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Mr Paul Dick
Headteacher
Kennet School
Stoney Lane
Thatcham
Berkshire
RG19 4LL

Dear Mr Dick

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Kennet School

Following my visit with Matthew Barnes, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 13 to 14 June 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring 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 at the request of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, in order to check the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the school.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and a wide range of other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. They considered leaders' records of pupils' attendance and behaviour. They met formally with you, the designated safeguarding lead and groups of staff and pupils. Inspectors also spoke informally to groups of pupils at breaktime, and to a small number of parents of Year 7 pupils. The lead inspector met the chair of directors and the safeguarding director, as well as three members of the local governing body, including the chair. The lead inspector also spoke to the head of children and family services for West Berkshire on the telephone.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Kennet School is an above-average-sized secondary school for pupils aged 11 to 18. It converted to an academy in April 2011 and is the lead school in the Kennet School Academies Trust. The school has 1,698 pupils on roll, including 308 in the sixth form. It includes specialist resource bases for pupils who have hearing impairments and physical disabilities. A higher proportion of pupils than is typical nationally have a statement of special education needs or an education, health and care plan. The percentage of pupils who are supported by the pupil premium is approximately half the national average. A similarly small proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic groups or speak English as an additional language.

Kennet School was inspected under section 5 of the Education Act in May 2016 and judged to be outstanding. In February 2017, a serious case review was published by West Berkshire Local Safeguarding Children Board relating to the prosecution of a former member of staff from Kennet School for historic sexual offences against children.

Main findings

This inspection was carried out without notice. Inspectors contacted the school, to announce the inspection, 15 minutes before arriving. The positive way that you and your team responded to this inspection demonstrates the open culture you have established and developed in your school. The ethos of putting pupils' welfare at the heart of the school's work is palpable. Staff are trained well and are highly vigilant in their work to help keep pupils safe.

You and your deputy headteacher lead a staff team which has high aspirations for your pupils, both academically and pastorally. You have established a community where pupils feel safe and well supported by the adults who care for them. The house system and the pastoral support team provide layers of care that meet the needs of individual pupils very well, enabling them to focus on their studies and achieve academic success. Pupils know who they would speak to if they had any concerns, and feel confident that staff would support them if they needed help with situations that worried them. Information about key staff to contact if needed, both within and beyond school, is readily available to pupils and their parents. A small number of parents of Year 7 pupils who spoke to inspectors at the start of the inspection expressed very positive views about how quickly and easily their children had settled into the school. They said that they trusted staff to deal with any issues they may need to raise.

Staff and governors receive helpful and comprehensive training which meets requirements and is appropriate to their role in school. Experts from beyond the school support the designated safeguarding lead effectively to deliver this training, providing an added dimension to the staff's understanding of emerging 'hot topics' and pertinent issues. The designated safeguarding lead ensures that staff have easy

access to a wide range of relevant documents that support their training, starting during their induction to the school. Staff express absolute clarity about what to do if they have a concern about a pupil, and describe well-rehearsed routines for seeking support and guidance from the designated safeguarding lead where appropriate. They understand their specific responsibilities relating to reporting any suspected cases of female genital mutilation directly to the police. The designated safeguarding lead keeps a careful check on staff training, providing 'top-up' training as required. This leader issues regular updates to all staff about individual pupils for whom there is concern, as well as providing emerging information about topical issues for staff to be aware of when carrying out their work. Staff challenge each other readily about their understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities, which contributes to the strong culture evident in the school.

Pupils are accepting of each other's differences, and are rightly proud of the inclusive atmosphere in their school. This is demonstrated powerfully by how seamlessly pupils from the specialist resource bases integrate into the school community, while having their individual needs met. Sixth form students described to inspectors how having specialist provision based at the school influences positively their understanding of diversity within the wider community.

Pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe through a layered approach to personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. Leaders review the PSHE curriculum regularly to check that it meets the needs of specific groups of pupils appropriately. They show a well-developed awareness of local issues which are particularly pertinent to pupils in the school, such as mental health and domestic violence. The effective teaching of PSHE throughout the school ensures that these needs and issues are considered carefully.

