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Mrs Karen Johns
Stopsley High School
St Thomas's Road
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Dear Mrs Johns

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Stopsley High School

Following my visit with Paul Copping, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 11 July 2017, 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 for the time you took to discuss behaviour in your school.

The monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with the no formal designation procedures. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and the behaviour of pupils in the school.

During the monitoring inspection, the circumstances relating to a critical incident were under investigation by the appropriate authorities. Ofsted does not have the power to investigate specific complaints relating to individuals. However, the wider concerns raised were taken into account when assessing the effectiveness of the school and its leadership.

Evidence

Inspectors looked at a wide range of evidence. This included the school's single central record, policies, and safeguarding and child protection documents. They took account of procedures and records linked to pupils' behaviour and attendance. Inspectors met with you, other senior leaders, staff, pupils and members of the governing body. I spoke, on the telephone, with representatives from the local authority about safeguarding, current investigations and the support they give to the school.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning were observed in lessons. Inspectors also observed their conduct around the school, outside of lessons, and at the start and end of the school day.

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

Leaders and managers are taking appropriate action to ensure that safeguarding is effective.

Context

The number of pupils on roll at Stopsley High School is growing. The school is now slightly larger than the average 11–16 secondary school. Just over half of all pupils are from minority ethnic groups. The number of pupils who speak English as an additional language is just above average and the number who are eligible for free school meals is slightly below. The number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or with an education, health and care plan is above average. At the time of the monitoring inspection, Year 11 pupils had left the school.

Teacher recruitment, in particular in mathematics and science, remains a concern for senior leaders as some vacant posts are yet to be filled with permanent staff.

Main Findings

You and other senior leaders, including governors, are very clear about the importance of safeguarding. Working together as a team, you understand your responsibilities to keep pupils safe. You have taken appropriate steps to make sure that the school site is secure during the demolition of the old building and as work continues to improve outdoor areas. Staff recruitment records are completed appropriately and meet statutory requirements. Staff training is up to date. Suitable systems are in place for checking on vulnerable pupils. It is evident that child protection matters are a high priority in the school.

Nevertheless, inspectors agreed that aspects of safeguarding administrative processes could be strengthened further. In particular, in ensuring that recording systems are consistent so that information is completed in sufficient detail across all aspects of concern. In meetings with staff, a few of them told inspectors that information about vulnerable pupils was not always shared and that they did not automatically receive feedback on the actions taken when they raised a concern.

You recognise that, prior to the move to the new building in January 2017, the delays occurring contributed to a dip in the good standards of behaviour noted at the previous inspection. Working together with your senior team, you have prioritised actions to address this. The recently revised behaviour policy is undergoing further checks to ensure that it reflects whole-school values and that the associated expectations of staff and pupils are clear.

During the monitoring inspection, some pupils said that they do not always understand the reasons behind the 'new rules' and that staff are not consistent in the way they use them. A few others felt that there is not enough recognition of typically good behaviour. In responding to this, senior leaders spoke about recent initiatives which focus on celebrating positive behaviour across the school. They were enthusiastic as they explained to inspectors about the new role of pupil well-being ambassadors. Currently, 40 pupils are being trained in readiness to take up this role in the new academic year. Leaders also highlighted the school information that shows the number of points, awarded through the rewards system, for positive behaviour has increased significantly this year.

Increasing expectations and hard-line approaches to poor behaviour are reflected in the high number of fixed-term exclusions this year. While these are linked to a small proportion of the whole-school population, the school's records show that, overall, the number of repeat exclusions are reducing.

Together, we discussed how some parents felt that they received insufficient information about the reasons why pupils were excluded and said that the actions taken were too harsh. Some other parents felt that interventions to address inappropriate behaviour were not happening quickly enough.

In the light of these differing views, we spoke about the draft version of the exclusion policy on the school's website. You agreed with me that it was open to different interpretations and that the processes need to be communicated more clearly, so that expectations of information, actions and timelines can be managed effectively.

