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25 January 2019

Mrs Lorraine Barker  
Executive Principal  
The Mirfield Free Grammar  
Kitson Hill Road  
Mirfield  
West Yorkshire  
WF14 9EZ

Dear Mrs Barker

### **No formal designation inspection of The Mirfield Free Grammar**

Following my visit with Steve Crossley, Mary Lanovy-Taylor and Gordon Watts, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 9 January 2019, 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, aspects of the effectiveness of leadership and management and the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils at the school.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors scrutinised the school's checks to ensure safer recruitment and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. Inspectors met with you and other senior leaders who have responsibility for safeguarding arrangements. An inspector met the chair of governors and a parent governor. Meetings were also held with the senior leaders responsible for attendance, behaviour, teaching, learning and assessment, pupils' outcomes and pupils' personal development and welfare. An inspector met the leader with responsibility for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). An inspector spoke by telephone with a leader at one of the providers of alternative education used by the school.

Inspectors met separately with groups of pupils from key stages 3 and 4 and the

sixth form. An inspector also met a group of pupils who have received additional support from the school. Inspectors spoke informally with pupils at breaktime and at lunchtime, as well as in lessons. An inspector met with a group of staff. A range of documentation was scrutinised, including: minutes of governors' meetings; leaders' records and analyses relating to attendance, punctuality and behaviour; exclusions information; and bullying logs and analysis. Inspectors also considered a sample of risk assessments for educational visits, science laboratories and design technology workshops. Programmes of study for personal, social, health and economics education were considered, along with records of assemblies.

Inspectors visited a number of lessons covering a variety of subjects and year groups, including the sixth form. These visits to lessons enabled inspectors to look at pupils' work and to talk to them about their thoughts and feelings about school.

Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the site, between lessons, at breaktime and lunchtime and at the end of the school day.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

## **Context**

The Mirfield Free Grammar is larger than the average-sized secondary school. The majority of pupils speak English as a first language. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average. There is a minority of pupils who come from a wide range of ethnic groups other than White British. The proportion of pupils with SEND is slightly below the national average, including those who have an education, health and care plan.

There have been substantial changes to leadership since the previous inspection in October/November 2017. The principal, who was recently appointed at the time, subsequently left the school. As executive principal, you have assumed responsibility for the day-to-day running of the school as an interim measure, until a substantive appointment to the post of principal is made. Two new vice-principals were appointed in September 2018. There have also been recent appointments to the leadership of English, science and modern foreign languages. You have very recently reorganised the roles and responsibilities of your senior team with regard to attendance, behaviour, teaching, learning and assessment and personal development.

Ofsted has received information regarding concerns about pupils' welfare and leaders' effectiveness with regard to safeguarding. This inspection focused on the wider issues arising from these concerns.

## **Inspection findings**

You and other leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding. You ensure that staff are up to date in their necessary training and knowledge. For example, the designated safeguarding leader receives regular updates from the local authority designated officer for safeguarding. The leader in school uses this information to keep staff abreast of safeguarding matters. Staff know the signs to look out for when safeguarding their pupils. Pupils told inspectors that staff are skilled at spotting when something might be wrong and putting the necessary help and support in place.

Leaders' processes for the management of safeguarding are robust. The records of referrals to external agencies in child protection cases are detailed and current. They show a tenacity in chasing action from professionals in external agencies. Records of leaders' actions following serious safeguarding allegations show that prompt, appropriate and reasonable steps are taken in response.

As part of your recent strategic review of how the school is organised, you have increased the size of the team which is responsible for the support of pupils' welfare. This includes a number of new roles and appointments since June 2018. Based in the 'Wellbeing Centre', you have ensured that your core safeguarding team has the time to deal with safeguarding concerns as they arise and that pupils have access through 'drop-ins' to immediate support. You have taken effective action to provide pupils with information and education about concerns which have arisen, including those which occur out of school. For instance, pupils have attended assemblies about e-safety, the dangers of drugs and alcohol and the risks of knife crime. In response to your local context, you have undertaken a 'lockdown' drill.

Governors have a clear understanding of their role in holding you and other leaders to account for safeguarding. For example, they check that the necessary policies and processes are in place and in order. Their support and challenge activities include on-site visits to check leaders' assertions about safeguarding practice. Governors attended training for designated safeguarding leaders at the same time as senior safeguarding leaders. This training enables governors to understand the requirements of the role and to hold leaders to account effectively. Governors have worked with leaders to establish a transparent and honest approach to safeguarding. For instance, governors are made aware when serious safeguarding concerns arise. They challenge leaders to ensure that appropriate steps are taken in line with the school's policies and guidance from the Department for Education.

