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Mrs K Craig
Headteacher
Smith's Wood Academy
Windward Way
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West Midlands
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Dear Mrs Craig

No formal designation inspection of Smith's Wood Academy

Following my visit to your school on 8 March 2018 with Peter Humphries and Simon Mosley, Her Majesty's Inspectors, 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.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with the no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. 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 discussion 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 not taken effective action to improve behaviour and secure consistently positive attitudes to learning.

Context

The school opened as an academy in April 2017. The number of pupils on roll is slightly above the national average for secondary schools. The majority of pupils are White British. A high proportion of pupils are entitled to free school meals and a higher than average proportion are identified as having special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The sixth form has only a very small number of students in Year 13 and none in Year 12, and will be closing at the end of the academic year.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Over the past year, you and senior leaders have worked hard to try to create an environment in which teachers can teach and pupils can learn. You have had some success in achieving this aim. Staff say that the school is now a better place in which to work. This view is also held by many pupils. Lessons are largely calm, with learning taking place. During the inspection, pupils' behaviour around the school was usually sensible. Year 11 pupils' conduct at the start of their examination was impeccable. At lunchtimes, pupils generally behaved well outside and in the canteen. The school is neat and tidy and mainly free from litter and graffiti. Pupils' books are well kept.

For a significant minority of pupils, however, the systems put in place to manage behaviour are not working. The initial approaches used by leaders to establish a calmer school and consistent expectations have become rigid and have not evolved quickly enough. Exclusions, both fixed-term and permanent, are very high. In addition, too many pupils miss large amounts of learning time because they are in 'isolation' – a large classroom where they work in silence for anything from one lesson to several days. The fact that it is often the same pupils receiving these sanctions time and time again indicates that they are having little or no impact on improving these pupils' behaviour. Leaders recognise that they need to make urgent improvements to their approaches to managing behaviour so that they become more effective for all pupils.

The behaviour management policy sets out clearly what is expected of staff and pupils. Pupils know that they must be on time for lessons and many make a good effort to arrive promptly. The structured introductions to lessons help pupils to know what to expect and usually lead to a calm and focused start. Some teachers use the policy well, skilfully promoting and encouraging good behaviour that enables learning to take place. Others, though, tend to use sanctions too quickly and are over-reliant on senior leaders.

The school has too few strategies for pupils who do not readily meet staff's expectations. Lack of cooperation, lateness to lessons, lateness to school and other rule infringements such as incorrect uniform can quickly lead to a period of time in isolation. The work completed here does not correspond to the work that the pupil's class is completing, so learning time is missed. Misbehaviour in isolation can lead to exclusion from school, and often does. The sanctions therefore quickly escalate, and for too many pupils this cycle, once it has begun, is repeated.

Fixed-term exclusions are very high and are not reducing term by term. In the autumn term, 466 school days were lost to exclusion, and 363 days have been lost this term so far. Most exclusions are for persistently defying the school's behaviour policy. It is notable, and concerning, that Year 7 pupils were excluded more than any other year group in their first term at the school. This situation remains the same this term, indicating that the sanction of exclusion is not proving effective in establishing positive behaviour for the youngest pupils and that other strategies are urgently needed. Permanent exclusions are exceptionally high – 20 pupils have been excluded since the start of the summer term 2017, including three this term so far. Permanent exclusions are seldom for one serious incident but for persistent disruption, again indicating a lack of other effective strategies.

A high proportion of pupils who receive repeated sanctions are those who have SEN and/or disabilities. Thirty-one per cent of those who have been excluded for a fixed period, 30% of pupils who have been permanently excluded, 11% of pupils placed in isolation and 51% of pupils placed in the 'first time' room for up to ten days are those who have SEN and/or disabilities. You and leaders acknowledge that for too many of these pupils the school is not meeting their needs well enough.

Overall attendance, at 90.7%, is very low. On the day of the inspection it was 89.7%. Persistent absence is more than double the national average, at 28.64% and is showing little sign of improvement. Disadvantaged pupils' attendance and the attendance of pupils who receive special educational needs support is particularly low. Leaders have put in place appropriate strategies to follow up and challenge pupils' persistent absence. You and leaders are committed to working more closely with families to improve attendance and have begun to plan how to do this. You have rightly identified that the high rate of exclusion is sending mixed messages to some parents whose children already attend poorly. The school tells these parents to send their children into school, then sometimes excludes them once they are there.

Leaders' analysis of behaviour and attendance is not detailed enough. The analysis of behaviour does not consider properly the patterns and trends that lie beneath incidents, and therefore does not allow leaders to know what is working and why. Too little consideration is given to where and when incidents take place, and how these may relate to the context and to pupils' individual needs. Similarly, the analysis of attendance is not good enough to inform subsequent policy and practice.

The interim executive board (IEB) has not focused strongly enough on whether behaviour in the school is actually improving. They have not required leaders to provide them with detailed analysis, nor questioned enough why exclusions have remained so high. Insufficient links have been made between outcomes and behaviour and attendance. In the most recent meetings there have been some improvements, with a clearer focus on all of these areas.

Priorities for further improvement

- Revise the school's approach to managing behaviour to ensure that it meets the needs of all pupils and urgently leads to a reduction in exclusions and the use of isolation, while still promoting good behaviour and attitudes to learning.
- Improve the analysis of behaviour so that leaders know where and why incidents are occurring and can challenge and support both staff and pupils accordingly.
- Support staff to develop their skills in managing behaviour, building on the good practice that some staff already display.
- Improve the recording and analysis of absence and use this to take appropriate action to improve attendance.
- Reduce the number of pupils who are persistently absent, including by working more closely with parents.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King
Her Majesty's Inspector