We considered how arrangements for the supervision of pupils, between lessons and at breaktimes and lunchtimes, have been adapted as the school settles into its new surroundings. Pupils told inspectors that the closed-circuit television helps them to feel safe, alongside the knowledge that more staff, including senior leaders, are on duty outside of lessons. All the pupils that inspectors spoke with could name a staff member they could go to if they had any concerns.

In corridors, and around the school, inspectors noted that pupils' conduct was mostly calm and orderly. Movement back into lessons was generally brisk and managed appropriately. Occasionally, the boisterous corridor behaviour of a few pupils, including some inappropriate shouting, needed more intervention from staff. When this happened, not all pupils responded quickly enough and their conduct fell short of the high expectations set out in the school's values.

In meetings with inspectors, most pupils said they feel safe and have a good understanding of how to keep safe online. They told inspectors that the school is a friendly place and although bullying happens sometimes, most pupils felt that staff managed to 'sort it out'.

On the other hand, pupils had mixed views about the standard of behaviour in lessons. Often, their less positive views were linked to the quality of teaching and inconsistencies in teachers' management of the challenging behaviour of a few pupils. This was a particular concern in subjects where there was more frequent use of supply staff.

In recognition of the need to continually improve the quality of teaching and learning, you have taken steps to increase the accountability of staff at all levels. There is a particular focus on middle leadership and on improving outcomes for all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, this work is at an early stage of implementation.

Inspectors noted positive attitudes to learning in most lessons they saw but sometimes pupils drifted off task because they lost interest in the work set. Occasionally, low-level disruption escalated because teachers did not intervene to stop this quickly enough.

You have rightly placed a strong emphasis on ensuring that pupils attend school regularly and that they are punctual to lessons. Changes have been made to the way attendance and punctuality information is checked. There is now a greater focus on monitoring the attendance of different pupil groups to make sure improvement plans are working.

Overall, attendance is similar to the national average, but the persistent absence rate of a small group of pupils is still too high. This is of particular concern in the case of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Arrangements to check the attendance and progress of the small number of pupils who attend alternative programmes at a local pupil referral unit are effective.

Together, you and your senior leaders are ensuring that the curriculum builds on what pupils know about how to keep safe. This was clear during the monitoring inspection, when inspectors watched Year 7 pupils taking part in the timetabled well-being day. External speakers included representatives from the police and a range of other agencies. Age-appropriate workshops supported lively discussions about emotional, social, personal and health issues. The potential risks for young people in the wider community were considered in sessions led by police community support officers.

In our discussions, you and your senior leaders spoke about staff recruitment. You are fully aware of the need to reduce the number of supply teachers deployed. You explained how the school has struggled to recruit staff to vacant posts in national teacher shortage subjects, for example in mathematics and science. Appropriate strategies are in place to address this. However, securing suitable permanent staff will remain a high priority for senior leaders and governors as the school moves into

the new academic year.

Parents have raised concerns linked to an incident in the school in the spring term 2017 and a more recent critical incident away from the school site. Investigations are being completed by the appropriate authorities. In such circumstances, there are limitations to the information the school can share. However, the school's records confirm that swift action was taken to support pupils, families and the staff involved.

Understandably, incidents like these raise anxieties about the safety of pupils and staff. In this context, you agreed with me when I said that communication links between school leaders, staff, parents and the local community need to be improved. We discussed how this could help to avoid any perceptions that the school is not taking action, in particular to alleviate some of the concerns raised in complaints from parents.

We also spoke about the need to ensure that governors receive regular updates about any complaints received. We agreed that this should be part of routine reporting processes. This is so that senior leaders and governors can work together to resolve concerns and identify any trends to inform planning for further improvement.

External support

The school makes effective use of a wide range of external agencies to enhance and support the provision, including the police, youth workers, health professionals and the local authority. You continue to work with a local leader in education to learn from the good practice of a high-performing school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that there is greater consistency in the way staff manage pupils' behaviour so that all pupils are challenged appropriately to meet the high standards expected.
- Continue to improve pupils' attendance, in particular the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Improve the effectiveness of the way information is shared between senior leaders, governors, staff and parents, ensuring that all policies are clear and procedures readily understood.
- Improve further the consistency of the administration of safeguarding records.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Luton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Dick
Her Majesty's Inspector