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4 November 2019

Mr Richard Dolding
Principal
East Point Academy
Kirkley Run
Lowestoft
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Dear Mr Dolding

No formal designation inspection of East Point Academy

Following my visit with Kim Pigram, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 14 October 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 issues raised with Ofsted about pupil movement and potential off-rolling, and to check the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the school.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. They met with you, senior leaders, and the chief executive and the standards director from The Inspiration Trust (the trust). Inspectors spoke to pupils and staff around the school at breaktime and lunchtime.

Inspectors scrutinised your admission and attendance records, and the documentation for any pupils taken off roll, including those opting for elective home education (EHE). Inspectors also looked at your reports to the trust and the minutes from trust meetings. An inspector also spoke to a few parents by telephone to gain their views of their experiences of the school.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

The school is a smaller than average-sized secondary school. The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is significantly above the national average. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is slightly below the national average.

The school has been sponsored by the trust since December 2014. The school was previously inspected in October 2016, when its overall effectiveness was judged to be good. Since this time, the vice-principal has taken on the role of principal. There have also been several changes to senior leadership, including changes in the leaders who take responsibility for safeguarding arrangements and pastoral care.

The inspection was carried out without notice.

Findings

A significant proportion of pupils join and/or leave the school other than at the beginning of Year 7 or end of Year 11 respectively. Leaders know which pupils have left the school before the end of Year 11 and each pupil's reason for doing so. However, their knowledge of this movement relies too heavily on their understanding of the context and circumstances of individual pupils and their families. Leaders have not analysed patterns of pupil movement closely enough, meaning they are not clear about any common reasons as to why pupils choose to leave. This leaves leaders poorly placed to decide upon any action they may need to take to improve the quality of education and care, and so reduce the number of pupils who leave. The chief executive officer agrees with inspectors' findings, saying, 'Leaders have good intentions, but they were not analysing their data about inclusion closely enough.'

Inspectors looked at the school's admissions registers, scrutinising information relating to any pupils taken off roll since 2016. There is no evidence that senior leaders or the trust encourage pupils and their families to leave the school. However, only more recently have leaders reflected more closely on the reasons why pupils choose to leave the school. One example of this is in the school's work around EHE.

The proportion of parents and carers opting for EHE rose steeply in 2017/18. Inspection evidence confirms that the school's records for pupils moving to EHE in 2017 were weak. Leaders' interrogation of why parents were opting for EHE was flimsy, meaning leaders were unable to adapt their provision to better meet pupils' needs. Documentation from the trust confirms that it was aware of this steep rise. A subsequent audit by the trust highlighted the lack of rigour in the school's processes for monitoring pupils transferring to EHE. The trust subsequently took steps to improve the monitoring of EHE and clarify actions to take when parents opt for EHE. In terms of the number of pupils electing to be home educated, the chief executive

officer said, 'We knew historically that it was not where it needed to be. Data doesn't lie; some of these figures were too high.' As a result of the steps taken by the trust, leaders now carry out more stringent enquiries when any parent asks to home educate their child. Case files for more recent requests for EHE show that staff investigate other options with parents, routinely explore parents' plans to provide education, and make parents aware of their legal responsibilities. The proportion of parents opting for EHE has started to reduce considerably.

The school is now using more alternative providers than at the time of the previous inspection. Leaders carry out effective safeguarding checks. In the main, pastoral staff work diligently with pupils and their families. The placements for each pupil are carefully considered, well researched and focused on getting pupils into good-quality, full-time provision.

Up until summer 2019, pupils who had attended alternative provision were sometimes removed from the school roll when they reached Year 11. Some parents had requested this to make communication easier through having a single point of contact (with the alternative provider rather than with the provider and the school). For other pupils accessing full-time alternative provision, the reasons for being removed from the school roll were less clear. Leaders say that they were following locally agreed practices to remove pupils from the roll. However, leaders could not show how this was in pupils' best interests, or why they had not followed the statutory guidance on the use of alternative provision and kept pupils dual registered for the purposes of the census. As with EHE, leaders know that these processes were not exacting enough. They have changed their approach and this practice no longer happens. Leaders make sure that any pupils attending alternative provision, including those attending full time, now remain on the roll of both the school and the alternative provider. The few pupils previously taken off roll have since been reinstated.

Leaders work well with the educational welfare officer service (commissioned by the school) to support parents whose children do not attend well enough. Leaders ensure that the safeguarding and welfare checks being made on the pupils by school staff are appropriate and thorough. These actions include regular phone calls, home visits, site visits and liaison with external agencies. Parents who spoke with inspectors were effusive in their praise for the pastoral staff who worked on behalf of them and their children. Staff and pupils who spoke with inspectors also agree that school staff work hard to ensure that all pupils get the best chances, no matter what their challenges or background.

The rationale for how some pupils' absence has been coded in the past is not well thought through. The trust has challenged leaders on this following a recent audit. Since September 2019, leaders have adopted a more streamlined approach to attendance coding. Despite this, staff are still not applying the coding consistently, and a few cases remain where the codes are used incorrectly.

A few pupils attend part time and there is still some work to do to make sure that all pupils have access to full-time, high-quality, appropriate provision. Following its extensive audit work of its schools in 2018/19, the trust has identified that developing staff's understanding of inclusion in its widest possible sense must now be, as stated by leaders, 'front and centre of their agenda'. Staff training this year continues to focus on raising staff's understanding about inclusive practice.

The issues raised during this inspection highlight a lack of clarity among some leaders about their strategic oversight and action planning. Many of the issues identified by the inspectors have been highlighted by the trust. Some improvements have taken place, but school leaders have been too slow to bring about all of the changes that the trust has identified.

External support

The school does not have any external support.

Priorities for further improvement

- Leaders need to analyse the evidence available to them more effectively, so they can spot trends and act upon any findings, to improve provision for pupils.
- Leaders should review the long-term educational provision for the few pupils who do not access full-time provision, and continue to develop a better sense of what inclusion really means across all staff.
- Leaders need to make sure that staff follow agreed procedures for recording pupils' absence and attendance, so that attendance codes are used consistently and accurately.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Randall

Her Majesty's Inspector