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9 December 2020

Simon Webb, interim headteacher  
Jasminder Grewal, interim headteacher  
Atam Academy  
Little Heath  
Romford  
RM6 4XX

Dear Mr Webb and Ms Grewal

### **No formal designation inspection of Atam Academy**

Following my visit with Mark Phillips, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Brenda McLaughlin, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 19 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.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We also met with one of the interim headteachers, the designated safeguarding leaders, groups of pupils, groups of staff, a parent and a trustee. The chief executive of the trust and the second interim headteacher attended the feedback meeting at the end of the day.

Additionally, inspectors looked at action plans, external audit reports, staff files, the school accident log and minutes of meetings.

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

Safeguarding is not effective.

## Context

- The academy opened as an all-through Sikh denomination free school in September 2016 as part of the Khalsa Academy Trust.
- A nursery opened in 2018. The primary school currently has pupils in Reception to Year 5. The secondary school has pupils in Years 7 and 8.
- The executive headteacher was absent from the school at the time of the inspection. Two interim headteachers are currently responsible for the running of the school.

## Main Findings

Leaders have not ensured that safeguarding and child protection arrangements are effective. Systems to track and evaluate practice are over reliant on individual staff working on a case by case basis. Safeguarding processes are not secure or embedded. Furthermore, some policies relating to safeguarding and child protection are generic and not sufficiently personalised to the school. For example, some policies do not contain the correct staff names. The designated safeguarding lead and her deputy did not feel they had ownership of these policies, and they told inspectors this needs to change.

Shortly before the inspection, local authority officers visited the school to review safeguarding arrangements. Senior leaders from the trust were reportedly reluctant to engage with the local authority officers. The local authority reported that officers were prevented from carrying out their duties and were asked to leave. A further visit from the local authority was arranged and took place a few days prior to our inspection. Again, local authority officers reported a lack of access to key documents, such as the single central record. Trust leaders dispute the local authority's views. Nevertheless, this is a serious concern.

Designated safeguarding leaders were only very recently appointed. In the very short time since the local authority visit, school safeguarding leaders have begun to implement the recommendations made. The designated safeguarding lead and her deputy are very familiar with individual children and their circumstances, and we found evidence of appropriate work to support children. Leaders engage with parents and carers and escalate cases to children's social care when appropriate. However, more needs to be done to develop work with partner agencies. For example, safeguarding leaders were not aware of how to access services for early help and how to ensure children access help at the right time.

Trust leaders do not have a good enough grasp of safeguarding in the school. Trust leaders rely too heavily on an external report. They do not oversee day-to-day safeguarding practice effectively. External reviews of safeguarding practice have been partially completed and an existing action plan is being updated. However, the

plan is incomplete, and any actions taken are very recent. It is too soon to evaluate any impact of the recent actions taken.

Pupils stated that they felt safe in school and they did not consider behaviour to be a problem. Pupils told inspectors how they are taught in lessons and assemblies to keep themselves safe. Teachers also understand their responsibility to report any concerns about pupils. Teachers know how and when to report concerns. However, their understanding of the different types of risk pupils face was less secure.

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and found it to be compliant in most aspects. However, at the start of the inspection, a couple of section 128 checks were not included on the single central record.

### **External support**

Leaders have received support from the local authority and a private company. Prior to this inspection, the local authority reported that trust leaders were reluctant to engage with the local authority and prevented local authority auditors from undertaking safeguarding checks. However, the newly appointed designated safeguarding lead says she is keen to accept this support and implement recommendations.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Continue to engage with and implement the priorities identified by the local authority as a matter of urgency. This will help leaders to create a robust culture of safeguarding to protect children in a timely manner.
- Safeguarding leaders should review policies and ensure that they are adapted and accurate for the school's context.
- Leaders need to develop their work with partner agencies, in particular with early help services so that pupils can access the support they need.
- Update the single central record to include all section 128 checks.

Under normal circumstances, we would treat this inspection as an inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005, due to the serious concerns identified. However, because routine inspections are suspended, we will prioritise the school for a section 5 inspection when routine inspections resume.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Smith  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**