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13 November 2018

Mrs Michelle Cooper
Acting Headteacher
The Westgate School
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Dear Mrs Cooper

No formal designation inspection of The Westgate School

Following my visit with Kathryn Moles, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 31 October 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 in response to exceptional levels of pupil movement in recent years.

Evidence

Inspectors met with the headteacher, other leaders and governors to discuss pupils' attendance, levels of exclusion and the reasons for pupils leaving the school at times other than the end of Year 11. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including governance records, school policies and documents relating to pupils' personal development, behaviour, welfare and attendance. Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and further documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. Inspectors met with groups of pupils and spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. Inspectors conducted two tours of the school, observing the school at work and during social times. Discussions were held with pastoral leaders and the special educational needs coordinator. The lead inspector visited the alternative provision used by the school to place pupils at times, and spoke with the provision's leaders.

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

Safeguarding is effective. Those pupils who leave the school other than in Year 11 typically do so for reasons which are well judged and supportive of pupils' well-being, safeguarding and improved progress.

Context

The Westgate School is an average-sized secondary school with 1095 pupils on roll, including 178 following 16 to 19 study programmes. It is a converter academy run by The Westgate School Trust. All members of the governing body are also trustees.

The school serves a diverse community. It has 16 of the United Kingdom's 17 main ethnic groups, including one third of pupils from White British backgrounds and one third from Asian backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well above the national average. Only a few pupils are in the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is broadly average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is broadly average. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is above average. The school has a special educational needs resource base for pupils who have a physical disability. A larger-than-average proportion of pupils leave the school at times other than at the end of Year 11. Some of the school's pupils attend Haybrook College for alternative provision.

At the time of the last inspection, in 2014, you were the deputy headteacher of the school. You were appointed as acting headteacher in July 2018. You are the second headteacher since the last inspection. Many of your senior leadership team are also new to their roles.

Leaders addressed precisely, and in detail, the issues giving rise to this inspection. You demonstrated a thorough understanding of the reasons for the high levels of pupil movement in your school. You provided inspectors with compelling evidence that pupils who leave the school at times other than the end of Year 11 typically do so for valid and well-thought-through reasons, and only after receiving high levels of care and support to sustain their attendance at Westgate for as long as reasonably possible. For example, pupils who leave in these circumstances are highly likely to go on to alternative provision which can more appropriately support their specific behaviour needs, or to a special school. These moves are validated by external partners, such as the alternative provider. You provided relevant evidence of the successes that pupils achieve, as a result of such moves, so that they are well-prepared for their next stages of education and for future life and work.

Serious behavioural incidents are rare. Each year, your use of fixed-term exclusion in response to pupils' poor behaviour is typically below the national average. Last year, however, you reported a slight rise in the number of incidents leading to exclusion. Leaders and governors took robust action to identify the reasons for this.

You changed school practices and procedures, including using governors' behaviour panels more effectively to help pupils understand the possible implications of their poor behaviour. During the inspection, you were able to demonstrate that, as a result, incidents of poor behaviour and, consequently, levels of exclusion have reduced.

You and your leaders demonstrate a strong sense of moral purpose. You understand the local risks for vulnerable pupils who do not attend school reliably. Because of this, you follow up any pupil's absence promptly, including visiting pupils' homes, if judged necessary, to make sure that pupils are safe. You rarely resort to permanent exclusion, because you recognise that finding a place in education for pupils once excluded can take time, and that such pupils are at risk when not in education. Instead, where a pupil is finally at risk of permanent exclusion, you typically place them with relevant alternative providers who have a positive track record of helping such pupils to succeed.

Leaders offered strong evidence that the school provides effective, proactive support for vulnerable pupils in school. As a result, over time, the number of pupils requiring long-term access to alternative provision is reducing. Helpfully, the curriculum includes a wide range of pre-emptive and personalised provision to support pupils' personal, social and emotional well-being and, where necessary, to improve their behaviour. For example, pupils are educated on the dangers of joining gangs, and recently a group of pupils visited a prison to learn at first-hand about the judicial consequences of criminal behaviour. Pupils explained to inspectors how their previous behaviour has been transformed by the school's actions. Most were very grateful to the school for the help that they had received. All were very clear that the best way for them to get on in the future was through hard work and academic achievement.

Your approach to safeguarding is impressive. You provide regular training for staff in child protection and safeguarding procedures, including how to recognise signs of radicalisation, extremism and the influence of gangs, for example. Staff report any concerns they may have promptly, demonstrating their awareness that safeguarding pupils is everybody's concern. Leaders are tenacious when liaising with external agencies to ensure the right, prompt support for vulnerable pupils. You carry out thorough checks on the suitability of adults who wish to work in the school and record these in appropriate detail on your single central record.

You have developed effective pastoral provision aimed at promoting positive mental health and pupils' overall well-being, with plans already underway to develop this support further. Pupils I spoke with especially praised leaders' work to include their parents when they are feeling vulnerable, because it 'helps things to get better, quicker'. They also related how the pastoral team helps them to improve their self-confidence and personal courage.

Provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is very well organised and

highly effective. Leaders have a thorough understanding of the different learning and pastoral needs of these pupils and their particular vulnerability in the outside world. You liaise well with primary schools before such pupils join you to make sure that you can help them get ready for secondary school. You are then ready to provide more effective support for them when they arrive. You are persistent in your determination to collect the evidence you need to secure an educational health and care plan for any pupil who may require one. You work very well with families and external agencies to provide effective care and support for these pupils, including, where necessary, supporting a pupil's move to a special school. This effective action supports pupils well in the school and ensures the correct placement should their needs require provision elsewhere.

Leaders and governors are well informed about the specific and changing risks that pupils can experience locally. As a result, leaders maintain strong oversight of safeguarding, attendance and behaviour policies and procedures to support timely, appropriate responses by the school when concerns arise. Leaders are increasingly proactive in their approach to these responsibilities and challenges. Nevertheless, you recognise that, as a newly reorganised leadership team, your school-wide monitoring of patterns of behaviour for different groups of pupils, and your evaluation of the impact of leaders' responses, are not entirely systematic.

The vast majority of pupils at The Westgate School behave extremely well. They exhibit very positive attitudes to learning, and are highly focused on achieving as well as they can, so that they can be successful in their future careers and lives. A group of key stage 4 pupils were keen to tell me that the best things about the school were the teachers and learning. Students following 16 to 19 study programmes spoke enthusiastically about their time at the school, telling an inspector that: 'We put in the hard work and get three times that back from staff.' Pupils felt well informed about their future next steps, including local career possibilities and the availability of apprenticeships.

External support

The school liaises well with the local authority and other agencies to make sure that vulnerable pupils get timely help and support to meet their needs. Haybrook College provides relevant short- and long-term programmes, including alternative provision for pupils with significant vulnerabilities, behaviour and welfare needs. The college also provides advice and support to sustain pupils at The Westgate School when relevant.

Priorities for further improvement

Refine how leaders and governors analyse pupils' behaviour across the school:

- to systematically recognise habits and trends, and develop successful responses even more promptly

- to check more precisely and further develop the impact of leaders' work in this area.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Old

Her Majesty's Inspector