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Mandy Gage
Principal
The Victory Academy
Magpie Hall Road
Chatham
Kent
ME4 5JB

Dear Ms Gage

No formal designation inspection of The Victory Academy

Following my visit with Dan Lambert, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 10 November 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 about the behaviour and attitudes of pupils.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We met with the principal and senior leaders from the school, and the chief executive officer and leaders from the multi-academy trust to discuss attendance, behaviour and safeguarding. Some meetings were held by video call to maintain social distancing. We looked at a range of documentation relating to attendance and behaviour. We held discussions with relevant leaders about how the curriculum supports pupils' safety, health and well-being. We talked to pupils informally around the school (following social distancing guidelines) and had individual conversations with a range of newly qualified teachers and support staff. We walked around the school during lesson times, break times and transitions to observe behaviour. We spoke to two representatives of Medway local authority by telephone. We considered 30 responses to our online

Parent View survey. We also considered 215 responses to our online pupil survey and 80 responses to our confidential staff questionnaire.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

The number of pupils on roll has increased to 1083 since the previous full inspection in September 2017. Just over half of pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils from other ethnic groups and/or who speak English as an additional language is above the national average. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils entitled to free school meals is much higher than the national average. There are more pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) than found nationally. There is a high level of mobility with pupils joining and leaving the school at different times. The leadership team has remained stable. The principal is now also the director of education for Chatham for The Thinking Schools Academy Trust.

Main Findings

Leaders are relentless in setting high expectations about behaviour across the school. There are clear rules around both 'behaviour for learning' and 'behaviour for safety'. Pupils have been made aware of the new rules to keep them and staff safe due to COVID-19 (coronavirus). These include wearing face coverings in communal areas, washing their hands frequently, following a one-way system and keeping to year-group 'bubbles'.

The school has a well-established reward system for good behaviour which allows pupils to accrue points. These can normally be redeemed in the school shop for high street vouchers, stationery, items of technology or prom tickets for Year 11 pupils. COVID-19 restrictions are currently preventing the school shop from opening, so leaders are considering alternative ways to reward pupils for consistently good behaviour.

There are also a set of well-understood incremental sanctions for poor behaviour. These include verbal warnings, detentions, pupils being 'parked' in another class (currently within the same bubble), internal exclusion and ultimately fixed-term exclusion. The school prioritises reconciliation and there are processes in place for pupils who have made wrong choices to 'repair' the issue at the end of the school day. Similarly, there are stringent processes in place to reset expectations when pupils return to school following a fixed-term exclusion.

Staff universally feel well supported by leaders when it comes to managing behaviour. They receive regular feedback from leaders to ensure that policies and

practices are followed consistently throughout the school. For example, teachers were recently reminded to give visual as well as verbal warnings about behaviour to support pupils with SEND.

Throughout our visit the school was calm and purposeful during lesson times. There are currently fewer but longer lessons each day due to COVID-19. Some pupils told us that this helps them to learn more and means there is less disruption as they are not moving around the school as frequently. Pupils informed us that sometimes their peers do disrupt lessons, but this is normally dealt with quickly by teachers and leaders. Live recording of behaviour incidents by staff during the inspection confirmed that this was the case.

Break and lunchtimes are currently staggered in bubbles due to COVID-19. Pupils are well supervised at these times, with many staff from throughout the school currently taking on extra duties to facilitate this. Pupils mainly socialise sensibly in groups in designated areas of the school during these times. On the whole, pupils move around the school sensibly between lessons. Staff and pupils greet each other cheerily. Pupils are given polite guidance from adults when they are not following the rules.

Behaviour records show that there are incidents of poor behaviour in the school and infrequently these can be of a violent nature. Records also show that these incidents are dealt with appropriately and proportionately by leaders, following the school's behaviour policy. Sanctions such as exclusion are used where the policy deems it is appropriate, for example if a pupil is verbally abusive to a member of staff. Around 5% of pupils have had one or more fixed-term exclusions so far this academic year. Permanent exclusions have continued to fall and are very rare. Leaders are determined to support pupils to have a fresh start as well as sanctioning them for their mistakes.

Around a quarter of pupils who completed our online survey felt that bullying was not dealt with well by the school. Analysis of the school's bullying records shows that there are no trends or patterns in bullying in the school. No group of pupils are more likely to be bullied than any other. In fact, most of the incidents recorded as bullying on the school's behaviour recording system are isolated incidents between individuals. These incidents are not the repeated or targeted acts of aggression or unkindness that would usually define bullying.

Leaders, staff and pupils do not have an up-to-date and shared definition and understanding of what bullying is and is not. A new definition was recently provided by the trust safeguarding lead during some staff training. However, the anti-bullying policy has not been updated to show this, nor has it been shared with pupils.

Work with families and other agencies to safeguard the most vulnerable pupils is extensive and of a high standard. Leaders responsible for safeguarding know the

pupils that they support very well and understand the risks they may face in the local community.

Record-keeping about safeguarding issues is usually of a high standard. However, on occasions there are omissions or repetition when details are not entered on to the online safeguarding system in a timely manner or when incidents of a safeguarding nature are only entered on to the school's behaviour recording system.

Checks on staff and volunteers working in the school are very thorough and are recorded appropriately on a single central record. Staff appointments are only ever made subject to satisfactory references being received, and employment offers have been rightly rescinded when this has not been the case.

Leaders of the school's digital work have provided training for staff and pupils to ensure that they are safe when working online. This has been especially important when pupils have been educated remotely due to COVID-19.

Pupils throughout the school feel that they have an adult to talk to if they are worried about something. Pupils in Year 11 told us how the school helps them with their mental health and 'life'. The student services department is the first port of call for pupils who are upset, unwell or have safeguarding concerns. Pupils with SEND or who are vulnerable are also able to access support and extra help there. Staff based in the department also support pupils who need help with their attendance.

Attendance was improving to be in line with national averages before COVID-19. Persistent absence had also fallen in March 2020. Current attendance has been affected by COVID-19, with one bubble sent home earlier in the academic year and many individuals self-isolating at different times. The extensive systems in place to monitor and promote good attendance have remained in place.

Recently leaders have planned a new personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum called the Victory Citizenship programme. The programme is well planned and sequenced, for example discussing consent in terms of friendships in Year 7, before moving on to peer pressure, sexual consent in Year 10 and sexual abuse in Year 11. Although it is too early to see the impact of this programme that was introduced in September 2020, it has given an increased prominence to PSHE education in the school.

External support

Leaders from the trust bring specific expertise to support the school well with the management of safeguarding issues and attendance. The chief executive officer visits the school regularly to check on the culture and work of the school in person. He and other trust leaders provide strategic support to the principal when needed. Members of the local board have previously visited the school to be part of meetings that set high expectations with pupils and their families about behaviour.

Priorities for further improvement

- Agree a school-wide definition of bullying that is shared with and understood by leaders, staff and pupils. Update the school's anti-bullying policy to reflect the new definition. Carefully record and monitor any behaviour incidents that could be defined as bullying, identifying any trends or patterns over time.
- The trust and senior leaders should have rigorous checks in place to ensure that all incidents of a safeguarding nature are recorded correctly and in a timely manner. They should put in place measures to check that there are no omissions, repetition between systems or issues recorded in the incorrect system.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of The Thinking Schools Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Medway. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector