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Ms Jo Southby
Executive Headteacher
Horizons Academy Bexley
Lensbury Way
Abbey Wood
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Dear Ms Southby

No formal designation inspection of Horizons Academy Bexley

Following my visit to your school on 17 July 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 aspects of the effectiveness of leadership and management in the school (including governance), and the behaviour and welfare of pupils at the school.

Evidence

The inspector scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. He met with the executive headteacher, leaders, teachers, pupils, parents, and the chair of the local governing body.

In addition, the inspector visited a number of classrooms to see learning, some with leaders. The inspector scrutinised a range of documents including the fire risk assessment, minutes of meetings, attendance records and safeguarding procedures.

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

safeguarding is effective.

Context

The number of pupils at the school is 71, including 20 in Year 11 who are leaving at the end of term. The number fluctuates from month to month depending on referrals from mainstream schools. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups, and those who speak English as an additional language, is above average. More than half of the pupils are entitled to free school meals. This is well above average. Eight out of 10 pupils have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and one in three an education, health and care plan. This year six staff are leaving, mostly for promotion or to work in mainstream schools.

Safeguarding and child protection arrangements are rigorous and detailed. This ensures that pupils are kept safe at all times. Pupils said they felt safe in school and that there was no bullying. The school has very robust procedures to ensure that no pupil is at risk of harm. Pupils' well-being is right at the top of the school's agenda. Concerns are dealt with quickly and decisively so that all pupils are looked after effectively.

The school's strong relationships with a wide range of outside agencies and services enable staff to provide specific support quickly and effectively. For example, the school has close links with educational welfare officers (EWOs), social workers and mental health practitioners. Staff go to great lengths to ensure that the support they provide is relevant and timely. This is illustrated by the fortnightly risk assessment meetings where the progress of each pupil is reviewed and strategies to support them are discussed. A particular feature of these meetings is the attendance of EWOs, ensuring that pupils' welfare is seen in the round and support is specific.

Staff are well trained in safeguarding, including children missing in education, child sexual exploitation, gangs and extremism and radicalisation. The prominence leaders give to these aspects has been instrumental in making sure that the school's safeguarding procedures are effective. For example, risk assessment meetings consider sexual exploitation and extremism as a matter of course, not as an 'add-on'. This exemplifies the school's strong culture of safeguarding.

Attendance and reducing absence are essential elements of the school's work to ensure that pupils' safety and well-being are promoted effectively. Procedures to tackle poor attendances are strong. Pupils' absence is followed up meticulously. This includes immediate phone calls and, where there is no response, home visits. Staff are tenacious and do not let pupils fall between the cracks. Overall attendance has risen significantly over the last three years, although leaders remain committed to improving it further.

Leadership and management are effective. The executive headteacher has a clear vision for school and sets high expectations. Leaders ensure that safeguarding procedures promote pupils' safety and well-being successfully. Leaders also

evaluate the impact of the school's work on pupils' outcomes thoughtfully and thoroughly. Judgements are based on a broad range of relevant information including pupils' achievements and teaching quality. As a result, leaders have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.

This approach to assessing the performance is used effectively to check whether the safeguarding arrangements are working well enough. Leaders' conclusions are rigorous and honest. As a result, they identify precise aspects that need developing further.

Leaders have tackled the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection successfully. Attendance in key stages 3 and 4 has improved well. Although it dipped a little in the spring term, it has now improved. Overall, attendance is better now that it was at the start of the year. This illustrates the positive impact of the school's increasingly thorough procedures for dealing with pupils' absence.

The expertise of staff is used well to support pupils and teachers in mainstream schools. For example, through the school's outreach programme pupils are supported when they move back into their mainstream schools. This helps to ensure that the reintegration process is successful and contributes well to pupils' well-being.

The range of subjects provided for pupils with medical conditions is appropriate. It allows pupils to study English, mathematics and science up to GCSE level, plus art; physical education; religious studies; and personal, social, health and economic education for 25 hours. Although the curriculum is narrower than at the mainstream schools from which pupils come, this is compensated for by the way the school builds pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem.

Pupils conduct in lessons and around the school is good. They listen carefully to their teachers and respond well to the work they are set. Their attitudes to school are positive. They find the school and their teachers supportive and greatly appreciate the help they are given. As a result, they make clear progress in their learning.

Outcomes for pupils are rising. In Year 11 most pupils have achieved at least a level 1 in one of the functional skills tests and many three or four, often up to level 2. The proportion of pupils who go on to education, employment or training has risen over the past three years. Of the 19 pupils currently in Year 11, all but one has a placement or a place at college next year and a clear pathway to further study or employment.

Achievement at GCSE is also improving. Information about GCSE results over the past three years shows that more pupils are taking the examinations. Although numbers are small, and fluctuate from year to year, all pupils now achieve at least two pass grades at GCSE. Nearly a half achieve seven or more passes at GCSE or

equivalent.

External support

Leaders employ an external consultant, with expertise in pupil referral units, to evaluate the school at least three times each year. In addition, the school has commissioned a review of its safeguarding procedures, which was positive. These evaluations and reviews have played an important part in improving leadership and helping the school to keep pupils safe.

Priorities for further improvement

- Extend and individualise the key stage 4 programme so that pupils can study an even wider range of subjects, including vocational subjects.
- Increase further the number of pupils gaining at least a grade 4 in GCSE English and mathematics and level 2 in functional skills in English and mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bexley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Brian Oppenheim
Her Majesty's Inspector