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Dear Mrs Airoll

Urgent inspection of Southchurch High School

Following my visit with Charlie Fordham, His Majesty's Inspector and Susan Sutton, Ofsted Inspector to the school on 1 July 2025, 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 with regards to the school's handling of safeguarding concerns, including the management of staff allegations, the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), the increased number of pupils leaving the school and the impact of a new behaviour policy on the well-being of pupils 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, behaviour, individual support plans for pupils with SEND and records for pupils who have left the school. We met with the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, the trust leads for SEND, the trust lead for behaviour, the headteacher and the designated safeguarding leads for the school. We also met with groups of staff

and pupils. We spoke to a sample group of parents as well as leaders from local alternative provisions.

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

Arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Main findings

At the last inspection, safeguarding arrangements were effective. They remain so. Staff know pupils exceptionally well and readily report when they notice a cause for concern. Robust procedures and established practices enable the safeguarding team to take swift action to secure the help that pupils need. This includes pertinent liaison with external agencies. Staff receive ongoing training that covers the latest statutory guidance. Over time, the school has followed the expected procedures for the reporting of staff allegations and have acted accordingly. The trust reflects on its safeguarding procedures and processes. For example, it commissions an independent review when necessary to ensure that lessons are learned and acted upon. The school follows the required safer recruitment processes when they employ staff. Pupils feel safe on site.

The implementation of a new behaviour policy has caused disquiet within the school community. While the trust undertook a consultation process prior to the policy's implementation, it did not sufficiently reassure parents that the measures would not negatively impact their child's welfare. As a result, an increased number of pupils have left the school. This inspection found that the school has complied with the procedures required when a pupil leaves the school's roll. However, the school did not communicate effectively during these procedures. For instance, confirmation of pupils' removal from roll was not readily provided to parents.

Some parents remain unconvinced by the new expectations for behaviour. However, the teething problems experienced at the start of term have been addressed. Leaders have listened closely to the views of pupils. For instance, they discussed with pupils with SEND how they can improve the experience they have in the classroom. Pupils with SEND are in receipt of reasonable adjustment in lessons. These may include the use of resources such as fidget toys, pre-warnings to help them understand what is expected and help with the organisation of equipment. The school has introduced a welfare check in the mornings for pupils with SEND. This is so they have an avenue to express their worries about the day and to receive support.

The trust has reviewed the provision for pupils with SEND in the school. This includes strengthening identification procedures. The school is in the process of refining pupils' individual support plans so staff can provide the help pupils need. Where improvements to provision have been made, the pupils respond well and learn productively. This includes when they receive support for their literacy and reading needs. Staff are in receipt of ongoing training to help them cater for pupils' specific SEND needs. In key stage 3, pupils with SEND benefit from small, nurture-style classes. They receive individualised attention

and enjoy productive relationships with staff. Consequently, pupils with SEND are increasingly well supported.

Pupils are well behaved on site. The environment is calm and orderly. That said, pupils have mixed feelings about the new behaviour policy. They see the benefits of lining up before lessons, so they are ready to engage in learning. While some do not like the silent movement to lessons, others appreciate the orderly manner in the corridors. It provides a calm environment where pupils feel safe and settled. Pupils with SEND like the routine. Due to the smooth entry into class, lessons start promptly. Staff are pleased that they can now teach focused pupils who are ready to learn. The previous distractions in lessons are no longer seen. Staff and pupils report that there is a better learning environment than previously. However, some pupils remain frustrated by what they see as 'petty rules', such as the use of the school pen rather than their own.

Over the course of the summer term, more pupils have received detentions, time in isolation and suspensions. This includes pupils who may not have been in receipt of such sanctions before. This has upset some pupils, particularly those who view themselves as 'good pupils' who follow the rules. In some cases, they may not have completed what was required in the time given by the teacher. As pupils have adjusted to the new routines, they now know what to do and do so quickly and easily. The rate of these sanctions has substantially reduced as the term has progressed. There is now a small number of pupils who are in receipt of multiple sanctions. For those pupils who spend longer periods in isolation or have repeated visits, the work they receive is not well matched to the curriculum they follow in lessons. As a result, they find it harder to catch up on missed work, and gaps in their knowledge and understanding widen.

As part of its new behaviour policy, the school changed its procedures for toilet use. A number of parents expressed concern about the new procedures. The current toilet procedures present risks to pupils' mental and physical health. For example, some pupils deliberately limit their drinking throughout the day to avoid toilet use. While the school's policy allows pupils to go to the toilet during lessons, this action incurs a detention. In particular, the arrangements are not supportive of girls' needs. The school acknowledges that they have not got this part of the policy right. It has resolved to urgently review and amend the procedures.

Additional support

The trust has acted in response to the low outcomes that pupils achieved in their national examinations in 2024. From its evaluation, the trust has determined that behaviour was not where it should be for pupils to learn what they need to. To this end, it has deployed trust staff to work with the school. The executive lead, along with trust specialists for behaviour and SEND, have provided support to the senior leadership team. They have facilitated visits for pupils, staff and parents to see schools that run similar behaviour systems so they can see the impact it will have over the longer term.

Priorities for further improvement

- The school's communication about the changes it makes, as well as key processes and procedures in the school, is not sufficient to keep parents well informed. As a result, parents are left with questions and concerns. The school should review its methods of communication so that parents understand the school's improvement journey and are assured that pupils' interests are served well.
- Sometimes when pupils are removed from lessons, they undertake unsuitable work, such as repeating the same tasks. This means that pupils' learning slows, and they find it harder to catch up when they go back into lessons. The school should ensure that the work provided for pupils when they are removed from the classroom is appropriate, so they do not have gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of the Partnership Learning trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Southend-on-Sea. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Liz Smith

His Majesty's Inspector