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Mr Barry Smith
Headteacher
Great Yarmouth Charter Academy
Salisbury Road
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Dear Mr Smith

No formal designation inspection of Great Yarmouth Charter Academy

Following my visit with John Wilson, Ofsted inspector, to your academy on 21 February 2018, 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 behaviour and safety of pupils at the school.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents, including those relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements, and met with you and other staff, and groups of pupils. Inspectors held conversations with the chair of governors, representatives of the Inspiration Trust, including the chief executive officer, and local authority officers.

We carried out a tour of the school and visited a range of lessons and observed pupils' behaviour around the school at breaks and between lessons. We considered 69 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, along with other information about parental perspectives, and 40 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

You have been in post since September 2017, when the predecessor school, Great Yarmouth High School, converted to academy status as part of the Inspiration Trust. The governing body was replaced at the same time.

The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is significantly greater than the national average. Around one quarter of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Just over one in five pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is much higher than the national average.

Inspection findings

A large number of pupils told inspectors that, prior to the introduction of the school's revised behaviour policy at the beginning of the current academic year, they often felt unsafe at school. They described 'dangerous' behaviour in corridors and during breaks from lessons, including regular fights, and said that abusive language was very common. Pupils explained that, very often, serious disruption during lessons prevented them from learning anything at all. Some said that in the past, they had 'dreaded', and in consequence sometimes avoided, coming to school because of these fears. Teachers and other staff told inspectors that they often found it difficult to teach because behaviour was so poor, that they were frequently the target of verbal, and occasionally of physical abuse, and that at times they too felt unsafe.

During this unannounced inspection, all of the large number of pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they now feel safe at school. Pupils moved around the school site in an orderly manner and behaved very politely and respectfully to their peers and to adults. They wore their uniform with pride, arrived at lessons promptly, and settled down to learning quickly. In all lessons visited, learning took place in a calm and orderly environment. Relationships between pupils and teachers were positive, and consequently pupils had the confidence to ask and to answer questions. Pupils behaved well, both when interacting with their teachers and when working on their own. As a result, they worked hard, completing tasks in a focused manner. During break periods, pupils socialised with each other amicably.

Pupils and teachers told inspectors that behaviour has improved significantly and that, as one put it, 'today is just what things are like now'. The school's records also indicate a considerable decline in the incidence of repeated disruption, and of more serious misconduct, particularly since the beginning of the current term. The incidence of permanent or temporary exclusion from school, or of internal isolation, though falling, remains too high because the behaviour of a small number of pupils has not improved. These pupils are removed from lessons when necessary so that learning continues. Pupils said that typically sanctions deter poor behaviour on the

part of others because they are enforced consistently and quickly. The increased emphasis on rewarding pupils for their punctuality, behaviour and achievement is also promoting good conduct. Staff feel supported by leaders in dealing with misconduct; all of the large number who responded to the Ofsted staff survey agreed that, overall, behaviour at the school is now positive.

Staff and pupils attribute the improvements to leaders' introduction of a new behaviour policy at the start of the current academic year. Leaders and teachers respond to poor behaviour robustly, but also priority is given to encouraging and rewarding positive conduct and relationships through what you describe as a 'warm, but strict' approach to discipline. Some parents expressed concern that a rigid application of the rules might punish, unfairly, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities who are unable to follow particular instructions. Other parents were anxious that a rule designed to keep pupils within the classroom whenever possible would prevent pupils with medical needs from visiting the toilet during lesson time. You have ensured that the text of the policy makes clear to staff that they must be flexible when applying it. Teachers and pupils told inspectors that in their view, the behaviour policy is applied with due regard to individual needs. Such an approach was evident during the inspection. Governors have considered carefully each of the small number of concerns about the application of the behaviour policy that individual parents have asked them to investigate.

Leaders are challenging a culture of low expectations around attendance on the part of some pupils and their parents. They contact parents quickly if their children do not arrive at school, and home visits take place if leaders have concerns about a pupil's well-being. In the past some pupils have absented themselves from lessons; this is now uncommon because teachers take registers in every lesson to ensure pupils' whereabouts are known. Leaders are also reassuring parents and carers that if their children recover after feeling initially unwell in the morning, they are welcome to attend the afternoon session. High attendance is celebrated; pupils who have received awards for full attendance wear their gold '100' badges with pride and the number receiving those is rising. As a result of this work, overall pupils' attendance has improved but remains below the national average. Too many pupils are persistently absent from school.

Staff receive regular safeguarding training about risks and dangers faced by pupils, including those specific to the local area, and how to identify the signs that an individual might need help. Governors have ensured that there are regular checks on the impact of this training, and that staff who need it receive additional guidance. Leaders also encourage staff to report any concern, however minor. As a result, staff are quick to report anything that worries them. Leaders use this information to identify pupils who need help and liaise appropriately with external agencies so that they receive the necessary support. Pupils said that if they raise concerns, staff act upon them; pupils made clear that the incidence of bullying has declined considerably because it is tackled effectively.

Leaders are receiving effective support from the Inspiration Trust. An experienced executive headteacher is assisting senior leaders in their work to improve Year 11 pupils' progress and outcomes. The trust's education adviser provides leaders with valued support and incisive challenge, visiting regularly to monitor standards and advise on 'next steps.' Independent reviews of key aspects of the school's work, such as provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, are helping leaders to plan improvements. Subject advisers are working with leaders to ensure that pupils improve their extended writing skills, particularly in English. The trust ensures that the necessary pre-employment checks take place prior to the appointment of staff and that the records of these are complete and accurate. It has funded improvements that have made the site secure and difficult for unauthorised visitors to access. Links with the safer schools officer and the local police help leaders to gain additional information about risks facing individual pupils.

Priorities for further improvement

- continue to reduce the incidence of unacceptable behaviour, so that the number of internal exclusions from lessons, and external exclusions from school, falls further
- increase the overall attendance of pupils, and reduce further the proportion who are persistently absent, so that it is at least in line with the national average.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the Inspiration Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard

Her Majesty's Inspector