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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



4 December 2018

Mr Neil Gallagher
Interim Executive Principal
Colne Community School and College
Church Road
Brightlingsea
Colchester
Essex
CO7 0QL

Dear Mr Gallagher,

No formal designation inspection of Colne Community School and College

Following my visit to your school on 21 November 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The 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 of Education, Children's Services and Skills was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and pupils' behaviour at the school.

Evidence

I looked at a wide range of documentary evidence, including the single central record, alongside other information related to child protection and safeguarding. I also reviewed the associated policies and the school's behaviour and attendance records.

I met with you, other senior leaders and a representative from the interim board of trustees. I met with pupils and staff in formal meetings and spoke with them informally around school. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and as they moved around during the day, including at breaktimes and when they arrived in the morning. I also met with a representative from the local authority, who has been supporting the school through a safeguarding review.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Colne Community School and College is a larger-than-average 11 to 18 secondary school. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average. The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is above average, as is the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The proportion of pupils who have a statement of SEND, or an education, health and care plan is broadly average. A small number of pupils attend part-time alternative provision at a local authority approved and registered centre but remain on the school roll.

At the previous inspection, in May 2018, the school was judged to be inadequate and placed in special measures. Inspectors raised serious concerns about the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements, pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, outcomes, the sixth form and leadership and management. The current interim executive principal was appointed shortly after the inspection in June 2018. The management of the academy is being re-brokered. Revised, temporary governance arrangements are in place. The new trust, Sigma, is expected to take control in January 2019.

This inspection focused on the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and the impact of leaders' work to improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare.

Main Findings

Ofsted was made aware of concerns regarding the school's safeguarding systems, including those relating to pupils' personal development, behaviour and well-being.

Since taking up your post as interim executive principal in June 2018, you have taken decisive action to begin to eradicate the significant weaknesses identified at the last inspection. You have restructured the senior leadership team. Roles and responsibilities and lines of accountability are now much more clearly defined. The roles of middle leaders are currently under review.

A new designated safeguarding lead from the senior leadership team and a governor with direct oversight of safeguarding have been appointed. The gaps previously identified in staff training have been closed. All teachers and support staff have now received updated safeguarding training. Consequently, they are better equipped to recognise the potential signs of abuse in its various forms. They know what to do if they have a concern. Child protection files are suitably maintained and stored in secure accommodation. Records are appropriately detailed

with clear chronologies, including all relevant information about vulnerable pupils' referrals to external agencies. Administration arrangements and regular checks ensure that concerns are followed up quickly, with procedures designed to prompt if responses are too slow.

A recently introduced safeguarding panel meets regularly to check that systems are effective and to identify any further actions needed. The group reports routinely to senior leaders, governors and trustees. An independent safeguarding review was completed in July 2018 by the local authority. A further independent, external review looked at the effectiveness of the school's systems for the monitoring and recording of pupils' attendance. All the recommendations from the reviews have been fully implemented. For example, previous inconsistencies in the way pupils' attendance was tracked have been corrected. Records are more accurate and new arrangements ensure that follow-up in the event of any absence is swift.

The required checks on the suitability of staff to work at the school meet statutory requirements. A minor administrative error in the single central record, which logs these checks, was corrected during the inspection.

In our discussions, pupils told me that they generally feel safe in the school and most of them, along with their teachers and some parents, said that behaviour had improved. Universally, they were clear about the implications of the new behaviour policy that was devised with contributions from both pupils and parents. However, the pupils I spoke with said that staff were not always consistent in how they used the policy. Consequently, this leads to some perceptions of unfairness.

While most pupils agreed that they had an adult they could go to if they had a concern, most felt that bullying was still an issue in the school. You explained how senior leaders are working together with staff to deal with these concerns, adopting a 'zero tolerance' approach if any investigation outcomes confirm an allegation. Non-teaching house managers are available throughout the day to support pupils' pastoral needs and to provide interventions as required.

