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David Hood
Headteacher
Cressex Community School
Holmers Lane
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Dear Mr Hood

No formal designation inspection of Cressex Community School

Following my visit with Catherine Old, Her Majesty's Inspector; Suzanne Richards, Ofsted Inspector; and Peter Rodin, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 1–2 May 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 and aspects of the effectiveness of leadership and management at the school.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements, and met with you, other senior leaders, groups of pupils, parents, the chair of the governing body and other governors, a representative of the local authority and groups of teachers.

Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour and learning around the school, at breaks, lunchtimes, and at the start and end of each day. Inspectors looked in detail at the school's records of attendance, persistent absence, pupils taken off roll and details of pupils designated as now in elective home education.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Cressex is a smaller-than-average secondary school which serves an area with average levels of deprivation but with above-average levels of pupils in receipt of the pupil premium. The school has a tiny sixth form, which caters each year for students who wish to pursue level 2 and level 3 studies in childcare and play. The community served by the school is diverse, with the biggest single group being those declared as Asian/Asian-British Pakistani. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above the national average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is also above the national average, including those who have an education, health and care plan.

The school is popular and oversubscribed, although each year several pupils leave to be educated elsewhere and a few parents elect to educate their children at home. There is greater stability in the staff team. Turnover is limited and leaders ensure, where possible, that there is no reduction in the quality of teaching as and when staff leave. A number of staff, including some teachers and leaders, are former pupils of the school which serves their home community.

Cressex School is a foundation school with a cooperative trust, known as the Cressex Co-operative Learning Partnership. The governing board is the responsible body. Members of the trust nominate some of the governors.

The chair of the governing body is an active member of the Muslim Parents Association, which celebrates the considerable contribution of the school to the life chances of Muslim pupils. There are also strong links with the local Anglican Church. For example, the Bishop of Buckingham is an associate member of the governing body.

This inspection was conducted to ensure that the school's work to maintain the safety and security of pupils aligns well to contemporary expectations and gives each pupil an equal opportunity to prosper. It was also conducted to check that all staff have been trained to the standards expected by the Home Office licensed WRAP (Workshop to Raise Awareness of 'Prevent') programme, and that they are able to exercise their duties with regard to the 'Prevent' duty. All public bodies, including schools, are bound by the 'Prevent' duty, which is intended to 'prevent' anyone from being radicalised or becoming extremist. Inspectors were commissioned to explore how well leaders work with other statutory bodies and agencies committed to keeping pupils safe, maintaining their health and well-being and supporting their academic progress and attainment.

Inspectors found a school that is functioning well and making a positive contribution to improving the lives of its pupils. Teaching programmes to keep pupils safe are comprehensive and cover all aspects of safeguarding, such as how to stay safe online and in relationships, how to spot signs of radicalisation and extremism, and what to do if you become aware of someone at risk. All pupils and staff know to whom they should report any concerns. The school's processes for signposting

pupils to appropriate support agencies, including the Channel programme, are robust. This programme is designed to educate, in specific and greater detail, pupils about the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Inspectors found that leaders make effective use of the external bodies even when they are hard to access, their referral processes are overly bureaucratic or they respond too slowly. Leaders reported, repeatedly, their frustrations with some agencies, the lack of timeliness in provision of support for some pupils and the ineffectiveness of some statutory agencies. Inspectors found no evidence that leaders frustrate the work of such agencies. This is an unwarranted perception.

Leaders provided evidence that all staff have been trained in safeguarding in the current year. The training included updates on the 'Prevent' duty. A small minority were not able to access this training due to personal circumstances. Leaders had already planned to 'mop up' those who needed refresher training. The headteacher chose to provide the WRAP training himself so as to be able to assure its quality. Inspectors judge that the majority of teachers have an understanding of the 'Prevent' duty that equates well to that of teachers in schools elsewhere. Some non-teaching staff, however, need to develop their knowledge further. The headteacher acknowledges that all staff would benefit from regular and/or annual up-to-date training on 'Prevent' and has instructed all staff to undertake the Home Office's latest online training programme. Records that staff have been trained were found but were not easily accessible and all in one place. Inspectors found no evidence that leaders frustrate the 'Prevent' agenda.

Similarly, leaders were able to provide records and evidence that all adults working or volunteering at the school have been checked to be fit and proper persons. These checks are not recorded in a single document but were all in one place. The headteacher had received external advice that this was good enough but recognises that there are better models of a single central register in place in other schools.

