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31 January 2022

Robert Russell
Principal
Wey Valley Academy
436 Dorchester Road
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Dear Mr Russell

No formal designation inspection of Wey Valley Academy

Following my visit with Sarah Favager-Dalton, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 18 and 19 January 2022, 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 about safeguarding and the personal development of pupils at the school.

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

We met with you and members of your senior team, including the designated safeguarding lead. We met with pastoral leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, groups of pupils, the director of secondary education and the chief executive officer of the trust. We also held online meetings with representatives from the local authority and leaders of the alternative provision that a small number of pupils attend. We scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and

child protection arrangements. In addition, we scrutinised school policies, and a sample of curriculum plans. We discussed attendance and exclusion records, behaviour records and information relating to alternative provision. We examined the case files of selected pupils. We observed pupils' behaviour around the school, in lessons and during breaktimes.

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

Safeguarding is effective

Context

Wey Valley Academy became an academy in 2019. The school is smaller than the average secondary school. The majority of pupils are from a White British background and the proportion who speak English as an additional language is below average. The school has 933 pupils on roll, a number that has risen over recent years. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is just above the national average. The school makes use of several alternative providers. The school is part of the Ambitions Academies Trust.

Main Findings

You and your leadership team have prioritised improvements in safeguarding. You have worked with determination to improve policies and practices to safeguard pupils. Leaders, including trust leaders, have an accurate understanding of the strengths of the school, as well as the areas that need further development. You have made strides towards strengthening the safeguarding and pastoral systems to meet the needs of pupils more effectively. You have developed a large and effective team of safeguarding specialists who are well known to pupils and staff. The team members work well together to ensure that the school's safeguarding policies are applied.

You ensure that staff are well trained in safeguarding. Staff know how to identify and report safeguarding concerns, in line with the school's policies. Staff said that frequent and recent training has made them much more aware of the importance of reporting concerns factually and in detail. This has led to an improvement in the quality of reporting of safeguarding concerns. The safeguarding officers have found this information helpful to support pupils more effectively. Leaders are responsive and supportive when staff raise concerns about pupils. Staff have confidence that their concerns will be dealt with promptly, and that leaders will take appropriate action.

Pupils said that they feel safe in school. The majority of pupils move purposefully around the site. Corridors are busy but orderly, and pupils respond positively to staff. Pupils said that staff supervise them well during these times. Pupils, including pupils with SEND, can identify a member of staff they would go to if they had any worries.

Pastoral leaders meet regularly to check, discuss and act on concerns in a timely manner. They welcome the changes you have made to tutor time, which have extended the tutors' contact with pupils. Tutors and staff in the SEND department meet regularly with pupils who are vulnerable, to check on their welfare. In addition, leaders of SEND have organised provision so that pupils have safe spaces, such as the Hubs, should they require additional support and guidance. Leaders of special educational needs and the safeguarding leaders work closely together to prioritise the needs of pupils with SEND.

Leaders analyse information to find the causes of poor attendance or behaviour. The school's subsequent actions have seen some success. You go out of your way to avoid excluding vulnerable pupils and to keep pupils in school. Leaders make appropriate use of internal provision, such as the Hubs or internal exclusion, as an alternative to suspension.

The school has been tenacious in seeking suitable support and alternative provision for pupils who would benefit from it, for example horse therapy and art therapy. The school works closely with alternative providers to ensure that pupils who attend are safe. The school operates a shared safeguarding system with alternative providers for reporting and responding to concerns.

The checks on staff recruitment are secure, and records are well organised and thorough. Several senior staff and administrative staff have received training in safer recruitment procedures. Leaders keep records of staff training, but these are not always updated in a timely way when training has been completed.

You have made sure that peer-on-peer abuse is high on the school's agenda. The school has appropriate school-wide policies in place. These make it clear that sexual harassment, online sexual abuse and sexual violence are unacceptable. Leaders have used a range of measures, such as assemblies, tutor time, and the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme, to raise pupils' awareness of these important issues. Leaders have taken appropriate action to ensure that pupils who are more vulnerable, such as those with SEND, have understood these messages. As a result, most pupils have a clear understanding of what is and what is not acceptable.

Some pupils said that sexist, racist and homophobic comments are still heard around school. They are sometimes reluctant to report this, and are not sure how it will be dealt with. You have recently introduced a student council focus group and an anonymous reporting system to encourage pupils to report concerns. These are, however, in their infancy.

The PSHE curriculum is coherently planned. It aims to develop pupils' understanding of managing risk and how to stay safe. The programme is flexible and is adapted to respond to current issues and needs. For example, you have brought forward content on diversity, in light of gaps in pupils' understanding of protected characteristics. Key concepts, such as consent, are revisited in several different year groups. Pupils told us this helped them to understand inappropriate sexual language and behaviour. However, pupils said that

they would welcome a greater focus on diversity, gender identity, sexuality and different faiths, in order to help them to understand modern society better.

Additional support

Leaders work well with external agencies and the local authority. You have worked with local authority safeguarding leaders and have welcomed their training and safeguarding reviews. You consult with the local authority designated officer so that allegations against staff are dealt with appropriately. Leaders have worked closely with trust leaders to improve safeguarding practice. Leaders across the school have welcomed support and challenge from the trust. This has enabled them to strengthen safeguarding practice at the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Leaders keep records of staff training, but these are not always updated in a timely way when training has been completed. Leaders therefore cannot be sure that all staff have completed training. Leaders need to impress on staff the importance of maintaining records, and need to ensure that records are fully up to date.
- While there is a coherent curriculum to develop pupils' personal development, some pupils experience racist, sexist or homophobic comments from their peers. Leaders should check the implementation of the PSHE programme in a more systematic way, to ensure that it is having the desired impact.
- Some pupils said that they are reluctant to report inappropriate comments. It is important that leaders consider why this might be. Gaining an understanding of the experiences of pupils who are, for example, from ethnic minority groups or who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans, would provide insight to help leaders to strengthen the actions they have begun to take.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracey Reynolds
Her Majesty's Inspector