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Mr Chris Wade
Huish Episcopi Academy
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Dear Mr Wade

No formal designation inspection of Huish Episcopi Academy

Following my visit with Tracey Reynolds, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Jenny Maraspin, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 12–13 November 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. 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 aspects of the effectiveness of leadership and management (including governance), the behaviour and attitudes of pupils, and the personal development of pupils.

Evidence

We met with you, members of your senior team and the designated safeguarding lead. We met with pastoral leaders, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), groups of pupils and the chair of the trust. We also spoke on the telephone to a local authority officer, the school improvement partner and the headteacher of the alternative provision that a small number of pupils attend. We scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We considered 110 replies to Parent View, the online questionnaire for parents and carers.

We scrutinised a number of additional documents, including governors' minutes of meetings, local authority safeguarding audits, and attendance and exclusion records. In addition, we looked at e-safety information, behaviour records, health and safety records, and information relating to alternative provision. We examined the case files of selected pupils. We observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and

during breaktimes.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Huish Episcopi Academy became an academy in 2010. It was judged to be good in 2017. The majority of pupils are from a White British background and the proportion who speak English as an additional language is below average. The school currently has 1,483 pupils on roll, 168 of whom are in the sixth form. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is similar to the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is just above the national average. The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is below the national average. There are sizable cohorts of pupils who either join the school or leave it at other than the usual transition points.

Main findings

You have worked diligently to improve the policies and practices in place to safeguard pupils. This includes updating the security of the school site. You have not sought to make excuses for some of the shortcomings in the past and have welcomed external scrutiny. Staff have worked proactively with the local authority and with community groups, such as Stand Against Racism and Inequality (SARI), to establish a shared understanding of safeguarding concerns. Staff have received appropriate child protection training in accordance with the school's policy and the latest guidance from the Department for Education.

You have made initial strides to strengthen the pastoral system to meet the needs of pupils more effectively. Pastoral leaders meet regularly to check, discuss and act on concerns in a timely manner. Staff are aware of the pupils who are vulnerable so that they can check on their welfare. Staff know how to report a concern and the signs that they need to be alert to.

Leaders are responsive and supportive when staff raise concerns about pupils. Referrals are managed promptly, and leaders take appropriate action. Leaders have recruited additional staff recently to support pupils' emotional and mental well-being and to work with vulnerable pupils and their families.

When necessary, staff liaise with external agencies. However, they feel frustrated, at times, that they have not been able to secure the support that they feel pupils need. Yet, when external support is not as timely as it should be, staff do not always follow this up carefully enough.

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths of the school, as well as

the areas that need further development. However, the school's improvement plan lacks precision. It does not focus closely enough on the barriers to learning that pupils face and how leaders' actions will address these. This is particularly important for disadvantaged pupils, who do not make the progress that they should. It is not clear when leaders check the impact of actions so that they know that their strategies are effective.

Governors, too, consider safeguarding a high priority. They have recruited governors who have expertise in this area and discuss safeguarding issues at every one of their meetings. There are regular meetings between staff and the designated safeguarding governor. Governors monitor attendance rates and behaviour incidents. For example, they have looked carefully at the use of racist or derogatory language at the school. They have updated their training, including on e-safety, so that they have the knowledge to support and challenge leaders effectively.

Governors recognise that they need to work positively with staff to build a culture of trust. They acknowledge that they are not as incisive as they need to be. Sometimes, they do not make sure that there is conclusive evidence of the impact of leaders' actions. To this end, they are currently discussing their governance structure and how they can ensure they have an objective and strategic view. They know that the lines of accountability are not clear enough at trust and governor level. This issue is not yet resolved. Nonetheless, governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities fully.

You base the culture of the school on clear expectations and fair consequences to help pupils to make positive choices. Pupils behave well in their classes and, typically, focus on the task in hand. They are happy to talk about what they are doing and comply with teachers' instructions. Yet, at times, they lose focus and do not take the initiative for their learning.

Teachers who are new to the profession say that these clear expectations have helped them to manage pupils' behaviour effectively. Pupils say that they have modified their behaviour because they know what the consequences will be.

