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Mr Gavin Ball
Executive Headteacher
The Kings of Wessex Academy
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Dear Mr Ball

No formal designation inspection of The Kings of Wessex Academy

Following my visit with Steven Colledge, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 10 and 11 October 2017, 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.

Evidence

Inspectors looked carefully at safeguarding and child protection policy and practice, including the quality of record-keeping and the impact of work with other agencies. In addition, an inspector scrutinised the single central record and other documentation related to the safe recruitment of staff. Inspectors met with the executive headteacher and with other leaders. The lead inspector also met with a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a separate meeting was held with the lead governor for safeguarding. Inspectors held discussions with various groups of pupils and students, both formally and informally, and met with members of staff, including ancillary and support staff. Inspectors visited lessons, tutorial sessions and a Year 9 assembly. The lead inspector scrutinised the curriculum planning for citizenship and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and records of quality assurance. The school improvement plan was also considered. The lead inspector reviewed the 112 responses made to the online survey, Parent View.

Inspectors scrutinised a range of other documents including governors' minutes, an external review of safeguarding and academy and trust-wide safeguarding policies. They also looked at records of attendance, bullying, racist incidents, fixed-term exclusions and behaviour. In addition, inspectors considered the effectiveness of risk assessment procedures and arrangements to ensure that pupils undertaking work experience are kept safe. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school, including at the start of school, at break and lunchtimes, and during the changeover times between lessons. An inspector also visited the inaugural meeting of a multi-agency group of lead professionals (known as 'team around the school'), and a meeting of the sixth-form Senior Student Team.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

The Kings of Wessex Academy is one of eight schools that make up the Wessex Learning Trust, which was formed in May 2016. When the Kings of Wessex Academy was last inspected, in March 2015, the overall effectiveness was judged to be 'good'. Following the retirement of the previous headteacher, a new executive headteacher was appointed from 1 September 2017. At the same time, two new deputy headteachers were also appointed. Since the time of the previous inspection, there have also been several changes to leaders of subject areas. A new role to support student welfare was established from January 2017. During December 2016, works to provide new perimeter fencing and to improve site security were completed.

The Kings of Wessex Academy is a secondary school of average size which caters for pupils from ages 13 to 18. There are currently 993 pupils on roll. Almost all pupils are of a White British background and the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is very low. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well below average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ensuring that safeguarding and child protection arrangements keep pupils safe

The school has a well-regarded track record for pupils' academic achievement and success. Despite this, leaders and governors recognise that many stakeholders, particularly a proportion of parents, have expressed concerns about the emphasis the school places on pastoral provision and on support for pupils' health, welfare and well-being. The new executive headteacher is resolute in his determination to develop a vision for the school which provides for the 'whole child', while sustaining its reputation for academic success.

The new leadership team's evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for development is accurate and perceptive. They are establishing a clear direction of travel, informed by the views of pupils, parents, staff and the wider community. They rightly recognise that change will entail a significant cultural shift from an institution predicated on academic achievement, to one which also has a greater focus on pupils' pastoral needs. For example, during the inspection the first of a series of multi-agency meetings of lead professionals took place (known as 'team around the school') and this represents a valuable first step in raising the profile and effectiveness of support for potentially vulnerable pupils at the school.

However, as leaders rightly recognise, there are some important weaknesses in how effectively they are able to realise this ambitious vision. These weaknesses reduce leaders' ability to work strategically and, instead, risk a short-term focus on managing aspects of the day-to-day operation of the school. For example, considerable information about pupils' attendance, behaviour, exclusions, bullying and other incidents is currently collected and recorded, often in simple lists. At present, too little useful analysis is carried out using this information. This means the school is not able to understand clearly how well its approaches to managing these aspects actually work. While this does not put pupils at risk, it does act as a barrier to more rapid improvement. It also reduces governors' ability to hold leaders to account for the effectiveness of the school's provision.

Nevertheless, leaders are taking action to develop a more effective pastoral provision. New leadership has energised staff, encouraged innovation and brought fresh ideas. They are developing a more effective approach to sharing a range of information about pupils so that staff are better able to meet pupils' needs throughout the school. However, leaders acknowledge that this new drive does not yet have a secure underpinning of rigorous improvement planning, linked to clear milestones and measurable targets. The current improvement plans, inherited from the previous leadership team, do not match new leaders' priorities well.

Governors are committed to and are highly supportive of the school. They visit the school regularly to meet with staff and talk to pupils about school life. The safeguarding governor provides useful challenge of the school's approach to keeping pupils safe, including checks on safer recruitment records and a scrutiny of safeguarding policy and practice. However, while governors hold a generally very positive view about the impact of safeguarding and welfare arrangements, this is not thoroughly checked against a range of evidence to judge the overall effectiveness of safeguarding.

There are only a very small proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Nevertheless, these pupils receive effective support that helps them to be successful in school and a close eye is kept on their well-being and welfare. This starts with ensuring a successful transition from pupils' feeder schools. The work of the trust in providing for pupils from the age of two to 19 is increasingly gathering momentum. For example, recent training for staff from

schools across the trust has helped teachers to provide better support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Arrangements to ensure safe recruitment of staff are robust and accurate. Risk assessments, including for trips and visits and after-school activities, are complete and up to date. An accurate first-aid record is also kept, although there is limited systematic analysis of this information in order to identify patterns in the incidents that do occur. All staff receive regular updates and training in safeguarding and child protection. As a result, members of staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and how to respond in the event of concerns or a disclosure.