Wider work is focused on enhancing pupils' personal development through improvements to their personal, social and health education. The curriculum team responsible are redesigning the schemes so that they focus more consistently on pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural education, while aiming to reinforce the British values of tolerance and respect. Themed assemblies and external expertise are used appropriately to complement the curriculum and to help pupils understand how to keep safe.

At the start of the school day, tutorial sessions for each year group aim to pick up on themes linked to pupils' personal, social and health education. However, too many of these sessions lack structure and so the learning time is wasted. Pupils do not always value their tutorial experiences and staff are not consistently confident in undertaking the tutor role. In our discussions, you explained to me how plans are in

place, through the wider curriculum review, to improve this. However, the new model is yet to be implemented.

Staff, pupils and an increasing proportion of parents feel that the standard of pupils' behaviour has improved since the summer term. However, while fewer than previously, there are still too many incidents of internal exclusion. The leadership team is working together with the special educational needs coordinator to reduce the over-representation of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND who are internally excluded. The actions underway include better sharing of information about pupils' individual learning needs and strategies to help teachers plan more effectively to meet these needs in their lessons.

Pupils' behaviour outside lessons is generally orderly but some pupils still take too long to respond to teachers' requests to behave sensibly. Occasional loud and sometimes overly-boisterous behaviour was observed during the inspection in corridors and the outdoor spaces at breaktimes. All incidents of unacceptable behaviour are recorded. New systems for analysing this information to identify trends and any changes needed are at an early stage of development.

In lessons, pupils' behaviour is often closely linked to the effectiveness of the teaching they receive. Across the school, the quality of teaching remains variable. Arrangements for the sharing of the good practice that exists are still a work in progress.

A few staff do not challenge low-level disruption early enough to prevent it from escalating. Occasionally, they do not demonstrate the skills they need to identify and apply the most effective strategies to manage the challenging behaviour of a minority of pupils. While there are early signs of improvement, there remains significant work to be done to ensure that all pupils behave as well as they should in order to meet leaders' high expectations.

School staff are working hard, through tighter tracking systems and a dedicated team, to ensure that all pupils attend school regularly. Overall attendance is currently around the national average, but is lower for some vulnerable groups. Pupils' punctuality at the start of the school day and across timetabled classes has improved.

Leaders are acting to ensure that careers information, advice and guidance, including for the sixth form is effective and impartial. Longer term plans to increase the range of courses available to post-16 students include the development of partnership arrangements across the new trust and work with the University of Essex.

In our discussions, we spoke about the need to continue to improve the communication links with parents. While there is still more work to do, the recently-introduced parents' newsletter, centralised contact arrangements and a commitment

to an initial response to parents within twenty-four hours are steps in the right direction. Further plans aim to introduce a regular 'surgery' so that issues can be raised directly in a face-to-face conversation with a senior leader.

Your appointment and the leadership restructuring have restored staff confidence and clarified lines of accountability. Safeguarding is effective. Your team are now in a better position to build on emerging improvements. More parents than in the previous year have a favourable view of the work of the school. Suitable strategies are established to deal with the issues arising from the previous inspection. However, most of these are at an early stage of implementation. It is too soon to judge the full extent of the difference that they are making to the overall quality of education that the school provides.

External support

Leaders have made effective use of external agencies, including the local authority, to ensure that safeguarding arrangements in the school are secure. Systems are now much tighter and subject to increased checks to ensure that they are working. Roles and responsibilities are clear.

Plans are in place to draw on wider contributions from organisations, for example health professionals and external speakers, to support pupils' personal, social and health education as the new curriculum is developed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that all staff have the skills they need to implement the school's behaviour policy consistently and effectively.
- Reduce the incidents of internal exclusion by analysing all available information to identify trends and plan actions for further improvement.
- Review the effectiveness of the use of learning time in tutorials to inform the development of wider curriculum planning.
- Ensure that the elements of good practice that exist in teaching and learning are routinely shared with teachers across the school.
- Embed strategies to improve all pupils' attendance, including for the most vulnerable groups.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Dick

Her Majesty's Inspector