Leaders' processes for assessing risk in and around the premises are strong. All organisations hiring the buildings are required to meet standards and expectations set out clearly in rental documentation. The headteacher, on behalf of the governors, reserves the right to withhold bookings until evidence is provided that expectations have been met. He takes this responsibility seriously and checks, for example, the content of the curriculum offered in the supplementary school which runs in the school buildings on Saturdays and after school.

Leaders are fully committed to the cooperative learning trust's values. As such, they are relentless advocates for the community. They are determined that the school provides high-quality education which enables all pupils to break through the 'glass ceiling'. All their efforts are oriented to ensuring that disadvantage does not hold pupils back, limit pupils' success or narrow their horizons. Leaders ensure that pupils have access to good-quality, independent careers advice and guidance. Leaders provide the niche sixth form for the small group of students who, each year, benefit from this particular 16 to 19 study programme. Their progress and

attainment in the programme is impressive. Most go on to work in the childcare industry locally, and a few go on to study childcare, early education or teaching, and take up graduate-level careers in these fields.

Teaching is effective in the large majority of subjects in the school. Pupils benefit from a contemporary curriculum, which enables an increasing number to meet the EBacc standard. The formal curriculum is admirably enhanced by a strong programme of citizenship education and personal, social, health and economic education. Through these programmes, and the wide array of enrichment activities, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are supported well. The impact of this on pupils' attitudes is clearly evident over time. For example, Year 7 pupils indicated that they sometimes experience racial abuse or bullying. They noted that the term 'gay' is used as a replacement for 'stupid'. They know this is wrong. Year 11 pupils were clear that these attitudes, which they assert pupils bring from home, are eradicated by the time they leave school. They believe the school is inclusive and welcoming of all. They also recognise that girls are better than the boys at accepting gender fluidity. Pupils learn about Islamophobia systematically, as it is a phenomenon that affects a significant proportion of the school's population.

All pupils study religious education in keeping with the Secretary of State's requirements and all pupils undertake the full GCSE religious studies course. This gives them the opportunity to study two contrasting religions in depth, Christianity and Islam.

This good-quality education is made possible because of the strong policy framework evolved over time, which makes explicit the school's ethos and approach. Parents like this approach. The vast majority are vocally supportive of the school and are generous in their praise of what the school has done for their children. Pupils like the approach, particularly to behaviour management. One commented, 'It's strict, but that's right.'

Pastoral care is a strength of the school. Adults know pupils well. They know who is thriving and those who are struggling with learning. They provide some pupils with basic care when necessary and attempt to access additional resources for those with particular needs. The school's work with pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is thorough, focused and effective. As a result, in order to protect some vulnerable young people, leaders have adopted an advocacy role. This can be time-consuming and frustrating for staff but is driven by the high-minded value of wanting the best for every pupil.

Inspectors encountered a strong school culture with an admirable commitment to diversity. This was found particularly in the positive relationships between staff and pupils. It leads to purposeful and productive relationships in classrooms, where learning is rarely disrupted and where, for the most part, pupils make good progress from their starting points. Teachers enjoy working at the school but, more than that, they are proud to be Cressex employees. They appreciate the support

from the headteacher and deputy headteacher and feel well trained for their roles. They particularly like the opportunities they have for collaboration in the development of the school.

External support

Leaders receive some support and challenge from a representative of Buckinghamshire County Council through its contracted service provider Buckinghamshire Learning Trust (BLT). The school pays directly for this service. In recent times, this has caused leaders to reflect on and publish a clear statement on the purpose of the Cressex curriculum. Leaders also benefit from focused support from the trustees of the cooperative learning trust, in which the headteacher plays a leading role. The impact of this is less clear, since the trust is dependent on the headteacher for information about the school's effectiveness. The headteacher has formed a professional dialogue with a school of similar type in Luton, Bedfordshire. Ideas, resources and materials are shared cooperatively. This relationship is important for the school as a benchmark for how well it is supporting the needs of Asian/Asian-British Pakistani pupils. The headteacher participates in the schools forum for Buckinghamshire and the Buckinghamshire Association of Secondary Headteachers. In these groups, discussions focus less on pupil achievement than on local matters such as the challenges of diminishing resources and selection at 11+.

Priorities for further improvement

- Review the school's public profile and work to eliminate any unwarranted negative perceptions of the school's activities and ethos.
- Improve the effectiveness of collaboration with all agencies committed to supporting the health and well-being of pupils in the area, and their educational success.
- Further extend partnerships with the broadest possible range of types of school, to share the good practice at Cressex and evaluate, adopt and/or adapt even more effective practices from elsewhere.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector