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Mr Andy Christoforou
Headteacher
Abbey College, Ramsey
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Cambridgeshire
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Dear Mr Christoforou

No formal designation inspection of Abbey College, Ramsey

Following my visit to your school with Andrew Hemmings, Her Majesty's Inspector, on 26 November 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and the time you took to discuss behaviour in your school.

The inspection was carried out in accordance with the no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out at no notice because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills was concerned about behaviour at the school.

Evidence

Inspectors considered evidence that included:

- observations of pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning in lessons
- observations of pupils' behaviour throughout the day, including discussion with pupils
- documentary evidence
- discussions with school leaders and staff
- scrutiny of the single central record and a meeting with the designated leader of safeguarding.

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

Leaders and managers have not taken effective action to maintain the high standards of behaviour identified at the school's previous inspection.

Overall standards are no longer as last reported under section 5 inspection arrangements, but no serious concerns have been identified.

Context

Abbey College, Ramsey is an average-sized secondary academy for 11 to 18 year-old pupils. It is situated in rural Cambridgeshire. The majority of pupils are White British. Very few are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium is below average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is lower than average. However, the proportion of pupils with SEND who have an education, health and care plan is above average. The school has a service-level agreement with the Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust to provide support and other services.

The school was inspected in March 2018 and judged to be good. Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare were also judged good. Staffing, including the senior leadership team, has remained broadly the same since this inspection.

Behaviour and attitudes

The inspection was prompted by complaints received from a small minority of parents about the management of behaviour, bullying and pupils' safety and welfare. Inspectors looked closely at the school's procedures to manage behaviour and to safeguard pupils. Evidence gained from discussions with you and your leaders, short visits to lessons and the views of pupils who met with us show that behaviour is not managed as effectively as it was at the time of the previous inspection.

All three groups of pupils who met with inspectors said that behaviour in lessons is not as good as it should be. They told us that behaviour varies depending on which member of staff is teaching. Pupils know the procedures used to manage misbehaviour, but feel that not all teachers apply them consistently. They told us that some staff are too lenient and do not use the agreed procedures when a small minority of pupils disrupt the learning of others.

Our short visits to observe pupils at work showed that behaviour in lessons is generally calm and purposeful. Relations between staff and pupils are positive. The main barrier to learning is the poor attitudes shown by a small minority of pupils. When learning is well planned, pupils engage fully and show interest in their work. However, when learning fails to capture and retain their interest, some pupils ease

off, stop paying attention and chat with others. Questioning is not always targeted well enough to ensure that all learners contribute to class discussion. The lack of clear timescales to complete tasks leads to pupils working steadily rather than working hard.

Exclusions from school are rare. However, internal isolation is used to manage challenging behaviour. Your records show that at times, pupils are sent to the 'M1 room' for minor behaviour matters rather than dealing with them in line with the school's behaviour policy. Inspectors also found that pupils who are removed from lessons and placed in rooms with support staff do not always engage in suitably challenging work.

Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school. They said that behaviour outside lessons is usually better than it is in lessons and that this helps to make school a safe place to be. Their only concern was the behaviour of older boys at lunchtimes who tend to push and shove others as they queue up to buy lunch. Our observations found that at breaks and lunchtimes, the school is generally a calm, safe place to be. Pupils are respectful and polite. They gather in friendship groups, behave sensibly and most conduct themselves well.

We followed up concerns raised about bullying by asking pupils for their views. Older pupils said that bullying does happen, mostly name-calling and being unpleasant towards others. They were unaware of any homophobic or racist bullying. If they did have any concerns, they would approach their tutor or head of year for help. Younger pupils shared their concerns about sexist comments made by older boys that they feel are disrespectful to girls. Their main concern is the behaviour of some pupils on buses at the start and end of the school day which can lead to some bullying.

Pupils are not allowed to use mobile phones in school. This helps to limit the risk of bullying through unwanted texts and messages. When asked, pupils said they knew what to do if they received inappropriate messages. However, not all of them said they would tell an adult in school. They said that the school's computers are carefully controlled to ensure that they remain safe online.

A newly formed anti-bullying committee led by students in the sixth form is making a good contribution towards raising awareness of bullying and whom pupils can turn to if they have concerns. Pupils feel that tutorials, assemblies and social studies lessons help them to learn about tolerance and respect for people from different backgrounds. They learn about the risks attached to drug and alcohol misuse. They would like more information on current issues such as knife crime. Older pupils show little understanding of the risks attached to county lines drug dealing.

You have made changes to improve the ways staff manage bullying. Incidents, and the actions taken by staff to resolve them, are carefully logged. Regular 'well-being checks' of the pupils involved enable your leaders to monitor bullying more

consistently. Records of behaviour incidents are also maintained, but this information lacks coherence. It does not provide a clear overview of the nature of incidents or enable staff and governors to spot patterns and trends in the causes of poor behaviour.

You and your senior leaders are aware of the inconsistencies in the management of pupils' behaviour. Policy and procedures are currently being revised ready for implementation next term. You have also recognised the need for improvements to the school's complaints policy. In the past, not all complaints have been handled effectively so that matters are resolved promptly, to the satisfaction of parents and carers. Serious complaints have not been made through the school's agreed procedures, namely in writing to the school's governing body. Consequently, governors are unaware of parents' concerns. Recently introduced procedures have simplified the way complaints are made and are handled. These provide parents with a clear pathway to speak with senior leaders and staff. Your records show that parental concerns are being recorded and followed up more systematically.

Safeguarding arrangements are effective. The single central record shows that all necessary checks are made when employing staff. Governors' monitoring of this record is not picking up minor errors in recording. A few omissions were promptly rectified during the inspection. Your designated leader of safeguarding is organised and effective. Safeguarding records are suitably logged electronically to provide a clear overview of the actions taken to protect pupils from harm. The local authority values her liaison with it about concerns raised by parents and carers.

Leadership of the arrangements made for a small proportion of pupils who struggle to behave in school or attend regularly are less effective. Alternative arrangements made for these pupils include work placements and part-time timetables. This provides them with a minimal amount of time for learning. Leaders are unable to articulate clearly the reasons for these arrangements, or what is being done to enable pupils to return to full-time learning. Pastoral leaders know these pupils and their backgrounds well. They make regular checks to ensure that they remain safe in their work placements or when they are educated at home. However, information is not collated systematically to enable senior leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of this provision.

Priorities for further improvement

- Gain greater consistency in the management of behaviour in lessons so that all pupils report with confidence that poor behaviour does not interrupt their learning or their enjoyment of lessons.
- Ensure that new policy and procedures to manage behaviour, including bullying, and for managing complaints, become fully established and lead to sustained improvement.
- Review the strategic leadership and management of the arrangements made to

educate pupils off site, including those on part-time timetables, to provide leaders and governors with a clear, coherent overview of the quality of this provision.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson

Her Majesty's Inspector