Corridors are busy but orderly and pupils respond positively to teachers' instructions. The majority of pupils move purposefully around the site although there are a few who are tardy as they move to their next lesson.

It is common to see positive interaction between staff and pupils, and between pupils, during break and lunchtimes. Pupils say that staff supervise them well during these times. Pupils feel that staff care about them and want them to do well. Pupils, including pupils with SEND, can identify a member of staff to whom they would go if they had any worries.

Leaders monitor and track behaviour incidents, but this is not yet strategic enough for leaders to detect patterns and emerging issues. At times, the information about

subsequent actions lacks the detail needed to make sure that there are no future incidents for pupils.

The SENCo knows pupils and their needs very well. She has detailed support plans in place for them. For example, staff enable pupils to access the full range of trips and visits safely. However, there is a lack of strategic oversight of the causes or patterns of behaviour and the use of exclusions that would be helpful to inform planning. Some parents do not feel that staff are meeting their children's needs well.

You have developed support for pupils who find behaviour expectations difficult to manage. This has moved onto the school site so that pupils who access this provision are at the centre of the school. As you stated, it is important that such pupils are not on the 'periphery'. As a result, some pupils are attending school more regularly now. Although this is a safe space, not all pupils receive the specialist input they need to complete the qualifications that will improve their opportunities at the end of Year 11. Leaders are currently exploring ways to support pupils to access a wider suite of qualifications, alongside the pastoral support required.

You consider exclusion to be a last resort. When you use this sanction, governors scrutinise the evidence carefully to check that pupils have received appropriate support prior to this course of action.

A small number of pupils attend alternative provision. Through regular visits and reports, leaders are aware of how pupils' needs are being met and the progress that they make.

The testimony of pupils and the majority of parents who responded to the online survey, Parent View, show that they do not consider bullying to be a particular issue. Pupils can identify the differences between bullying and pupils being 'mean'. However, some pupils say that they have experienced bullying. Some pupils feel that staff deal with these concerns well. Other pupils say that action is not always speedy enough when they report an issue. Teachers are alert to the use of racist and derogatory language and discriminatory behaviour. Pupils know that staff will not tolerate this.

Leaders have made changes to the curriculum so that pupils can reflect on a wider range of issues relevant to their personal development. Pupils are aware of the risks in their local area and know how they can keep themselves safe, including when using social media.

Pupils regularly discuss issues to help them become active and responsible citizens. For example, pupils in key stage 3 talk about self-image and self-esteem and think about how they can eat healthily. Pupils in key stage 4 discuss the British justice system, as well as the dangers posed by those who might try to influence them with extreme views. In the sixth form, students have an extensive understanding of

equality and diversity and are aware of the issues facing them, both in their community and if they choose to move away. They debate important social issues and say that others respect their opinions.

Leaders have thought carefully about how the curriculum will contribute to the different strands of pupils' personal development. However, there is a lack of coherence to the different elements of the programme. While staff have put together the initial plans and resources, the lack of an overarching vision means that there are gaps in content coverage and overlaps that are not identified.

There are effective systems in place to monitor attendance. The attendance officer works with pastoral staff to follow up reported absences, particularly where pupils might be at risk. Pastoral staff have a detailed knowledge of individual cases of absence. However, the rates of absence remain slightly worse than what is typical nationally, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders do challenge absences and support pupils who do not attend as regularly as they should. Even so, there are pupils whose rates of attendance pose a significant challenge for leaders.

External support

The school has worked with the local authority and external agencies over time. More recently, it has worked with an external organisation to receive enhanced support, training and advice. Leaders have taken advice to ensure that they resolve complaints and deal with allegations against staff appropriately. Leaders have also commissioned safeguarding reviews from an external consultant. This has enabled them to improve their practice.

Priorities for further improvement

- Leaders should sharpen school systems to identify emerging patterns and formulate precise plans to monitor the impact of their actions, including for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.
- Leaders should develop a more strategic oversight of the new curriculum so that it fully develops aspects of pupils' personal, social and health education.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Somerset. This letter will be

published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah McGinnis

Her Majesty's Inspector