The school's approach to managing and escalating referrals of concerns about children is rigorous and effective, with good-quality record-keeping. Leaders follow up robustly any concerns which are raised with external agencies, such as social care. A close eye is kept on any attendance issues which may indicate safeguarding concerns, including in the sixth form. Partnership working with schools across the trust is an increasingly effective feature of the school's safeguarding practice. Systems to deal with any allegations against staff are fully secure.

In the sixth form, there is an effective focus on students' welfare and on safeguarding issues. Students' attendance is checked in each lesson, and they must sign in and out of the school at times when they are allowed to do so. The suitability of work experience placements for Year 12 students are also checked for any safeguarding concerns. Students who mentor younger pupils are trained to understand their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding. However, as in other year groups in school, although attendance data in the sixth form is used well to spot individual issues, it is less well used strategically to plan improvements.

Leaders acknowledge that pastoral support in the sixth form needs further development. Students are sometimes confused about who they would turn to with specific concerns or worries, although they value support from their tutors and other trusted adults. Leaders are working to broaden provision for students' personal development, welfare and well-being, including for mental health. Some encouraging early steps have already been taken in this direction. For example, in the previous academic year, staff developed a programme of 'mindfulness' to meet the needs of a small number of students. This year, leaders are adapting this in the light of feedback from the first group of students.

The citizenship and PSHE programme in Years 9 and 10 is well planned and taught, although some pupils feel they would like more time in their timetables for these lessons. Pupils enjoy PSHE because teaching develops discussion well and there are opportunities to explore sensitive and challenging issues. Leaders ensure that planning in PSHE links well with the curriculum in other subjects and is adapted to take account of learning from safeguarding and pastoral issues. Year 11 pupils say the PSHE programme they receive is too limited and that they would like more opportunities to learn about issues relevant to them. A planned programme of year-

group assemblies supports the PSHE programme well, although the daily tutorial sessions vary considerably in their effectiveness. Pupils feel these tutorial times are less relevant and engaging, and are too dependent on the skills and commitment of individual tutors. Currently, the tutorial programme lacks enough coherence with the stronger citizenship and PSHE curriculum. Leaders recognise there is more work to do to align the tutorial and PSHE programmes and to make better use of a wider range of themed days and external input to support both aspects.

In the sixth form, there is a similar programme of tutorials, assemblies and themed events, including contributions from external speakers. However, as in Year 11, there is no formal PSHE curriculum. Students say they would welcome a broader and more varied programme, although they value highly the help and support provided for career choices and for applications to universities and other courses. Students make an effective contribution to school life, with the majority of students volunteering to undertake a variety of additional roles. Through the Senior Student Team, the sixth form leads various charitable and social events. However, more could be done to use this and other routes to seek the views of students about school life and the impact of decisions that affect them.

Pupils who spoke with inspectors were positive about school and about their relationships with their peers, with staff and with other adults. They all feel their school is friendly and welcoming, including those who joined the school after the start of Year 9. At break and lunchtimes, at the start and end of the school day, and in the movement between lessons, corridors and open spaces are calm and orderly. The school canteen – including on a wet day during the inspection – is a pleasant space where pupils enjoy socialising happily together. Pupils typically manage their own behaviour well, and staff supervision is low-key and unobtrusive.

Pupils believe bullying is rare and are confident staff will deal with issues effectively. There are few incidents of racism, homophobia or other instances of discrimination, and most pupils believe staff will tackle any such behaviour quickly. Pupils feel their biggest concern is the misuse of social media and mobile devices, particularly where issues happen outside of school, but affect relationships inside. Pupils understand the risks associated with this and the school works hard to educate pupils about the risks and consequences. The school has taken robust action where issues have come to light. Pupils know there are adults they can trust and turn to with concerns or worries they may have. However, they are unclear about where they would go to seek specific support about their health, welfare or well-being, including those linked to mental health, for example. This includes students in the sixth form.

Overall attendance is broadly average, although there are higher levels of absence in Year 11 and for some groups of pupils, such as pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Levels of exclusion are typically below average, and most arise from a few pupils' refusal to cooperate, or for behaviour that persistently falls below the school's expectations. Nevertheless, pupils say that there are some instances of low-level disruption in lessons and these are not always

dealt with consistently by staff. They are sometimes frustrated that disturbance to learning recurs without being tackled effectively. Leaders recognise that some pupils are not responding to the existing approach to managing their behaviour. They acknowledge that the curriculum and pastoral support needs to be adapted to cater for a very small minority of pupils for whom the school currently does not meet the needs of well.

External support

Leaders commissioned an external review of safeguarding in October 2016. This provided valuable feedback about where safeguarding practice could be improved. Nevertheless, while some issues have been tackled – including site security, sixth-form access and improved fencing – others remain. Improvements to the Year 11 PSHE programme and to the strategic leadership of attendance, for example, have not been fully resolved.

Priorities for further improvement

- Strengthen the range and impact of provision for pupils' well-being, health and welfare, including for mental health.
- Ensure that the systematic analysis of information about pupils' attendance, behaviour, exclusions and other indicators is used to support more effective strategic leadership and accountability for these aspects.
- Improve the impact of approaches for managing pupils' behaviour in order to further reduce instances of low-level disruption to learning.
- Improve the consistency and quality of tutorial time throughout the school and further develop an appropriate PSHE programme for Year 11 and for the sixth form.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Northern
Her Majesty's Inspector