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Mr Ricky Porter
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Porter

No formal designation inspection of Abbey Hill School and College

Following my visit with Mel Ford, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 21 and 22 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 the school's safeguarding arrangements. This was because concerns had been raised with Ofsted about the effectiveness of the school's leadership and management (including governance), and pupils' behaviour and attitudes.

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 met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the four assistant headteachers and other leaders, including those responsible for safeguarding. We met with two members of the governing body, including the chair. We also met with two representatives of the local authority.

We visited classrooms across a range of year groups. We met with groups of pupils and discussed their experiences at school. Some of these groups were same-sex groups.

We met with groups of teachers and support staff. In discussions with staff, we spoke about their safeguarding training and their understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities. We also discussed how staff manage pupils' behaviour and the support they receive from leaders to do this.

We scrutinised and evaluated various school documents, including a range of policies. We reviewed the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection. This included information linked to promoting safeguarding through the curriculum. Information about pupils' behaviour and welfare was also analysed. We considered responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and the free-text responses received during the inspection.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

There are currently 342 pupils on roll at the school. The school is made up of primary, secondary and post-16 phases. Pupils' prime areas of need are cognition and learning, and communication and interaction. There is an increasing number of pupils in school with social, emotional and mental health needs.

The school engages in outreach work supporting mainstream maintained schools across the local authority. The school uses two registered alternative providers and one unregistered alternative provider for a very small number of secondary-aged pupils.

Main Findings

In this school, safeguarding, and ensuring pupils' well-being, is everyone's business. The single focus of the safeguarding team has created a culture of safeguarding that underpins all aspects of school life. Leaders have established robust systems for identifying pupils' concerns or needs. The safeguarding team and staff monitor pupils who are causing concern with great rigour. Staff know what to do if they are concerned about a pupil's welfare. Leaders and staff work closely with external agencies to ensure that the needs of pupils and their families are met. Leaders have designed a personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum with the pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in mind. The PSHE curriculum builds pupils' knowledge of how to keep themselves safe, both in school and beyond the school gate, well. Online safety is a key feature of the curriculum.

Pupils say they feel safe in school because the staff care for them. Pupils named members of staff who they would go to if they were worried or concerned about something. Leaders and staff are aware of the additional risks that pupils with SEND may face. Those responsible for the leadership of safeguarding organise safeguarding training and regular updates for all staff. Training includes updates linked to government guidance as well as specific aspects, such as county lines. Governors are clear about their safeguarding responsibilities. The safeguarding governor assures herself that pupils are safe through information provided by school leaders and termly monitoring meetings with the designated safeguarding lead. Parents comment positively that their children feel safe when in school.

There is a calm atmosphere in the classrooms and around the school. Clear routines and high expectations of behaviour are embedded. Staff encourage pupils to behave as well as they can. Most pupils are engaged in learning activities. If not, staff encourage and support them to re-engage with their learning well. Positive, caring relationships exist between staff and pupils. Pupils value this and say that they are happy in this school. Staff know individual pupils well. As a result, they are alert to what might trigger a pupil's anxiety. Pupils have a clear understanding of the definition of bullying and the different types that exist. Pupils say that bullying hardly ever happens in school. They say if it does, staff will deal with it quickly and effectively. Parents speak positively about how the school manages behaviour and how any incidents of bullying, although rare, are dealt with by staff.

Leaders have established effective systems for staff to log behaviour incidents. Leaders analyse this information at an individual pupil level to decide if any follow up action is required. If there are concerns about a pupil's behaviour and/or well-being, staff refer these to the pupil welfare forum. Leaders, staff and other stakeholders then review and update the pupil's positive intervention plan. Leaders have created a personalised approach to managing pupils' behaviour needs. In addition, leaders monitor behaviour incidents across the school to identify any patterns or trends in pupils' behaviour, so they can respond accordingly. For example, leaders identified a noticeable increase in the number of behaviour incidents in a particular class. As a result, they put interventions in place that had a positive impact on improving pupils' behaviour and attitudes to their learning.

Staff know and use the multi-layered approach to supporting pupils' behaviour. This includes the help they get from the various behaviour support teams and systems within the school. Staff value this support, as well as the support they get from their phase-group colleagues. However, some staff would like senior leaders to be more visible around the school to support and promote positive behaviour. In addition, some staff comment that if they have been physically assaulted by a pupil, although protocols are followed, they feel that the personal element of follow-up care can be missing.

Leaders noticed that staff absence levels had started to increase due to the increasingly complex needs of pupils joining the school. Alongside behaviour management training, leaders recently launched a well-being strategy that reviews and renews the school's

approach to staff well-being. Very recently, leaders designed a well-being charter that is due to be reviewed by the new well-being champions before sharing with staff. Leaders acknowledge that the strategy is in the very early stages of development.

The recent appointment of additional assistant headteachers has strengthened the capacity of the senior leadership team. The presence and actions of the four assistant headteachers around the school is having a positive impact on pupils' behaviour, which in turn supports staff well-being.

Additional support

The local authority provides a broad range of support for the school. This includes termly visits from a school improvement partner and a two-day 'health check' in the summer term. The local authority provides ongoing advice and support linked to safeguarding. The inclusion support service also provides guidance linked to pupils with SEND, including providing additional training for support staff.

Priorities for further improvement

- Until recently, capacity in the leadership team was limited. This shortfall has been addressed through the recent expansion of the senior leadership team. However, many senior leaders are new to their roles. Established senior leaders should continue to provide support for the new senior leadership team members, so that they can have a greater impact on different aspects of school life.
- The staff well-being strategy is very new and in its infancy. Consequently, it is not yet having the desired positive impact on staff well-being. Leaders need to continue to develop the implementation of the well-being strategy, so that it promotes staff well-being more effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Wayne Simner
Her Majesty's Inspector