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Jonny Mitchell
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Dear Mr Mitchell

Urgent inspection of Netherwood Academy

Following my visit with Michelle Farr, Lindsey Oyston and Gordon Watts, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 7 and 8 December 2022, I write on behalf of His 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 urgent inspections. The inspection was carried out because His Majesty's Chief Inspector wished to determine the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the school as concerns had been raised with Ofsted about the behaviour and attitudes of pupils.

We do not give graded judgements on urgent 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 graded inspection, which will be carried out under section 5 of the Act and be brought forward. If we have serious concerns, we will deem the urgent inspection as a graded inspection immediately.

Evidence

This inspection was unannounced. I spoke to you shortly before arriving on site. The inspection team met with you and several other senior leaders, including the designated safeguarding lead and the special education needs coordinator. I met the chair of the local management committee (who is also a senior employee of the trust). I also met with other representatives from the Astrea academy trust, including the chief executive officer. I spoke to a trustee by telephone. I also spoke to a representative from the local authority.

Inspectors spoke to several members of staff, including those with subject leadership responsibilities, teachers, non-teaching staff and early career teachers.

Inspectors spoke to several groups of pupils, including some who have received sanctions for poor behaviour. We observed behaviour throughout the school day, during lessons and at social time. We visited the school's two seclusion rooms. We visited the school's off-site provision for pupils who are at risk of exclusion.

The single central record was reviewed, in addition to other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We reviewed the school's records of incidents of poor behaviour, bullying, use of sanctions (including detentions and seclusions), suspensions and exclusions. We scrutinised the information on pupils who have left the school roll since the previous inspection in October 2021. We reviewed the school's attendance records.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance have taken effective action to improve behaviour and secure consistently positive attitudes to learning.

Main Findings

Leaders introduced a new behaviour policy in September 2022. This policy was introduced as a result of leaders raising their expectations of pupils' conduct. The school is currently in a period of transition as the new policy becomes embedded.

Pupils told inspectors that the day-to-day standards of behaviour in the school have significantly improved since the introduction of the new policy. They say lessons are disturbed less frequently. They say that they are less likely to witness poor behaviour in or out of lessons. During the inspection, the inspection team saw many lessons, which were routinely calm and purposeful. Although a small number of pupils appeared uninterested within lessons, incidents of low-level disruption were seen infrequently.

The new behaviour system has led to a sharp increase in the number of detentions. This has created some tensions with the school community. While some parents praise the higher standards introduced, others have been more critical of the changes. Some pupils, who routinely behave well, have become upset by receiving detentions for incidents, such as forgetting equipment. Others are receiving regular detentions for repeatedly forgetting homework or not arriving to school on time. Staff do not always talk to pupils to explore the reasons why this is happening.

Some pupils have taken time to adjust to the raised expectations. As such, the number of suspensions has risen rapidly. Inspectors noted that the rate of suspensions for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is more than double the rate for pupils without SEND within the school. Leaders do not fully understand the underlying causes for some of these matters. There is more to do to ensure the school's policies and procedures

are fully mindful of the needs of pupils with SEND. This is particularly the case for those with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs.

Staff are very positive about the new behaviour system. Many considered it to have provided much needed clarity on how poor behaviour is to be tackled. They valued the training you initiated before and throughout the implementation of the policy. Staff told inspectors that behaviour in school was more settled than it had been for several years.

Pupils told inspectors that they felt safe at school. Staff also considered pupils to be safe. Bullying occasionally happens, and when pupils tell staff, actions are taken as necessary. However, following this, staff sometimes rely on victims of bullying to raise further concerns, rather than proactively checking in with them on a regular basis.

Leaders regularly survey pupils to gather their views on life at school. When concerns are identified, leaders act on this information appropriately. This includes adaptations that have been made to the school's personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum. However, some pupils feel the school's PSHE curriculum could go further in developing pupils' understanding of the protected characteristics.

During the inspection, pupils from several year groups were learning about knife crime in assemblies. This is a planned aspect of the PSHE curriculum. The assemblies were delivered by an external visitor. The pupils in the assemblies were respectful and took the sessions seriously. The behaviour of pupils in PSHE lessons visited during the inspection was no different from the behaviour in any other lesson.

Leaders currently use two internal seclusion rooms. When a pupil is removed from a lesson, or when they return to school following a suspension, they are directed to either the 'reset' or 'reflection' room for a specific period of time.

In the 'reset' room, pupils work independently under the supervision of members of staff. The behaviour in this room was consistently settled during the inspection. The door to this room is always open. At the start of the inspection, inspectors observed that many of the desks in this room had been defaced with inappropriate graffiti. This matter was addressed immediately during the inspection. There was no other evidence of graffiti or inappropriate comments seen throughout the school site, including in toilets, changing rooms and other such areas.

