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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



28 February 2022

John Russell
Headteacher
Colchester Royal Grammar School
Lexden Road
Colchester
Essex
CO3 3ND

Dear Mr Russell

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Colchester Royal Grammar School

Following my visit with Kim Hall, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 1 February 2022, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in May 2021. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

We discussed the ongoing 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:

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 1 February 2022

Context

Since the previous inspection, the leadership of safeguarding has changed. It is now led by an experienced deputy headteacher. Plans are in place to appoint another deputy headteacher this term to add further capacity to promoting pupils' welfare and personal development. A team of eight trained designated leaders of safeguarding is in place. This includes a recently appointed student well-being manager and a new special educational needs and disabilities coordinator (SENDCo).

A student support hub has opened on the school site. Policies and procedures linked to safeguarding have been updated. A suitably prioritised statement of action is in place. In July 2021, the Department for Education (DfE) issued the school's trustees with a termination warning notice. Currently, a review of the school's governance is under way.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Leaders and governors are demonstrating the capacity to make rapid improvements. Serious weaknesses in the school's safeguarding arrangements identified at the time of the previous inspection are being dealt with systematically. Safeguarding arrangements are much more effective than they were previously. A stronger culture of safeguarding is evident throughout the school.

A trained team of safeguarding staff provides coordinated support for pupils in each key stage. Better quality recording procedures are in place. Pupils show a greater awareness of equality and respect for others. They say school is a safe and enjoyable place to be. If they do have concerns, they know who to approach and are confident that staff will help them sort things out.

Leaders have strengthened the school's systems and procedures for reporting safeguarding concerns. Staff training is promoting greater consistency in the use of the school's chosen electronic procedures. Leaders are now more aware of the difficulties some pupils face. They make full use of their records to determine what to do next and ensure that serious concerns are followed up in a timely manner. Leaders monitor safeguarding records regularly, and agree if any further actions are needed. The newly appointed pastoral leaders address any concerns relating to pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. The SENDCo is beginning to identify those pupils in need of additional support more quickly.

Leaders have liaised with other providers to gain from their good practice and use this information to inform further guidance and training for staff. Inaccuracies in the school's single central record noted at the time of the previous inspection have been addressed.

Leaders understand the purpose of this record. Leaders make sure that recruitment checks are carried out thoroughly.

At the previous inspection, some pupils were reluctant to pass on their concerns to staff. This has changed. Leaders have adopted an 'it is happening here' approach. They ask anyone in school who sees insulting or damaging behaviour to 'call it out'. This is leading to improvement. Pupils are more confident in tackling unacceptable language or discriminatory behaviour, and will report it.

Pupils feel listened to. Leaders have surveyed their views and responded to their concerns. For example, pupils asked staff for a secure way of raising safeguarding concerns anonymously. Leaders have made sure that pupils now have a means of doing this securely, using their mobile phones. Leaders trusted members of the student panel to implement this initiative. It is new but is already working well. Increasingly, pupils are reporting their concerns to staff. Pupils are confident about the system and feel the issues they raise will be resolved.

Students joining the sixth form this year praised the quality of the induction programme provided for them. Leaders focused sharply on those joining from other schools to ensure that they remain safe, and get to know the school's ethos. Girls who joined in Year 12 told inspectors they feel fully supported and have not experienced any unwanted comments from boys. They value the actions taken by staff to welcome them into school and keep them safe. Students in Year 13 said they feel free from any forms of harassment or bullying. If this did happen, others would 'call it out'. They talked enthusiastically about the culture of equality and respect promoted in the sixth form. Student-led societies actively promote mutual respect and understanding throughout the school.

Leaders have strengthened the personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum. Pupils say that a lot has been done to improve the subject this year. They feel that it now has a higher profile in school. Pupils can explain what they are learning about and why they feel discriminatory and homophobic language is not acceptable. These improvements are less evident in the sixth form. However, talking to students confirmed that they do develop a clear understanding of the subject. The teaching of pertinent issues such as consent, equality and masculinity has broadened students' awareness and increased their understanding of the expectations of them.

Leaders have assessed pupils' prior learning in PSHE to gauge what else needs to be done to give them a thorough grounding in the subject. New planning and resources introduced this year provide teachers with a clearly sequenced programme of PSHE taught across key stages 3 and 4. It is suitably planned to give pupils a better understanding of the protected characteristics and ensure that they are fully prepared for life in modern Britain. The programme is underpinned by staff training and links to the school's own values.

Governors demonstrate a realistic view of the progress made so far in tackling weaknesses in safeguarding. They understand what else needs to be done to improve it further. Governors recognise that many changes are new this year and that more time is

needed for them to become firmly established. An experienced governor oversees the changes being made. Regular checks to ensure that leaders are securing improvements to the priorities listed in the statement of action are under way.

Additional support

Support from an established multi-academy trust (MAT) has informed leaders' actions to plan and implement improvements. A new committee with expertise from the MAT, a local charity and the local authority scrutinise the rate of improvements being made. Leaders value this external challenge and support.

Evidence

The inspectors observed the school's work and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, and a group of teachers and support staff. They met with a member of the governing body and spoke with the chair online.

Inspectors met with eight groups of pupils and sixth-form students to gain their views of the school. They observed pupils' behaviour and attitudes at breaktimes. They looked closely at the school's single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding. An inspector held a telephone conversation with a parent.