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27 February 2020

Mrs Kimberley Lawton
Interim Principal
Malcolm Arnold Academy
Trinity Avenue
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Dear Mrs Lawton

No formal designation inspection of Malcolm Arnold Academy

Following my visit with Andrew Fulbrook, Ofsted Inspector, Karen Hayes, Ofsted Inspector, and Julie Sheppard, Ofsted Inspector, on 11 February 2020, 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 wished to determine the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the school, as concerns had been raised with Ofsted. There were also concerns about the behaviour and attitudes of pupils, and aspects of pupils' personal development. The inspection was carried out without notice.

Evidence

We met with the interim principal and senior leaders, including those responsible for safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, alternative provision, children looked after and pupil premium funding. I met with trust representatives, including the deputy chief executive officer, the executive principal and the trust's safeguarding leader. We met with groups of teachers, including pastoral leaders and teachers who have recently joined the profession.

We visited lessons across key stages 3 and 4 to observe pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning. We met formally with four groups of pupils from all key stages, including some students from the sixth form. We also spoke with pupils informally during social times.

We looked at a range of documents, including information relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements and pupils' safeguarding files. I checked the

school's single central record and the systems for recruiting staff. We evaluated the effectiveness of the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum in teaching pupils about safety. We considered information about alternative providers used by the school. An inspector spoke with four of these providers by telephone. We reviewed documents relating to pupils' behaviour and exclusions. We scrutinised systems for monitoring pupils' attendance and looked at their attendance records.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

The school is a larger-than-average-sized secondary school. There are 1350 pupils on roll. The school is in an area of above-average deprivation. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is close to the national average. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is below average. Just over half of the pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is twice the national average. Many teachers have left the school in the last 12 months.

A small number of pupils attend five alternative, off-site providers. These are: Hospital and Outreach Education, Northampton Saints Foundation, Progress Schools Limited, Rushmere Academy and The CE Academy.

The interim principal has been in post since the end of September 2019. A new vice-principal joined the school in the autumn term. In January 2020, there were further changes to leadership. A second vice-principal was appointed with responsibility for behaviour and pupils' welfare. A new assistant principal took responsibility for safeguarding. She also has oversight of children looked after and pupils who attend alternative provision. A new leader responsible for overseeing pupils' attendance was appointed. The executive principal joined the trust in summer 2019. She has supported school leaders since that time.

Inspection findings

Trust leaders have a thorough oversight of the school's arrangements for safeguarding. They have reviewed the school's safeguarding practices and procedures recently. Their timely response to their findings has brought about notable improvements, which they continue to monitor closely. They have increased the capacity of the school's safeguarding team. Leaders are well trained and understand their responsibilities. They know that 'it could happen here'. Leaders work together well to keep pupils safe.

New safeguarding leaders have made sure that staff have had up-to-date training. Staff are well informed and understand the latest safeguarding guidance. For

instance, they know about up-skirting and the risks of pupils being exploited for criminal activity. They know who to inform if they have a concern about another adult. Staff recognise the signs that a pupil may be at risk. They know that it is important to share any worries they may have.

Leaders respond quickly to any issues that staff raise about pupils. They have implemented new systems for reporting and recording safeguarding concerns. Leaders' records of their actions are now much more precise than was previously the case. They store safeguarding records securely. Leaders keep comprehensive and up-to-date records of the recruitment checks they complete before new staff or volunteers start to work at the school.

Leaders know individual pupils who need support well. They involve external agencies when necessary. They persist until they are confident that they have got the right help. Leaders use risk assessments to identify and reduce the risks that pupils may face. Some risk assessments do not focus closely enough on the specific needs of each pupil. Leaders challenge other agencies who do not follow their own procedures well enough when working with pupils. However, they do not check the risk assessments that off-site providers put in place for each pupil. Leaders have clear procedures should a pupil abscond from school.

Pupils feel safe in school and learn how to stay safe. A detailed PSHE programme helps pupils consider issues such as online safety, gang culture, knife crime and child sexual exploitation. Pupils know who the new safeguarding leaders are. Many staff have completed mental health training. Pupils told us they can talk to a teacher if they have a concern.

A small number of pupils receive part or all of their education at alternative providers. Some of these pupils are children looked after. Leaders have reviewed the provision for these pupils to make sure that the curriculum suits their needs. They visit the providers each half term to check that these pupils' welfare needs are being met. Leaders have daily contact with most of these providers to make sure that pupils are attending and safe. They do not transfer paper attendance records for these pupils to the school's electronic systems. This leads to some inconsistent or inaccurate recording of attendance.

The executive principal has worked closely with school leaders to implement new strategies to manage pupils' behaviour. As pupils have become used to the new approach their behaviour and attitudes have improved. Leaders have raised teachers' expectations of pupils' conduct. Staff feel well supported in managing pupils' behaviour. However, not all staff follow the agreed strategies when pupils misbehave.

Pupils know that the new systems help them to focus on their learning. Classroom environments are calm. Teachers follow well-established routines, allowing pupils to participate and learn without interruption. Most pupils we spoke with told us behaviour has improved. However, some older pupils felt the rules had changed too quickly.

Trust leaders did not communicate the changes to the behaviour policy well enough to parents and carers. They did not make sure that parents understood the new approach well enough. Trust leaders are now providing opportunities for parents to meet with them to discuss any concerns they may have. Most parents support the new system and can see the benefits it brings.

Fixed-term exclusions have increased following the launch of the new behaviour policy, compared with previous years. More recently, there are signs that both the number of pupils excluded, and the incidences of exclusion are beginning to reduce. Pupils who are excluded are supported to help them reintegrate when they return to school. Staff are successful at helping some pupils to improve their behaviour through structured support programmes.

Overall attendance is below national levels. Leaders are reviewing strategies to monitor and track pupils' attendance. Currently, there are no signs that attendance is improving.

There is a culture of mutual respect and tolerance between pupils and with adults. Pupils usually get on well with each other. We saw pupils interact well during lessons and social times. For example, at breaktime, pupils gathered around the grand pianos to share their love of music. The school is a busy place, but the atmosphere is positive.

The interim principal is honest and accurate in her evaluation of the school and the work that leaders have done, and still need to do, to improve it. Staff feel supported and valued. One staff member described how they feel that they are now part of a team. After a period of challenge, staff are confident that things are improving.

Trust leaders are ambitious for the pupils and want them to be successful. They agree that they did not respond swiftly enough to stem the decline in standards at the school last year. However, their actions are now having a positive impact on pupils' learning environment. They have recruited new leaders with the experience necessary to bring about improvements, particularly in safeguarding. Trust leaders know that some of these leaders need ongoing training and support so that they can be fully effective in their roles.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Peterborough, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Tordoff
Her Majesty's Inspector