Pupils behave extremely well towards each other, because of adults' consistently high expectations. Staff and pupils share a clear understanding of the systems in place in the school for dealing with instances of behaviour which do not meet these high standards. As a result, the number of incidents involving poor behaviour in the school is small and reducing over time. Serious behaviour incidents are rare. While systems and structures for managing pupils' behaviour are clearly defined and understood, leaders recognise that this information could helpfully be brought together more coherently, particularly in relation to bullying and the use of physical restraint. This would help staff to access this information even more promptly and inform governors' monitoring of this aspect of the school's work. Broad plans to achieve this development are in place but have not yet been put into action.

Leaders monitor pupils' pastoral needs carefully, and respond promptly to any concerns that may arise. This begins with close tracking of pupils' attendance, of which the school has high expectations. Most pupils attend school very regularly, with fewer pupils persistently absent from school than is seen nationally. Disadvantaged pupils and those who are looked after do not currently attend school as regularly as others. Leaders make daily checks, particularly on pupils they

consider to be vulnerable, and take effective action where needed to get pupils back into school. As a result, the percentage of pupils absent from school is well below the national average, and leaders have aspirations to reduce this figure further.

Leaders' strategies for monitoring the health and well-being of pupils are similarly well developed. Record-keeping has been reviewed and refined, so that it is more rigorous than in the past. Staff refer any concerns, no matter how small, promptly to the designated safeguarding lead, and use established systems to record their concerns. This enables the designated safeguarding lead and her pastoral team to monitor and support effectively those pupils for whom patterns of concern begin to emerge. Pastoral leaders review referrals from staff frequently and routinely. They put prompt and personalised support in place to ensure that pupils, particularly those who are potentially the most vulnerable, are kept safe and supported well. They work effectively and in a timely way with experts from beyond the school to provide useful additional support to pupils and their families. Records of this work are suitably detailed and stored securely, while being readily accessible to those who need them. This enables pastoral staff to work efficiently together for the benefit of the pupils.

Governors and trust directors demonstrate a strong focus on safeguarding that underpins the school's culture. All governors and directors have undergone helpful additional safeguarding training during the past year, including the recent staff training run by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). A number of governors and school leaders have undergone safer recruitment training to add extra rigour to staff recruitment procedures. Governors describe clearly how their practice has developed as a result of this training. They demonstrate a well-developed understanding of safer recruitment strategies employed by the school. This is borne out by recent improvements to how leaders check and record information about newly appointed staff, which have added rigour to recruitment practice and to the quality of information that is recorded about staff.

Governors hold leaders stringently to account for their work to keep pupils safe. A designated safeguarding governor representative from the local governing body works alongside school leaders to check the quality of safeguarding arrangements in the school. This governor challenges leaders in response to the findings of externally verified audits. The trust has recently put a safeguarding committee in place, led by a suitably experienced designated safeguarding director. Although in its infancy, this committee aims to work closely with local governing body members across the trust to monitor and develop further the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, based on the findings of external reviews. Regular discussions as standing items at senior leadership, local governing body and trust meetings ensure that the effectiveness of safeguarding rightly remains a continual focus for school leaders.

External support

You, your deputy headteacher, governors and trust directors review constantly the quality of the school's safeguarding arrangements. For example, you check the quality of safeguarding arrangements annually through an audit carried out by governors and submitted to the local authority. Colleagues from another local school also carry out a peer review to validate school leaders' judgements. In addition, the Local Safeguarding Children Board monitors regularly the school's progress with the recommendations of the serious case review. Leaders consider carefully the findings from these activities, adapting the school's procedures where appropriate, so that the quality of safeguarding arrangements remains as effective as it can be.

Leaders and governors work increasingly closely with colleagues from the local authority. The deputy headteacher and another school colleague are representatives on development groups coordinated by the Local Safeguarding Children Board. This enables leaders to review and share their effective practice with colleagues from beyond the school, and to contribute to the ongoing development of safeguarding services and practice across the local authority.

School leaders use experts from beyond the school to ensure that staff training is of very high quality. For example, in April 2017, the NSPCC worked alongside your deputy headteacher to deliver staff training, linked closely to aspects of safeguarding which were the focus of the serious case review. This training was viewed as highly effective by a range of staff, who recognised how their awareness and practice have improved further as a result.

Priorities for further improvement

- Bring together the range of written behaviour management guidance available to staff, particularly in relation to bullying and physical restraint, so that it supports leaders and governors in monitoring the effectiveness of practice more efficiently.

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

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Moles

Her Majesty's Inspector