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Michelle Currie
Executive Principal
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Dear Ms Currie

No formal designation inspection of Walton High

Following my visit with Harry Ingham, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 8 June 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 about the behaviour and welfare of pupils at the school.

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 senior leaders, including the principals of each school site and the executive principal. We met with groups of pupils and staff, as well as representatives of the local governing body and board of trustees. We scrutinised documents provided by the school relating to behaviour, including policies and the school's logs of behavioural incidents and bullying. We made visits to lessons and spoke to pupils at social times.

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

Safeguarding is effective

Context

There are 2,780 pupils on roll, including 405 in the sixth form. The school operates across two sites, each with its own principal. There is an executive principal across both sites who is also the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust. A small number of pupils attend a registered alternative provision at the Bridge Academy. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above the national average. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is around average.

Main Findings

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding is a high priority. The policies and procedures to keep children safe are effective and securely embedded. Staff are trained effectively and know how to recognise the signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. If they have concerns, they report these in line with the school's procedures. Leaders treat safeguarding concerns seriously and look into them promptly. They put in place timely support for pupils and refer on to external agencies when appropriate. Leaders are proactive in analysing safeguarding data and taking action when they identify patterns. For example, they have recently placed a greater focus on peer-on-peer abuse through assemblies and the teaching of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. They have responded quickly to an increase in safeguarding concerns following the pandemic by growing the capacity of the pastoral team.

Pupils feel safe in school. They know that they can talk to an adult if they feel worried about something and most feel comfortable doing so. Leaders have made recent improvements to the way that PSHE is planned and taught across all year groups, including the sixth form. The new curriculum has been carefully considered and draws on the expertise of staff in school, as well as that of other organisations such as the local police. Although promising, these plans are not yet fully embedded. The changes to the curriculum, in addition to the impact of the pandemic, mean that several cohorts of pupils have missed out on some crucial topics and have gaps in their learning. Pupils are knowledgeable about the topics they have been taught. For example, they can talk confidently about aspects of fundamental British values, diversity, consent and online safety.

Behaviour in lessons is calm and focused. The atmosphere is supportive, so most pupils feel comfortable asking questions and engaging in discussion. At breaktimes or when moving between lessons, pupils' behaviour is orderly.

Staff have high expectations of all pupils. Pupils respond well because they have a clear understanding of what constitutes good behaviour in school and what is unacceptable. Leaders recognise that the pandemic has resulted in more pupils than usual struggling with their social skills. When pupils fall out, leaders intervene quickly and help them to resolve their differences so that disagreements do not escalate.

The number of more serious behavioural incidents is low, particularly considering the size of the school. Pupils say that bullying and discrimination are uncommon in the school, and this is supported by the school's own records of such incidents. When bullying or discrimination do occur, leaders investigate quickly and thoroughly. Leaders do not tolerate this behaviour and use sanctions appropriately, including the use of internal isolation where necessary. They ask pupils to reflect on their behaviour and to make amends with those affected. This usually prevents disagreements from recurring. Leaders keep parents informed whenever incidents occur.

Governors and trustees have a clear understanding of the school's work in relation to safeguarding and behaviour. They check that the school's safeguarding procedures are effective and ask questions if they require more reassurance. Governors review documents relating to safeguarding, including the school's safeguarding policy. Governors and trustees are knowledgeable about the work the school has done this year on behaviour and the PSHE curriculum. They discuss these priorities regularly in their meetings, providing challenge to leaders as appropriate. Governors understand and carry out their role in the school complaints procedure.

Additional support

Leaders engage with the local authority when necessary, for example in managing allegations against members of staff or making safeguarding referrals. They seek advice from the local authority where appropriate. Leaders recently commissioned an external safeguarding audit. Although the recommendations from this are minimal, leaders took these on board fully.

Priorities for further improvement

- Coverage of PSHE topics is inconsistent, particularly for some older year groups and where affected by the pandemic. Leaders should continue to embed their new PSHE curriculum, review its effectiveness and take action to fill any gaps in pupils' knowledge. This will help to ensure that all pupils are informed about important issues and feel well prepared for life in modern Britain.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Milton Keynes. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Ellison
Her Majesty's Inspector