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Steven Palmer
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Palmer

No formal designation inspection of Cedars Upper School

Following my visit with Christine Dick, Her Majesty's Inspector to your school on 5 October 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 the time you took to discuss 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.

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 as a section 5 inspection immediately.

Evidence

During the inspection, we met with the headteacher, other leaders, groups of pupils, the governor who has lead responsibility for safeguarding, the chief executive officer of the Chiltern Learning Trust and the director of education of the Chiltern Learning Trust. I also spoke to a representative of the local authority by telephone.

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

Safeguarding is effective

Context

Cedars Upper School joined the Chiltern Learning Trust in June 2018. There are 1,060 pupils aged 13 to 18. Most pupils attending the school are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is below that seen nationally. The proportion of pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans is above average. Those pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is broadly average.

The most recent Ofsted inspection of the school was in October 2017. The school was judged as good overall. Since the last inspection, the headteacher has taken on the role of the designated leader for safeguarding. A new assistant headteacher for behaviour, attendance and transition joined the school in September 2020. The safeguarding governor commenced her role in September 2020. There have been no difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. The turnover of staff and the level of mobility of pupils at the school is low.

Main Findings

Leaders, governors and the trust have ensured that the school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have a clear oversight of these arrangements. There is a strong culture of vigilance.

Leaders, including governors, are trained in safer recruitment. They are thorough in checking the suitability of all adults who work with pupils. These checks meet all statutory requirements. Governors and trustees check that this work is carried out correctly.

The school's current safeguarding policies and procedures replicate current national guidance. Safeguarding has a high priority. Staff are well trained and knowledgeable in this area. Staff spoke confidently about policy and procedures relating to keeping children safe. They have strong knowledge of the local issues facing the pupils at Cedars Upper School. Staff are aware of the early help offer. They know which pupils might benefit from early intervention and support.

Pupils told us that they feel safe in school and that they feel part of the school community. Pupils know who they can speak to if they have any worries or concerns. They learn about a range of issues related to their safety, including consent, online safety, the dangers of crime, drugs and gang involvement.

The pastoral team provides effective support to help pupils resolve their concerns. Pupils value the support the school offers. They are clear in articulating the impact of that support. Instances of peer-on-peer abuse are taken seriously. Staff provide appropriate and effective support for all pupils involved in these situations.

Most pupils are respectful and behave well. Pupils told us that bullying is rare and dealt with well. They are aware of the various forms of bullying, including homophobic behaviour and other forms of discrimination.

The arrangements for monitoring pupils' attendance are good. Staff make daily checks on pupils who are absent from school. They are particularly alert to those pupils who are vulnerable. Home visits take place if leaders have concerns about a pupil's well-being.

Safeguarding records are detailed and clear. Leaders have a good understanding of the concerns that individuals in the school face. A wide range of information is recorded on the school's electronic system. This includes attendance, behaviour records and information about pupils with SEND.

Leaders encourage staff to report any concern about pupils, however small. As a result, staff are quick to report anything that worries them. Leaders take appropriate action when safeguarding concerns are raised. They refer concerns to the appropriate authorities and request support from external agencies. Leaders have put in place risk assessments to support vulnerable pupils. These are applied well and reviewed regularly.

Leaders use their knowledge about safeguarding concerns to inform the curriculum for personal development and well-being. The relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) curriculum has plans which build on learning in an age-appropriate way. Safeguarding and RSHE is mapped into other subjects. There is no structured RSHE work with the sixth form currently. There are hours provided for this in the timetable, but it is less structured.

Governors take their responsibilities for safeguarding seriously. The safeguarding governor is well informed and appropriately trained. Records of governor meetings demonstrate how school leaders are held to account. The trust has recently reviewed how governors can further strengthen their approach to the monitoring of safeguarding when visiting the school.

Additional support

Trustees have the necessary knowledge to hold leaders to account on the safeguarding systems and procedures at the school. They ensure that the school's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements. Members are well informed and bring a range of valuable experience to their roles. Regular reports are produced for the board so that they can accurately track safeguarding work overtime.

Leaders work collaboratively with a wide range of external agencies including the police and health professionals. Leaders have a secure understanding of the safeguarding local context through work with multi-agency groups. There is a strong focus on prevention as well as intervention in cases of need.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ongoing arrangements for the teaching of age-appropriate relationships, sex and health education is not as well-structured in the sixth form as it is in other year groups. Senior leaders and governors should sharpen the post-16 curriculum in relation to healthy relationships and healthy lifestyles to prepare students for their next steps in education and/or training.
- Governors should embed their new systems for monitoring and scrutinising safeguarding, when undertaking school visits. This will provide a consistent approach, to support and challenge school leaders.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Chiltern Learning Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Central Bedfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop
Her Majesty's Inspector