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12 May 2022

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Dear Mr Stokes

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Farnley Academy

Following my visit to your school on 30 March 2022, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring 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 to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school received a judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspection.

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

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action toward the school becoming a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- Embed the changes to internal behaviour management systems, made in response to the previous inspection and also in response to pupil dysregulation linked to the pandemic, so that the number of incidents of fixed-term suspensions reduces further.

- Review the use of the isolation facility as part of the wider behaviour management system, ensuring that pupils' experiences of the system are viewed as safe and positive, with pupils having no perception of not being able to leave of their own free will.
- Continue to work with colleagues at alternative provision to support the small number of pupils with low levels of attendance.

Context

There have been a small number of changes made to the structure of the senior leadership team since the previous inspection in 2019. These include the appointment of a senior assistant principal and three other assistant principals. One vice-principal and one assistant principal have left since the previous inspection.

As well as holding the position of principal at The Farnley Academy, in September 2020 you took on additional responsibilities as a deputy executive principal of the GORSE multi-academy trust (MAT). The chair of the governing body was also appointed as the chair of the board of trustees at the MAT in September 2021.

The overall number of pupils on roll has increased since the previous inspection. At the time of this monitoring inspection, small numbers of staff and pupils were absent because of COVID-19.

Main findings

Leaders, governors and colleagues from the MAT have reflected carefully on the matters identified at the previous inspection. All accepted that there were some specific areas that needed reviewing. All acknowledged that there was more to do. Governors felt that the previous inspection had ignited discussions about how best to meet the needs of all pupils, especially those who do not always have seamless experiences in education. You have not delayed in taking steps to address the concerns raised. You have not allowed the pandemic to delay these improvements.

Since the previous inspection, you have adapted the school's behaviour management systems. You have created a new 'tiered' system for monitoring concerns about pupils. Pupils who have not met your expectations work their way through five different tiers of support. This is part of a new, graduated approach to supporting individual pupils. You also engage with local services to provide further bespoke support for individuals who require it. You also work with several qualified counsellors to provide support for pupils with their well-being and self-esteem.

You have placed a strong emphasis on praise since the pandemic, with staff training in place to help promote praise in all areas of the school. You have focused your approach on the school's core values of 'ambition, resilience and kindness'. You are aiming for the vast majority of pupils to identify as meeting the expectations of the school's student

charter. The pupils I spoke to were positive about their experiences of day-to-day behaviour in school. While the focus of this monitoring inspection was limited, the school site was calm throughout the time of this visit. Pupils told me that when incidents of poor behaviour had occurred, they were handled well by members of staff. They did not consider bullying to be a problem at the school.

The school continues to be a popular choice, and the number of applications for places for pupils in Year 7 has risen year on year. The number of applications for places far outnumbers the number of places available. However, despite this, you recognised the need to create better links with parents and carers and the wider community. To support this, you have appointed a number of community engagement officers to build and strengthen the relationships between school and home. These staff respond to concerns when they arise. Recently, they have also been in touch with parents of pupils in most year groups as part of your strategy to check that pupils are happy in school.

You discussed with me the way you now use internal data more strategically to help improve behaviour and reduce sanctions. For example, to address low-tariff issues that may result in sanctions, such as pupils forgetting planners and equipment, you track where issues are happening and engage with parents accordingly. As a result, you have seen a reduction in such concerns, and the number of associated sanctions has also decreased.

Some pupils do not meet your expectations for behaviour in school. However, the number of pupils accessing the school's internal isolation facility has decreased since the time of the previous inspection. From September 2018 to March 2019, 21% of pupils accessed the isolation facility at least once. For the same period in this school year, it is just under 15% of pupils. You monitor the use of this facility carefully and identify relevant trends and patterns to help pre-empt concerns.

You have also reflected on the way you deal with pupils who make mistakes more than once. When a pupil accesses isolation, they get an isolation 'increment'. Previously, these increments accrued throughout the year and led to further sanctions. However, you have changed this system so that pupils' increments are now reset every half-term. You have done this to help pupils move on from mistakes they have made earlier in the school year.

You have reviewed the purpose of the isolation room, and particularly the support available to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who access this area. For example, some pupils with specific needs receive more bespoke support in the new learning support centre. When spending time in the isolation area, pupils access daily mentoring support in an adjoining room. This allows them to reflect on their behaviour and helps to prepare them for reintegration to the classroom. Many of the pupils I spoke to who had accessed this facility were grateful for this mentoring support, and said that it usually happens daily.

The ongoing review of the isolation facility continues as you seek to ensure that the facility is viewed in a positive light by pupils. This is important. Since the previous inspection, you have removed the door locks to help ensure that pupils do not feel restricted. However, the majority of pupils spoken to on this inspection are under the impression that access into and out of the facility is only possible with key cards held by staff. Although I am satisfied that you have addressed this restriction on pupils' individual liberties, there remains a perception among the pupil population that it is not possible to leave the facility of their own free will. You are keen to address these concerns.

Leaders have reviewed the length of suspensions, where these are used. The number of days for which pupils are suspended has reduced. As a result, the total number of suspension days has decreased. However, the total number of incidents of suspension has remained stable. In line with your wider strategy to support more vulnerable pupils, there have been fewer suspensions for pupils with SEND. You note that some of the more recent suspensions were as a result of pupil dysregulation during and following the periods of partial school closure. You are aiming for the number of incidents of suspension to reduce further.

Pupils who are suspended are offered support to help them reintegrate back into school. You record these processes and the support offered. These records are known as 'interaction logs' and set out the support available to help the pupil get back on track. Where pupils are not successful, further support is identified. No pupils have been permanently excluded since the previous inspection. You are keen to explore all other options before considering permanent exclusion.

At the time of the previous inspection, three alternative providers were used. You now only make use of one facility, The Stephen Longfellow Academy. This provision is also part of the GORSE MAT. You are confident that this provision meets your pupils' individual needs. You feel that commissioning just one facility allows you to have better oversight of the progress that pupils are making.

At the time of this inspection, a total of 18 pupils from Years 7 to 11 are accessing this provision, all for various reasons. This is approximately half as many as at the time of the previous inspection. Most pupils attend this provision regularly. However, some do not. Currently, six of your pupils who attend alternative provision attend for 50% of the time or less. You are working with leaders at the provision to help address concerns about the attendance of individual pupils. This work is important and needs to continue.

I reviewed a sample of records that you keep for pupils who attend this provision. These records, known as internal 'wave' documents, are detailed. It was clear for me to see why pupils are there, what they are studying, and where discussions take place to review progress and consider reintegration back into the main school. Reviews of each pupil now take place every week. A dedicated member of staff, appointed since the previous inspection, visits the provider weekly to check on the pupils. Logs of these

visits are kept, and leaders use a matrix system for tracking and identifying when pupils are ready to reintegrate into mainstream school.

Several pupils have now successfully reintegrated back into school following their placements at this provision. You told me that this was not the case previously. I spoke with pupils who currently attend the alternative provision, and who have reintegrated back into school. I was encouraged to hear about their individual journeys and their perceptions of the work you have done to meet their individual needs. Having spoken to pupils and leaders, I am satisfied that your older pupils who use alternative provision are suitably supported with their next steps.

The chair of the governing body now approves every decision for a pupil to access alternative provision. You and other leaders are questioned and held to account before any decision about alternative provision is made. This is one way in which governors' oversight of behaviour strategies has been strengthened. Governors come into school regularly. You meet with the chair of the governing body every two weeks to provide an update on the work you have done since the previous inspection. It is clear from the minutes of local governing body meetings that governors' broader oversight is now a high priority. I noted also that a governor recently reviewed the checks that leaders make on the suitability of alternative providers, as part of a wider safeguarding review.

Other than pupils who have reached the end of Year 11, a small number of pupils have left the school since the previous inspection. This includes a very small number whose parents have chosen to educate them at home. Based on the evidence I scrutinised, which included information about pupils who have left the school roll since the time of the previous inspection, records of part-time timetables, and records of use of alternative provision, I found no concerning patterns or trends in this information. I found no evidence of off-rolling from the documentation reviewed.

Additional support

Leaders from the MAT have supported you and other leaders in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Leaders from the MAT conduct quality assurance activities on a regular basis. These are in addition to those conducted by members of the governing body. A new inclusion committee, part of the trust governance system, has also been established to oversee the wider provision.

You continue to use an independent school improvement partner to review aspects of school improvement. A recent focus of this support has been to review the provision in place for vulnerable pupils following the pandemic. You told me that the local authority will be conducting a routine safeguarding audit later this school year.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. I also met with the chief executive officer and

executive principal of the MAT, and with representatives of those responsible for governance. I met with groups of pupils, including those who have been subject to the school's sanction systems. I also spoke, by telephone, to leaders from The Stephen Longfellow Academy.

I toured the school site with a leader, and made two visits to the school's isolation facilities. I spoke with pupils who have spent time in this area. I also reviewed the school's records on the use of internal isolation, suspensions and placements at alternative provision. I also scrutinised the information on pupils who have left the school's roll.

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

Yours sincerely

James Duncan
Her Majesty's Inspector