In the 'reflection' room, although the environment itself is more welcoming, a locked door could have prevented pupils being able to leave the room of their own free will. The room was not being used at the time of this unannounced inspection. Leaders have decided to close this room with immediate effect. Pupils told inspectors that they can navigate around all other areas of the school site safely and freely.

As part of the strategy to reduce truancy and lateness, leaders have temporarily limited the number of toilet facilities open during lesson times. Pupils confirmed there is always a toilet available at all times of the school day. However, many pupils are frustrated that there are

limited toilets available to use at lunchtime. It was clear to inspectors, during the inspection, that these are well-founded frustrations. Other pupils remain confused about which facilities are available at different times of the day. You are fully committed to addressing these points.

In the previous school inspection in October 2021, it was noted that some pupils do not attend school regularly enough. This continues to be the case. The overall rate of attendance remains below the national average. The attendance of pupils with SEND is particularly low. Leaders have launched several new strategies to help improve rates of attendance. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of this work. However, there remains more to do to support pupils who struggle with the transition from home to school at the start of the day. Although the attendance leader receives guidance from the trust's attendance leader, this support needs to intensify.

You have raised your expectations about pupils arriving to school on time. As a result of new strategies, the number of pupils arriving late to school has halved in recent months. Arriving late to school results in an automatic same-day detention. However, where parents inform school about genuine reasons for lateness, detentions are not issued.

A notable number of pupils have left the school in recent months. Some of these have transferred to other schools. Parents of several pupils have opted to have their children educated at home, including a small number of pupils with SEND. While inspectors did not find any evidence of off-rolling, the number of pupils who have left the school is notably high.

A small number of pupils access alternative provision. This includes some who attend the school's new provision, which is based away from the main school site. This off-site provision is permanently staffed by four members of school staff. Safeguarding, behaviour and SEND leaders visit regularly. An inspector visited this provision and confirmed it to be safe and appropriately managed. Pupils access an adapted academic curriculum. However, they do not access the PSHE curriculum offered to pupils in the main school. There are also fewer opportunities for pupils at this provision to access careers advice and guidance.

Leaders' oversight of safeguarding is strong. Leaders make appropriate checks when appointing new staff. Staff receive regular training on local and national safeguarding issues. They are alert to pupils who may need support and know how to report concerns within school. Leaders act on concerns raised. They work well with other agencies, where necessary. However, a very small number of pupils feel they are not always listened to when they raise concerns.

The board of trustees have appropriate oversight of the school. Their work is complemented by a localised trust management board. Both groups are well informed about the school's improvement priorities. Additional scrutiny and support are provided from the executive team at the Astrea academy trust. School leaders are open and transparent with the information they share with trustees. Visits are made to the school to help validate this information.

However, prior to this inspection, no one with responsibility for governance or from the executive team had visited the school's off-site provision (which opened in spring 2022). There has been little dialogue about the attendance of pupils at this provision from the trust board or the management board. Furthermore, those with responsibility for governance do not routinely scrutinise records linked to the use of physical intervention, which is used very occasionally, and appropriately, at the school.

Additional support

Leaders from the Astrea academy trust work closely with school leaders. They make regular visit to the school to monitor school improvement priorities. Trust leaders are keen to work with school leaders on engaging more closely with parents and carers on school improvement priorities. School leaders work closely with external agencies, when safeguarding concerns arise.

Priorities for further improvement

- Leaders have introduced a new behaviour policy to help improve standards throughout the school. Because of this, the number of suspensions and detentions is currently high. The use of detentions for low-level concerns, such as forgetting equipment, is causing frustration for pupils, who otherwise behave well. Having now established expectations of pupils' behaviour, leaders should ensure the number of suspensions and detentions reduces.
- Leaders have not done all they can to consider the needs of pupils with SEND while implementing school improvement initiatives, such as the new behaviour policy. Pupils with SEND, and particularly those with SEMH needs, are being sanctioned more often than their peers. Their attendance to school is also lower. Leaders should review the reasons why this is happening, and ensure they address the source of such matters.
- Pupils who attend the off-site provision do not access a high-quality PSHE curriculum. They do not routinely have access to appropriate careers advice and guidance. This does not prepare them for life after school. Leaders should ensure pupils at the off-site provision have appropriate careers advice and access a comparable PSHE curriculum to the one offered to pupils in the main school.
- Some pupils are frustrated about the availability of toilets at lunchtime. This is causing unnecessary upset. Leaders should work with pupils to review the current arrangements in place, ensuring there is suitable access to these facilities.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Astrea academy trust, the Department for Education regional director and the director of children's services for Barnsley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

James Duncan
His Majesty's Inspector