All of the pupils spoken to by inspectors said that they feel safe in school. They told inspectors that there are no 'no-go zones' in school. Pupils have no awareness of any dangerous items being brought into school. The pupils we spoke to told us that if they are worried about anything, they know that there are staff who will listen and help. As one pupil said, 'We would tell the safeguarding team.' Pupils told inspectors that violence and fighting are extremely rare. In discussions with inspectors, pupils told us that bullying is also rare, a view confirmed by leaders'

records. To ensure that they remain on top of any possibility of bullying, leaders conduct regular safeguarding and bullying surveys of pupils, so that problems are identified and acted on quickly.

As an example of your ongoing commitment to safeguarding, and following surveys into pupils' views, you made changes recently to how breaktimes and lunchtimes are organised. These changes were to alleviate the overcrowding of corridors at the end of lessons and of social spaces, including the canteen. Pupils told inspectors that this has improved the situation and that there is much less pushing and shoving on corridors. Although a reduction in incidents has been noted, some younger pupils feel pushing and shoving from older pupils remains an occasional issue. Inspectors saw pupils behaving patiently and sensibly on corridors during the inspection. At social times, pupils are calm, chatty and considerate of others' space. Inspectors saw no physicality or boisterous behaviour at breaktime, lunchtime or after school. However, you are not complacent and are about to survey the pupils again to review the changes and plan for further improvement.

You have made recent changes to the school's behaviour policy, as you identified that standards of pupils' conduct were not where you wanted them to be. All of the pupils spoken to by inspectors are unanimous that behaviour is improving because of these changes. In particular, sixth-form students, who have attended the school for over five years, readily acknowledge the improving behaviour.

Inspectors saw strong standards of pupils' behaviour for the majority of the time during the inspection. In lessons, pupils are usually well behaved and listen respectfully while their teacher and classmates speak. Teachers speak appropriately to pupils and often 'model' how to speak considerately and politely to one another. As a result, pupils are courteous and thoughtful in their speech for the majority of the time.

At times, however, standards of pupils' behaviour in lessons are not as strong and there is some off-task behaviour. When this occurs, teachers are usually effective in applying the school's behaviour policy, but occasionally they do not apply the policy consistently. Pupils told inspectors that while behaviour overall is improving, a minority of lessons are affected by disruption because some teachers do not apply the behaviour policy consistently. As a result, some pupils' learning is disrupted and they make variable progress. Leaders recognised that standards of behaviour had slipped from where they wanted them to be and have taken effective action to address this. However, leaders' overall evaluation that standards of behaviour are consistently good is overgenerous.

You have taken effective action to maintain rates of attendance which are around the national averages. For pupils in Years 7 to 10, the rate of attendance is above the national average. In particular, leaders have taken effective steps to improve the attendance of pupils with SEND and to reduce the number of pupils with SEND who are persistently absent. Additionally, the proportion of pupils with SEND who

are excluded for a fixed-term period has reduced because of your actions.

While the overall proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is below the national average, in the current academic year it is showing signs of worsening compared to the same period of time in 2017/18. Additionally, Year 11 pupils are absent from school at a much higher rate than pupils in Years 7 to 10.

Having identified punctuality, in the previous academic year, as an area for improvement, a minority of pupils are still arriving late. Some pupils are late to the last lesson of the day.

The reorganisation of the senior team has led to a period of transition as leaders assume new responsibilities. It is vital that leaders now quickly establish a strategic overview of attendance and punctuality so that areas of strength are maintained and areas of relative weakness or decline are addressed.

### **External support**

Leaders have sought the advice and guidance of a small number of consultants and local authority specialists in providing some evaluation of new policies and processes, particularly relating to behaviour. This has been effective in enabling leaders to make changes which have improved standards of pupils' behaviour.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Continue to embed the new behaviour policy and teachers' consistent application of it, so that low-level disruption is eradicated and pupils' progress is more consistent across subjects and years.
- Establish the new strategic oversight of attendance so that persistent absence declines, the attendance of Year 11 increases and punctuality improves.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Shaw  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**