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16 July 2021

Mr Tony Oulton
Acting Principal
Pimlico Academy
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Dear Mr Oulton

No formal designation inspection of Pimlico Academy

Following my visit with Noeman Anwar, Lucy Bruce, Nasim Butt and Madeleine Gerard, Her Majesty's Inspectors, to your school on 16 and 17 June 2021, 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 no formal designation (NFD) inspections. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector wished to determine the effectiveness of leadership and management in the school (including governance) and the behaviour and attitudes of pupils.

We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 NFD inspection. However, we found some evidence that overall standards may no longer be as last reported in December 2010. We therefore recommend that the school's next section 5 inspection be brought forward.

Evidence

We met with the acting principal, the school leadership team, the chief executive officer of Future Academies Trust, the chair of the trust, the co-chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. We had meetings with different groups of teachers and non-teaching staff. We also held five informal drop-in sessions for staff. We visited a range of lessons to observe pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning. We met with pupils, both in formal meetings and informally around the school and in the playground. Documentation relating to behaviour,

attendance and safeguarding was scrutinised. We also reviewed responses to Ofsted's staff, pupil and parental surveys.

Context

Pimlico Academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school, with 1,189 pupils aged 11 to 19 on roll. The school has been part of the Future Academies Trust since 2008. Pupils come from a wide range of ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above the national average, as is the proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.

In September 2020, a new principal was appointed following the departure of a principal who had been in post for six years. Three new senior leaders took up post in January 2021. The new principal resigned on 31 May 2021. Since September 2020, some staff have left the school and a large number have announced their resignations and will be leaving at the end of the academic year. This includes members of the leadership team, teaching staff and non-teaching staff. Following the new principal's resignation, the trust appointed you as acting principal. You have been in post since 1 June 2021.

On 8 June 2021, a number of staff took strike action. At the time of this inspection, leaders were still in talks with teaching unions to try and prevent further strike action.

This was the first inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. We discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

Main Findings

The school community has experienced a great deal of turbulence this academic year. School leaders, with the support of governors and trustees, brought in considerable changes to the school's systems and practices from September 2020. Leaders received opposition from many staff, pupils, parents and carers who felt the changes were not bringing improvements. This has led to a lack of confidence in leaders' decision-making and the management of change.

Ongoing disagreement between staff and leaders has resulted in a breakdown of communication. Many members of staff raised a range of concerns with inspectors. They do not feel they are consulted with when changes are made. Some feel that senior leaders have not yet properly listened to them. A number of staff are also concerned that some of the changes since September 2020 are still in place. They believe that these are not effective and have had an impact on workload and morale.

Governors and leaders accept that some changes have not been managed well. They are taking steps to correct the mistakes made. Following your appointment as acting principal, you have worked collaboratively with staff. You are taking time to meet with each member of staff, to listen to their concerns and find out how best to support them. Leaders are also in the process of developing a detailed survey system for staff to express their views and give feedback on plans for the school. Leaders have designed a new coaching programme for staff which aims to provide bespoke continued professional development, focusing on curriculum and teaching. These systems are at a relatively early stage of development and, while they are well thought through, the impact is not yet fully evident.

New leadership appointments have strengthened the pastoral team so that there is greater oversight of safeguarding arrangements. Leaders are reviewing safeguarding systems and actions, and have established appropriate systems and processes to improve safeguarding further, including risk assessments. However, there is more work to be done in this area. Some staff expressed concern that the new electronic system for recording safeguarding issues is cumbersome. While staff have received training in using this system and know how to report concerns, more training is planned to build confidence in using the new system. Leaders are working more closely with members of the local authority's safeguarding team, benefiting from their expertise in dealing with any complex safeguarding issues. The programme for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) development has been recently rewritten in response to pupils' feedback. It now includes more about topics such as consent and sexual harassment. Leaders plan to allocate more time to PSHE to cover the relationships, sex and health education content.

Some pupils and staff reported that standards in behaviour declined following the changes made from September 2020, but have improved this term. Typically, pupils' behaviour around the school is settled and orderly. Lessons are calm and pupils can get on with their work. However, inspectors observed low-level disruption in some lessons. Leaders are working to improve behaviour in corridors between lessons. New systems to monitor behaviour have only recently been introduced but these are working well. Leaders record and track behaviour incidents appropriately.

Some pupils were disappointed and frustrated at a number of the changes introduced from September 2020. Leaders have amended the behaviour and uniform policies to take into account pupils' views without compromising on high expectations. Leaders continue to talk with pupils about school rules and are taking their views into account. While a number of pupils still feel that some rules are unfair, most pupils we spoke to are optimistic about the improvements they have seen at the school recently.

Some parents expressed their frustration at leaders' actions this year. Leaders are trying to rebuild trust with parents, but this is at an early stage. You are committed to building bridges, and have organised coffee mornings with parents, for example.

Leaders plan to appoint a parent governor to the governing body. More work is needed to improve communication with parents.

External support

The trust provides an extensive network of support for school leaders and staff. New leaders have a mentor to support them in their roles. You have also received individual support from a headteacher outside of the trust. Leaders have benefited from the support of Westminster local authority.

Priorities for further improvement

- Resolve conflicts with staff and ensure that new leaders continue to have appropriate support so that the school can overcome this period of instability.
- Continue to prioritise the review of all historical safeguarding work and train staff further on the use of the new electronic system for recording concerns about pupils.
- Improve communication with parents, staff and pupils so that they feel involved in decision-making processes and that their views are listened to.
- Embed the new behaviour policy so that all staff apply it consistently and continue to improve the monitoring and tracking of behaviour incidents.

I am copying this letter to the co-chairs of the governing body, the chief executive officer of the Future Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Westminster. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Jude Wilson
Her Majesty's Inspector