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Nigel Bielby
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Dear Mr Bielby

Urgent inspection of Holmes Chapel Comprehensive School

Following my visit with Rachel Goodwin, Charlotte Oles and Sally Rix, His Majesty's Inspectors, and Mark Cocker and Kevin Sexton, Ofsted Inspectors, to the school on 12 and 13 October 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 was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the school, aspects of the quality of education, the behaviour and attitudes of pupils and the effectiveness of leadership and management at the school.

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

We scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We met with you, other senior leaders, groups of staff and

pupils. We also held discussions with the chair of the board of trustees and other trustees. We spoke with representatives of the local authority.

We considered local authority audits of safeguarding, minutes of the meetings of the board of trustees and behaviour and attendance records. We visited lessons and observed pupils on arrival, at form time and during breaktimes and lunchtimes.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Main findings

Leaders and trustees have an accurate and deep understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. Their open and reflective approach means that they have been successful in establishing a culture where pupils are welcomed and are safe. Pupils, including the most vulnerable, are appropriately protected from harm and educated effectively.

Leaders and staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding. They understand the potential risks to pupils' safety. Pupils benefit from age-appropriate opportunities to learn about forming healthy relationships, staying safe and making safe choices. The school has suitable systems to record and respond to concerns about pupils' safety. These systems ensure that pupils are well supported and that they receive the help that they need.

The school ensures effective oversight of safeguarding and child protection arrangements. Leaders work productively with the local authority and other external agencies to review and strengthen their policies and procedures. The school's safeguarding practices are well informed, embedded and used appropriately by staff. Trustees rigorously scrutinise, challenge and support this aspect of the school's care for pupils.

Leaders and trustees understand their statutory duties. They ensure that relevant policies are in place and implemented effectively. These guide school practice appropriately to ensure that pupils' welfare is always a priority, for example when supporting pupils' welfare through access to food, toilets and the protection of pupils' privacy.

The school sets appropriate expectations for pupils' behaviour. For the most part, pupils live up to these expectations. Most pupils attend school regularly and on time. Pupils usually behave well during form time and in lessons. They benefit from positive relationships with staff. Pupils follow instructions and engage well with learning. Low-level disruption in lessons is uncommon. Furthermore, most pupils behave well around school. They show respect to staff and to each other. Pupils calmly adhere to routines. They usually respond immediately and positively to staff's requests.

Occasionally, pupils' experiences are interrupted by the challenging behaviours of a few pupils. For example, at times, a few older pupils do not behave as well as they should

around school or in lessons. The school is alert to this behaviour. It is quickly challenged and pupils are supported appropriately. Pupils recognise that the school is taking action to tackle such incidents of poor behaviour, for example through the new systems and rules that are in place when pupils leave lessons or visit the toilet. Some pupils are frustrated by these changes. Even so, they acknowledge that behaviour has improved and that they feel much safer as a result.

Pupils are usually friendly and cordial to each other. The school carefully tracks incidents of bullying and other unpleasant behaviours, such as the use of derogatory and discriminatory language. These are relatively rare. When they do occur, most pupils feel that they have someone that they can speak to. The school takes instances of such behaviour seriously. They challenge and sanction perpetrators appropriately. They ensure that victims and perpetrators are well supported.

The school's curriculum is appropriately ambitious for all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). All pupils are encouraged to learn the full curriculum. In the main, pupils with SEND learn successfully alongside other pupils in lessons. A small number of these pupils have more profound needs. The school makes effective use of appropriate systems to identify and support the needs of these pupils as soon as they join the school. Where necessary, the school involves these pupils and their parents and carers in making open, transparent and justifiable decisions about the education that they are receiving. Occasionally, this means that for a few pupils, short-term intensive support for their needs is appropriately prioritised ahead of curriculum coverage. As a result, these pupils get the extra support that they require to help them with their additional needs. Where possible, this helps pupils to cover curriculum content and quickly gain the confidence to return to routine lessons as soon as they can.

The school ensures that staff are suitably trained to deliver the subjects that they teach. In the main, this means that pupils benefit from a curriculum that is delivered confidently and effectively. Furthermore, pupils are provided with activities that are well matched to the curriculum so that they learn what they should.

Pupils, including those with SEND, have confidence in their subject teachers. They enjoy learning. They value the support that they receive from their teachers, including support for examination preparation. This ensures that, in most areas of the curriculum, pupils typically learn and achieve well.

The school engages well with staff. Consequently, staff are well supported in their roles. For example, they benefit from relevant training that is delivered in such a way to minimise meeting time after school. This has a positive impact on the practice, workload and the well-being of staff.

The school invests in its engagement with parents. Most parents are happy with many aspects of school. However, a minority of parents are less satisfied about some areas. For example, some parents have concerns about how well the school provides support for

pupils with SEND and how well the school responds to parental concerns. Despite the range of suitable policies in place, some parents are not as well informed of the school's practices or approaches in these areas as they could be.

Additional support

The school has benefited from external support from the local authority. This has helped the school to undertake audits of the arrangements for safeguarding. This has secured an even stronger understanding of the areas of strength and the priorities for development in safeguarding policy and practice.

Priorities for further improvement

- The school should continue to strengthen its approaches to communicating and engaging with parents, including the parents of pupils with SEND.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Cheshire East Local Authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Pennington
His Majesty's Inspector