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Vincent McInerney
Headteacher
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Dear Mr McInerney

No formal designation inspection of Highlands School

Following my visit with Lisa Strong, Sophie Welch and Alice Clay (Her Majesty's Inspectors) and Joanna Jones (Ofsted Inspector), to your school on 13 and 14 July 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 safeguarding arrangements at the school as concerns had been raised with Ofsted.

We do not give graded judgements on NFD inspections. However, if we find some evidence that overall standards may be declining, but where no serious concerns have been identified, then the next inspection will normally be a section 5 inspection and will be brought forward. If we have serious concerns, we will deem the NFD inspection to be a section 5 inspection immediately.

The judgement made in this inspection related specifically to the effectiveness of safeguarding. Inspection activities were completed with a sharp focus on safeguarding, including the leadership and management of safeguarding. We did not gather evidence or make judgements about other aspects of the school's work. This inspection did not seek to confirm whether the school continues to be an outstanding school. The next inspection is likely to be a section 5 inspection where inspectors will make a full range of judgements, including a judgement about the school's overall effectiveness.

Evidence

We met with you and members of the senior leadership team, including the designated safeguarding lead. We held a meeting with three governors, including the

chair of the governing body, and a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. We had meetings with different groups of teachers and non-teaching staff. We also held two informal drop-in sessions for staff and pupils.

We visited a range of lessons and met with pupils, both in formal meetings and informally around the school and in the playground. We scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements, exclusions and attendance. We also reviewed responses to Ofsted's surveys for staff, pupils, and parents and carers.

This was the first inspection the school had 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.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Highlands is a larger than average secondary school, with 1,563 pupils aged 11 to 19 on roll. Pupils come from a range of ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below 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 (SEND) is broadly average. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is higher than average. The proportion of pupils who join and leave the school other than at the usual times is below the national average.

You have been in post since September 2018. Most members of the senior leadership team have joined the school in the last two years. Some governors have been in post for at least 10 years, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. The school has not experienced any recent difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. The turnover of staff is low.

Main findings

You and other leaders have recently set up an executive safeguarding team. This team has a high profile across the school. Roles and responsibilities are clear, supported by processes that enable essential information to be picked up quickly. Leaders understand the possible link between safeguarding concerns, pupils' behaviour and their attendance at school. Staff record information about specific concerns swiftly and concisely, helping meaningful connections to be made between different sources of evidence. Consequently, leaders make better informed decisions about individual cases than in the past. This is beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of support for pupils and families.

Safeguarding arrangements are managed effectively across the school. The single central record of pre-employment checks of new staff is well maintained. Senior leaders and governors regularly commission external consultants to undertake additional reviews to ensure that all aspects of safeguarding are effective. We found that you act on any recommendations for further improvements swiftly. For example, following a recent review, you have plans to deliver safeguarding training in respect of harmful sexual behaviour to all staff in September 2021.

Staff are vigilant and responsive to pupils' welfare needs. They know the possible warning signs that could indicate that a pupil may be at risk from harm. Appropriate links are established with external agencies, including the police and social services. These links support rapid referrals when serious concerns arise. Child-protection record-keeping is detailed and includes suitable follow-up actions. Leaders make regular checks on pupils' attendance and well-being, including during periods of the school's partial closure due to national COVID-19 restrictions.

The school's records show that in the current academic year, a higher than expected number of pupils experienced anxiety and depression. The school has systems in place to deal with mental health difficulties, and you have taken steps to strengthen these systems further. You have ensured that all members of the executive safeguarding team have received additional training on self-harm, including suicide prevention. You have also drawn up a mental health action plan and put in place a comprehensive suicide prevention strategy. Staff have been trained to notice the early signs of depression and to record their concerns. This triggers the provision of swift and appropriate support. Some actions in the mental health action plan have already been completed, for example the creation of individual health plans for any pupils with mental health concerns, including for pupils with SEND. Other actions are planned for the next academic year, for instance in sharing the suicide prevention strategy with parents.

Leaders have improved the content and the programme for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and the order in which it is taught. In particular, the PSHE curriculum now prioritises anti-bullying and the harmful impact of discriminatory language. There has been a change in culture, and in expectations, which are high. Pupils told us that leaders' actions have had a strong impact on rooting out the use of racist and homophobic language. Leaders analyse bullying incidents of all types. Records show that these have decreased sharply. Records also show a significant reduction in fixed-term exclusions over the past two years. Through the PSHE curriculum, pupils are also made aware of harmful sexual behaviour, as well as mental health issues and the importance of well-being. These continue to be your priority areas because you know that the impact of these aspects of the PSHE curriculum on pupils' behaviour and attitudes has not been as strong as the school's work to combat racism and homophobia.

Governors work closely with you and other leaders. They hold the senior leadership team to account for pupils' welfare, safety and well-being. They scrutinise

safeguarding records and ask searching questions. Safeguarding and pupils' mental health and well-being are regular agenda items at governing body meetings.

External support

The local authority carried out its own review of the school's safeguarding culture and practice. The local authority worked with you, the leadership team and governors to identify potential learning points to strengthen arrangements further. Using extra funding from the local authority, leaders with responsibility for safeguarding have received additional training, which is already having a positive impact.

Priorities for further improvement

- Implement the school's mental health action plan in full and sustain improvements in the work to support pupils' mental health and well-being.

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

Yours sincerely

Nasim Butt
Her Majesty's Inspector