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Kirstie Woodcock
Acting Headteacher
Woodcote High School
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Dear Mrs Woodcock

No formal designation inspection of Woodcote High School

Following my visit with David Boyle, Andrew Hook and Jonathan Newby, Ofsted inspectors, and Lucy Bruce, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 22 and 23 February 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 and was also concerned about the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance.

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 and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements and met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, groups of teaching and non-teaching staff, the chair of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and the local authority

designated officer. We reviewed the local authority's recent no-notice safeguarding review, an external review of governance, governors' minutes and attendance and behaviour records, visited lessons, observed pupils at breaktime and lunchtime, and reviewed surveys of staff, pupils and parents.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Woodcote High School is a larger than average-size secondary school for pupils aged between 11 and 19. It became an academy in 2012. Pupils come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is at the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average, as is the number of pupils with education, health and care plans. The number of pupils who join and leave the school other than at the usual time is broadly average. The school has not faced any specific difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. There has been a slightly higher turnover of staff than usual in the last four years.

You have been acting headteacher since November 2020. The school has not been able to advertise for the substantive headteacher position until recently. There have been a significant number of additions to the governing body recently. In November 2020, there were just three governors. This has now increased to eight, and more are being sought.

This was the first inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. We discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

Main Findings

Pupils are safe. Leaders follow all statutory procedures to safeguard pupils. This includes relevant safer recruitment training and responses to allegations against adults. All appropriate pre-employment checks are in place and governors review these. Staff are clear about how to record and report concerns. Leaders make referrals in a timely manner, and pupils receive external support when required.

As well as being the acting headteacher, you also remain the designated safeguarding lead. You have increased capacity in the core safeguarding team this academic year. Leaders and governors have clear oversight of safeguarding arrangements. Relevant training is up to date. Leaders make full use of safeguarding

resources in the local authority. Advice is appropriately sought from the local authority designated officer, as required, in a timely fashion.

In addition to the effects of the pandemic, the school has been through a difficult time. Your actions and those taken more recently by governors and trustees have provided necessary stability. However, it is clear that, at times since the last inspection, governors have not had full control and oversight over some of their legal obligations, specifically in relation to the school's finances. Governors have recognised this. Actions aimed at improving the school's management have started. As acting headteacher, you have worked hard to steady the school, but trustees rightly recognise that school leadership and governance needs further capacity.

Governors and trustees have sought external advice and guidance. They commissioned and completed an external review of governance. This helped them identify key next steps and actions for both leadership and governance. Some of these have already started, for example the refreshing of some policies and practices. Governors are undertaking a broad range of relevant training and have recruited experienced governors. Leaders know they need to tighten more key processes, for example the complaints policy and procedure and the staff code of conduct. Work has started on this, but there is still much more to do.

During the inspection, Years 11 and 13 students were taking mock examinations. School leaders decided to suspend lessons during this period and allow pupils to spend their time learning and revising online either at school or at home, with the permission of their parents. Given the amount of learning lost to the pandemic, inspectors are of the view that this is not the most effective way of helping pupils catch up on lost teaching and learning.

Leaders have clearly planned and are delivering appropriate personal, social and health education. Pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 receive a one-hour lesson every fortnight as part of their curriculum. Additional drop-down days in Years 10 and 11 build on this learning and give pupils time to learn key topics, for example the risks of drugs. Sixth-form students have a tutorial programme that covers a range of topics, including consent. The relationships and sexual health education curriculum provided throughout the school meets government requirements. However, leaders and governors have not consulted with parents on this policy, as required. This is an indication of the need to improve communication with parents generally. Some parents are frustrated with what they feel has been poor communication from school leaders. It is clear leaders need to do more in response to the parent voice.

Additional support

Leaders and governors have sought external support. They have commissioned an external review of governance which has helped to identify the improvements

needed. External audits have been completed, and support has been sought from the regional schools commissioner. The local authority has also provided support.

Priorities for further improvement

- Governors and trustees have recognised and responded to failings in their statutory duties by seeking external advice and guidance. They should follow all the recommendations provided. They have started the process to appoint a substantive headteacher. This all needs to be completed to provide the school with the necessary leadership and capacity.
- Leaders and governors should review the way they communicate with parents. As part of this, they must ensure that parents are consulted about the school's relationships and sex education policy.
- Leaders have organised mock examination arrangements in such a way that Years 11 and 13 pupils are able to work online or at home during this time. In the context of missed teaching and learning during the pandemic, this is not an effective use of these pupils' time and should be reconsidered.

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 Croydon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Sophie Healey-Welch
Her Majesty's Inspector