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Dear Miss Lancefield

Urgent inspection of Ursuline College

Following my visit with Linda Culling, His Majesty's Inspector to the school on 27 September 2023, 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 the 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.

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. This inspection gave us no such concerns.

Evidence

We scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, executive leaders, including the chief executive officer, staff and pupils. I also met with the chair of governors and chair of trustees. I also had a separate telephone conversation with the local authority designated officer (LADO).

We also considered a range of other evidence, including leaders' assessment of safeguarding arrangements and records of safeguarding incidents, including actions taken by leaders. We reviewed policies and staff training materials relating to safeguarding. We checked how well these are understood by all staff. We also looked at planning of the personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum to understand how the school prepares pupils with knowledge around relationships and sex education and online and offline safety.

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

Safeguarding is effective

Main findings

Safeguarding pupils is a priority for you and your staff. Regular, expert training is provided so staff know how to identify the signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. The robust policies in place set out the steps all staff should take to raise concerns. Through recent additional training, staff have gained an increased understanding of the importance of maintaining a professional code of conduct. This has helped instil a culture of professional challenge where staff feel confident to raise concerns they may have about colleagues. You and your safeguarding team recognised that safeguarding processes needed to be more explicit when taking pupils offsite. Newly developed policies and training have been provided to support this.

Trustees and governors work in partnership to maintain a clear oversight of the school's effectiveness to safeguard pupils. Together, they work with executive trust leaders to identify and address any lapses in the interpretation of policies to safeguard pupils. Through a rigorous and swift internal review process, appropriate steps are put in place to address any concerns. There is a focus on ensuring similar issues are prevented from arising again in the future. Trustees and governors seek additional assurances through external reviews of their own processes, staff policies and training. This ensures an ethos of rigorous challenge and helps to assure leaders that they are successfully promoting a culture of safeguarding.

Concerns about pupils' welfare are clearly and promptly recorded. Leaders use these detailed records to identify and seek additional support for pupils who need it. Leaders work closely with professionals supporting pupils and their families. They maintain regular contact with all those involved in the care of pupils, to share and update information about pupils appropriately.

The school ensures it makes appropriate checks on adults who work in the school. Leaders comply with statutory requirements around recruitment. Staff who join the school receive a comprehensive induction programme. This includes training on how to follow safeguarding procedures and maintain professional boundaries. Leaders take measured and appropriate steps to manage allegations about staff, including working with the LADO and teaching regulators.

The school is reviewing its PSHE curriculum to ensure pupils develop an age-appropriate understanding of relationships and know how to keep themselves safe and healthy. Leaders know that some pupils still have gaps in their learning because of the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. These gaps are more evident in the older year groups. Currently, the curriculum has not been fully developed to identify and close these gaps. This means some pupils do not feel as well prepared for adulthood as they could be. While some training has been provided to deliver this curriculum, some staff still lack certainty in how to talk about more challenging topics. This means the curriculum is not implemented as confidently as leaders intend. You and your team are clear about the need to continue to review the intent and implementation of this curriculum.

Priorities for further improvement

- The PSHE curriculum is not fully developed. Leaders have not identified the important content they need pupils to recap and learn following the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, pupils have gaps in their understanding. Leaders need to rapidly review the curriculum and ensure that it is implemented effectively.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Southwark, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Payne
His Majesty's Inspector