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22 April 2021

Andy Christoforou
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Dear Mr Christoforou

No formal designation inspection of Abbey College, Ramsey

Following my inspection with Kim Hall, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 17 March 2021, 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 for the time you took to discuss behaviour and safeguarding in your school.

This inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for no formal designation (NFD) inspections. 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. Ofsted was made aware of concerns regarding the school's handling of complaints, and aspects of safeguarding, including those relating to pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning. This inspection focused on the effectiveness of these arrangements.

We do not give graded judgements on these inspections. Under normal circumstances, if we find some evidence that overall standards may be declining, but no serious concerns have been identified, then the next inspection of the school is likely to be a section 5 inspection and be brought forward. If we identify significant concerns, normally we will deem the inspection as being completed under section 5 of the Act.

Having considered all the evidence, and taking into account the impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus) on the school, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action to maintain the standards of behaviour and attitudes identified at the school's previous inspection.

Priorities for further improvement:

Leaders and those responsible for governance should take further action to:

- accelerate arrangements to implement fully the plans for the 'New Horizons' alternative provision in school
- ensure that staff, including supply staff, implement the school's behaviour policy consistently and fairly
- continue to embed the strategies focused on enhancing communications with parents and ensure that any concerns arising are resolved promptly.

Context

- Abbey College, Ramsey is an averagely sized secondary school, located in Cambridgeshire.
- The school provides education for pupils aged 11 to 18 years. Most pupils are of White British heritage. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below average. While the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is lower than average, 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 (CMAT). Under the terms of this agreement, the trust provides support and other services to the school.

Main findings

- In November 2019, inspectors found that leaders were not taking effective action to maintain the good standard of behaviour. Since this inspection, leaders have reorganised the systems and processes for managing pupils' personal development, behaviour and attitudes to learning across the school.
- Leaders have strengthened their approach to collecting and evaluating information about pupils' behaviour, attendance and attitudes to learning, including through listening to pupils' views. A senior leader has oversight of this aspect of the school's work. She is working closely with other leaders and staff to secure improvements.

- The team of leaders responsible for raising standards work together with form tutors and support staff to share information about both the positive and negative aspects of pupils' behaviour. The information gathered is used in discussion between staff, and with pupils and their parents, to develop strategies to improve pupils' conduct. As one staff member said, 'We used to operate as a series of departments, but now we are working together across the school.'
- Pupils have more opportunities now to contribute to discussions about what is working well to promote good behaviour and areas that still need to improve. The revised behaviour policy, developed with input from pupils and staff, sets out the details of rewards and sanctions. Leaders have made further amendments since the policy's introduction, based on pupils' ideas offered in regular reviews, for example the introduction of same-day detentions.
- School records, prior to the partial closure due to COVID-19 restrictions, show that incidents of unacceptable behaviour are reducing. Inspectors saw calm and orderly conduct as pupils moved around the school. Staff presence around school at the start of the day aims to ensure prompt arrival to form tutor time.
- In discussions with inspectors, a few pupils reported inconsistencies in how some staff, such as short-term supply teachers, deal with poor behaviour. However, pupils told inspectors that incidents of bullying have reduced since the previous inspection. The pupils who inspectors spoke with were confident that staff would support them if they had a problem.
- You have focused appropriately on supporting pupils' mental health and well-being, including through a programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE). The PSHE curriculum is adapted in line with relevant issues arising in school and more widely in society. A group of pupils are currently being trained to act as peer mediators as part of a research project with a university in London. The difference the project makes to pupils' behaviour and well-being will be shared as professional development for staff and colleagues in other schools.
- Safeguarding arrangements are managed effectively across the school. The single central record of pre-employment checks of new staff is well maintained. Senior leaders also commission the trust to undertake additional reviews to ensure that safeguarding meets statutory requirements.
- Safeguarding training for staff is up to date, systematic and regular. Staff are vigilant and responsive to pupils' welfare needs. They are clear about the signs that could indicate a pupil may be at risk of harm. Appropriate links are established with external agencies, such as the police and social services, to support referrals when serious concerns arise. Child protection records are

appropriately detailed, with suitable follow-up actions. Evidence presented to inspectors showed that regular checks are made on pupils' absence and well-being, including during periods of partial closure due to national restrictions.

- While most parents are generally positive about the education that the school provides, leaders know that a minority of parents do not always agree. In acting to address these concerns, you have taken steps to further improve the way staff, at all levels, communicate with families. A 'parent-friendly' leaflet version of the school's informal and formal complaints procedures includes the key contact details of staff working in each year group. This document makes it clear that leaders aim to resolve concerns informally. Staff know that they are expected to respond promptly to issues as they arise.
- You have recently established a forum for parents to share their views with school staff, taking a 'you said, we did' approach. This is part of an ongoing strategy for improving communications with parents of all pupil groups, including those who have recently joined the school, and pupils with SEND.
- Governors work closely with the trust, you and other leaders to ensure that they are rigorous in holding the senior leadership team to account for pupils' behaviour, safety and well-being. These aspects of the school's work are regular agenda items at governors' meetings.
- Governors and the trust are currently monitoring leaders' progress in redesigning the school's alternative provision offer through its 'New Horizons' project. This aims to offer more focused support for a small group of pupils who struggle, for example, to attend school regularly or to behave well. While the project has started, the development of this work has not yet made significant headway in supporting all these pupils. An action plan is in place to extend the provision and will be subject to regular reviews during its implementation. Where a few pupils are currently being educated away from the school site, staff make regular well-being checks to make sure that pupils are safe.

Evidence

This inspection was conducted on site due to concerns about safeguarding.

We gathered evidence from observations of pupils' behaviour and discussions with them in meetings. We held discussions with school staff, representatives from CMAT, governors and other school leaders, including the designated safeguarding leader.

We looked at documents provided by school leaders, including policies linked to behaviour, complaints, safeguarding and child protection, and the PSHE curriculum.

We scrutinised the school's records of managing pupils' behaviour and the single central record of pre-employment checks on new staff.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of CMAT, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Dick
Her Majesty's Inspector