.

Leaders explained how there have been significant changes at both leadership and governance level. This is in response to some of the concerns raised. You have an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness at present, with clear and detailed plans in place to bring about improvement. While you and other leaders have certainly acted decisively, it is too early to see the full impact of your actions.

External support

The local authority has been instrumental in providing expertise and guidance to

support the school. In light of the complaints, representatives have checked that leaders and governors are safeguarding pupils effectively. Their findings show that the school safeguards pupils effectively.

Priorities for further improvement

- Provide more guidance to parents about what to do if they have concerns and strengthen procedures to follow up complaints so that all parties are satisfied and matters remain fully resolved.
- Improve pupils' attitudes towards learning in lessons by ensuring that staff consistently apply the school's agreed procedures to manage the behaviour of those who do not work as hard as they could.
- Ensure that leaders use the information they have on pupils' behaviour to seek improvements by identifying trends and acting upon their findings.

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

Yours sincerely

John Randall
Her Majesty's Inspector