

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 8 November 2021 and 9 November 2021**

### **Context**

Since the previous inspection, there have been changes to the school's leadership. The former headteacher left the school. An interim headteacher and several other interim senior leaders were seconded to the school in August 2021 and left in October 2021. A senior deputy headteacher, who took up post in September 2021, and another deputy headteacher were appointed as acting headteachers in October 2021. Several associate assistant headteachers and an acting head of sixth form have recently been appointed. The governors are recruiting a new headteacher.

Governors engaged the services of education consultants to support the work of the school soon after the previous inspection.

On this inspection, inspectors focused on safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.

### **The progress made towards the removal of special measures**

Following the previous inspection, there has been a period of substantial change and some turbulence in leadership. In recent weeks, the acting headteachers have created a greater sense of stability for staff and pupils.

Leaders, including governors, have taken steps to improve safeguarding policy and practice across the school. They are drawing upon valuable and ongoing consultancy support to increase the capacity of the safeguarding team. Leaders have increased the number of deputy designated safeguarding leaders. This means that there are more suitably qualified staff to respond appropriately to safeguarding concerns.

Leaders have provided staff with better access to and more frequent safeguarding training. Leaders check regularly that staff understand their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding. They check that training makes a difference. Leaders provide staff with regular updates so that all are alert to the potential risks pupils may face.

Leaders have introduced new systems for recording safeguarding and behaviour concerns. Staff are familiar with these systems and use them confidently. When concerns are raised, there is greater awareness among staff about the actions that will follow, and who will be involved. Staff are positive about the improvements brought by these systems, including the immediacy of leaders' response to referrals. Typically, staff report to feeling 'safer and part of the bigger system'. They said that referrals 'no longer disappear into the ether'.

Leaders have been proactive in consulting with pupils about the prevalence of sexually related behaviour in the school. Leaders conducted a survey to find out pupils' views and experiences around harmful sexual behaviour as well as any other safeguarding concerns. Around 500 pupils contributed. Leaders are taking on board pupils' responses and, where

necessary, addressing any specific concerns raised. Leaders are putting in place a range of initiatives for pupils to report incidents and to have access to support when they need it. Pastoral and safeguarding teams are beginning to work together to identify when pupils are at risk and need further support. A high proportion of behaviour and safeguarding concerns relate to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). As a result, leaders plan an imminent review of provision for these pupils.

The school's mental health team is being re-structured under new leadership. There are credible plans in place to expand the support for pupils' mental health and well-being. Leaders, including governors, are working closely with staff and outside organisations, including the local authority, to increase pupils' access to professional services such as counselling and social care. Over 70 volunteer sixth-form students have signed up to receive mental health first-aid training. Pupils in Year 10 are now working as peer buddies to pupils in Year 7, after receiving appropriate guidance and training. They work with pupils to help them settle into the new routines and expectations in secondary school. They know what to look out for if a pupil might need more support from an adult in school.

Leaders are promoting the ways in which pupils can report concerns. Pupils now have more places and people to turn to if they are worried about something. Pupils are familiar with, and welcome, leaders' new initiatives to ensure that pupils have five adults in school they can speak to – 'the helping hand'. Students in the sixth form feel that staff are now much better at asking about their well-being. But some pupils are less confident about reporting concerns. For example, they said that they might prefer to speak to an adult that is not one of their teachers. Some pupils would like more information about what might happen after they have shared a concern, including how confidentiality is assured.

Leaders have revised the school's behaviour policy. They have trained staff so that everyone is clear on leaders' raised expectations of pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. Staff use the new systems to report any incidents of poor behaviour. Leaders oversee these behaviour records and identify where support is needed for pupils and staff. Pupils commented that since the previous inspection, behaviour has improved, especially in lessons, because they feel teachers follow the school's policy more rigorously. Changes to school routines mean that pupils are quicker to settle in class and their conduct in the corridors between lessons is generally more orderly. However, new behaviour expectations are in the early stages of being implemented. Low-level disruption continues to occur on occasions and behaviour in the busy corridors and stairways is sometimes over-exuberant.

Leaders have developed personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education which incorporates relationships and sex education (RSE). They have introduced timetabled lessons for all year groups. Leaders have chosen a published scheme to inform their planning of the PSHE and RSE programmes. Leaders are working with specialist staff and external agencies so that their curriculum plans fit the context of the school. Leaders are working to ensure that pupils gain knowledge and understanding of the protected characteristics, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships. Leaders are

providing training and support for PSHE and RSE teachers in order to increase their confidence in delivering lessons, especially with regard to more sensitive themes. These plans are in the very early stages of implementation and review.

Leaders are seeking and acting upon pupils' views. Leaders are using this feedback to inform the planning and delivery of PSHE and RSE. The absence of a well-planned PSHE curriculum in the past led to gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Leaders have listened to pupils' views about what should be covered and when. For example, older pupils said that subjects such as consent, online safety and harmful sexual behaviour should be covered further down the school.

Pupils appreciate the improvements made to the PSHE and RSE programmes. They are insightful about ways these subjects should develop further in order to be more informative and relevant to them. Pupils would like more opportunities for discussion and to work with a consistent group to build up trust and discuss more sensitive topics. Pupils said there are clear messages in school about not engaging in certain behaviours, such as vaping. They would like more guidance on coping mechanisms when facing stressful or traumatic situations.

Governors have reviewed their ways of working, so that they are better placed to ask the right questions and hold leaders to account. They are more outward looking, including for their training and development. Governors are working increasingly with other schools and advisers to develop their understanding and systems of governance. Governors know that they need to manage carefully any changes to the school's leadership arrangements in the future. Governors are clear about how any changes must build on the improvements that leaders have made so far.

Leaders are considerate of the additional staff workload that has come with the rapid changes made since the previous inspection. The majority of staff who completed the survey and those who spoke to inspectors said that they enjoy working at the school. They appreciate the steps leaders take to boost staff morale and support their work-life balance. Leaders are setting up a forum to identify further actions needed to support staff's mental health and well-being.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Embed the new systems for the recording, analysis and response to safeguarding and behaviour concerns.
- Develop the processes for listening to and acting upon pupils' views, especially regarding access to support services and the planning and implementation of the new PSHE and RSE programmes.
- Formulate and implement a rapid and effective response to the upcoming review of the school's provision for pupils with SEND.
- Ensure that all staff, including leaders, are well supported to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

## **Additional support**

Leaders have a positive working relationship with the local authority. School leaders value the local authority's support in key areas such as safeguarding advice and guidance. School leaders work closely with external agencies, such as social care, in responding to any safeguarding concerns about adults or pupils.

Ongoing consultancy support has contributed substantially to the improvements already made to safeguarding and behaviour in the school since the previous inspection. Work with consultants is building leaders' capacity to implement and sustain further improvements.

## **Evidence**

The inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised a wide range of documents. They held meetings with the interim headteachers and other school leaders, the chair and other members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority, the school's consultants, groups of pupils from most year groups including the sixth form, and groups of teaching and non-teaching staff. An inspector toured the school accompanied by one of the interim headteachers. Inspectors visited some lessons. They observed pupils' behaviour at the start and end of the school day, at break time and lunchtime and between lessons. Inspectors held informal conversations with pupils and staff.

Inspectors considered the responses to surveys completed by staff, pupils, parents and carers. The facility for parents to leave written responses to the online survey, Parent View, was not available due to a technical issue. Correspondence from parents was taken into account.