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Rhys Spiers
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Spiers

No formal designation inspection of Ark Greenwich Free School

Following my visit with Charlotte Robinson and John Blaney, Ofsted Inspectors, and Ian Rawstorne, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 17 and 18 November 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 was concerned about the effectiveness of leadership and management in the school (including governance), the behaviour and attitudes of pupils, and safeguarding arrangements.

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 scrutinised the single central record of staff vetting checks and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We met with the headteacher, the chair of the governing body, representatives of the multi-academy trust and groups of pupils and staff. We met with leaders to discuss attendance and behaviour, including exclusions. We also discussed the provision in place to support pupils' personal development.

Additionally, we visited lessons, observed pupils at lunchtime, and reviewed the school's own surveys for pupils and parent and carers.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Ark Greenwich Free School is a co-educational school with 595 pupils on roll. More pupils than the national average speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is higher than the national average, as is the proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals. Pupil mobility is higher than that found nationally. The school has no current vacancies for teaching staff.

Main Findings

You and your staff are ambitious for your pupils. This ambition is centred on ensuring that pupils receive a broad education and are well prepared for the future. You want pupils to 'stand shoulder to shoulder' with their peers in every walk of life.

Leaders and staff are clear about the rules and routines in place to ensure that pupils learn and behave well. You expect them to arrive at school on time, in the correct uniform and with the correct equipment. Pupils move around the school 'in a whisper'. Corridors are very calm spaces, with plenty of staff available to supervise pupils between lessons.

Teachers have high expectations of pupils in lessons. Pupils are focused on their learning. There are clear routines for pupils to follow and these are well practised. This helps create the calm and orderly environment that we saw in classrooms and throughout the school. Some pupils said that, in a few instances, sanctions in lessons feel harsh. For example, they commented on how frequently detentions are awarded. However, behaviour records show that sanctions are appropriate and proportionate, and that staff typically follow the behaviour policy consistently.

Leaders have put in place a system of rewards that is well understood by pupils. Staff give out rewards frequently. For instance, pupils receive 'golden tickets' to recognise their achievements. Last year there were three times as many rewards given than sanctions. Many pupils said that they find this motivating. However, not all pupils we spoke to feel this is the case. Leaders are taking steps to address this. They seek pupils' views on what could be improved further. Pupils complete weekly surveys to share their views on school life, including the rewards system. Leaders have taken pupils' suggestions into account and have responded with appropriate changes to the rewards system. Pupils appreciate that leaders listen to their opinions. Leaders have also sought the views of parents and carers. You are rightly continuing to develop how parents are kept informed about systems to support pupils' behaviour, including the rewards and sanctions used.

Your expectations of pupils with SEND are equally high. Leaders identify pupils' needs and put in place appropriate support. Leaders work closely with staff to make sure that they know about and understand the needs of pupils in their classes. Teachers use this information effectively. They develop suitable approaches to support pupils with SEND to learn well. Leaders and staff also take into account pupils' additional needs when applying the behaviour policy. They make suitable adaptations to sanctions and rewards for pupils with SEND. Nevertheless, some pupils with SEND feel that sanctions are not always proportionate.

Pupils enjoy taking on leadership roles in Years 10 and 11. Pupils apply for these positions and are selected by senior leaders. These roles give pupils the opportunity to take on responsibility and represent their peers in discussions with leaders. These pupils also act as peer mentors to younger pupils. This is a relatively new initiative, but it is already working well. For instance, peer mentors talk to pupils about how they can follow the school expectations for behaviour, and reduce the number of sanctions they receive.

Pupils said that they feel happy and safe in school. They learn how to keep themselves safe, both physically and online. Bullying and discriminatory language is not tolerated. Pupils said that bullying rarely happens, but they know who to tell if it does. Leaders keep accurate records of any behaviour and bullying incidents. They make sure that incidents are dealt with effectively.

You and your staff make sure that pupils are kept safe. Staff receive regular safeguarding training, including on the issues that pupils are likely to face in and out of school, as well as online. Staff know how to report concerns and leaders deal with issues promptly and effectively. Safeguarding and personal development themes are built into pupils' learning throughout the school day, for example during discussions at 'family dining'.

Governors' and trustees' oversight of leaders' work is strong. Trust leaders review safeguarding arrangements regularly. They meet with leaders to check and strengthen arrangements. Governors also check the provision in place for pupils with SEND, and meet the special educational needs coordinator regularly.

Additional support

Leaders work closely with representatives from the trust. Trust leaders provide a range of resources and effective support to the school. These resources and support are adapted by leaders to meet the needs of pupils at Ark Greenwich.

Priorities for further improvement

- Leaders are ambitious for pupils in the school. They have high expectations for their learning and behaviour. The system of rewards and sanctions contributes well to the culture of high expectations. However, some pupils and parents think the sanctions can be overly harsh.

Leaders should continue to work with pupils and parents to communicate the link between high expectations and the school's system of rewards and sanctions.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of Ark multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Greenwich. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector