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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Mr Toby Rutter
Principal
Outwood Academy Hemsworth
Wakefield Road
Pontefract
West Yorkshire
WF9 4AB

Dear Mr Rutter

No formal designation inspection of Outwood Academy Hemsworth

Following my visit with Eleanor Belfield, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 1 March 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 was concerned about how leaders were managing the behaviour and attitudes of pupils at the school.

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 a section 5 inspection immediately.

Evidence

We met with the principal, associate principal and other senior leaders, groups of pupils from each key stage, including a group of sixth-form students, and a selection of staff employed in different roles in the school. We also visited lessons in a variety of subjects, visited the reflection room, met with a group of pupils who had received fixed-term suspensions and scrutinised documents showing the decision-making process behind the issuing of different sanctions. We spoke informally to pupils and members of staff at social times. We toured the school during lessons and at lunchtime to look at the general culture, climate and quality of relationships between adults and pupils.

Context

Outwood Academy Hemsworth opened as a new entity within the Outwood Grange Academies Trust on 1 May 2018. The predecessor school was called Hemsworth Arts and Community Academy. There are close to 1,000 pupils on roll. The school serves an area of considerable deprivation. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. A broadly average proportion of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The principal is currently the principal of this academy and the associate executive principal acting as interim principal until the new incumbent takes up their role in another academy within the Outwood Grange Academies Trust.

Main findings

When the trust took over the school in May 2018, there was much to do. Pupils were 'voting with their feet' and over half were persistently absent. Initially, the approach taken by the trust led to very high levels of suspensions. In 2019/20, for example, nearly a quarter of pupils received a fixed-term suspension. Since then, the numbers of suspensions have declined steadily. Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND are now far less likely to be suspended. This reflects leaders' determination to be inclusive and to try and meet the needs of all their young people. The trust's policies and procedures are steadily raising expectations. Standards of behaviour and pupils' attitudes towards education are improving.

Although the overall direction of travel is positive, there remains plenty to do. Leaders acknowledge that the standard of behaviour is not yet where they want it to be. It is clear that their work has been hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic. The school has had 18 partial closures, and staff absence due to COVID-19 has been high. In December 2021, 35% of staff were absent, with the English department being affected the most. The frequent use of supply teachers has undermined efforts to maintain high standards of behaviour. The frequent disruptions have made it more difficult to establish normal routines and expectations. All the groups of pupils that we spoke to said that a small minority of pupils are disrespectful and misbehave when taught by supply staff.

We found the school to be largely calm and orderly, despite it having no internet connection or phone lines during the inspection. Lessons were purposeful. We saw positive, friendly relationships. Most pupils take care with their work. Standards of presentation were impressive. Topics were being covered in depth and detail. Older pupils said that behaviour has improved since the trust took over. However, in discussions, some pupils told us that a small minority of pupils regularly misbehave and disrupt lessons. Some pupils were frustrated by these disruptions and the loss of learning time. Some sixth-form students were unhappy that their lessons are sometimes disrupted by the same pupils when they are removed from their lesson due to their poor behaviour and placed in other classrooms. This is termed 'matrix'. Some pupils who continue not to follow the behavioural expectations have to attend the

reflection room. Typically, this involves spending a half-day working in a booth, segregated from others. These pupils receive breaks and lunch, but remain segregated at these times. They are provided with work. If they cooperate and complete the sanction, they return to lessons following that period and are booked in to complete a half-day in the reflection room the following day. Pupils know the system and understand it. Most accept it as fair. For most pupils, it is an effective deterrent. However, a small minority of pupils regularly spend time out of lessons having received a sanction for their behaviour. Some are not deterred and regularly progress from one sanction to the next. For some, the sanctions set out in the trust's behaviour policy are not an effective deterrent.

Leaders have recognised that sanctions alone are not enough. They have put in place other, alternative interventions designed to teach pupils how to manage their more challenging behaviour. We saw examples of some pupils being withdrawn from lessons to be taught about the importance of good behaviour, respect and responsibility. The principal describes the approach as a 'behaviour curriculum'. It is not yet clear whether this alternative approach is having the desired impact. Further work is needed to evaluate whether pupils on this programme are developing more positive attitudes.

Some pupils told us that bullying happens occasionally, but is not widespread. Most pupils said that they trusted staff to sort it out if they reported it. The school has several transgender pupils. There is a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender-plus (LGBT+) group. Some pupils said that they had experienced some identity-related bullying in the past, but that this had now reduced or stopped. The school has recently been awarded the Inclusion Quality Mark. There are good arrangements in place to provide counselling support for pupils who need support with their mental health.

The trust's behaviour policy states that staff 'will make reasonable adjustments for students who find it difficult to meet our expectations. Where patterns of misbehaviour are presented, the school will endeavour to discern if there are any factors impacting on the student's decision-making and take a judgement about suitable consequences or support.' As part of the inspection, we talked to some pupils and staff and looked at records of when sanctions had been applied. There was no evidence that permanent exclusions or fixed-term suspensions were being used disproportionately. However, there was evidence that, at times, reasonable adjustments were not being made for vulnerable pupils, such as those with SEND or those who are looked after by the local authority. Furthermore, some pupils perceive that the use of sanctions can escalate quickly and that staff do not take time to stop and talk in order to de-escalate the situation.

Most staff and pupils told us that the general climate and culture in school had improved. Pupils are well supervised at social times, both in the cafeteria and halls where they eat and outside where they socialise. There is little litter around the site. Staff have tightened up and raised expectations about how pupils tidy away after their lunch. Cafeteria staff reported most pupils to be polite and pleasant. Pupils did tell us that they regularly hear bad language. Some reported hearing homophobic language

and language that was sexually offensive. Leaders are aware that, despite their efforts, this is yet to be eradicated. Incidents of derogatory language are logged, and action is usually taken. However, some older students reported that some staff turn a blind eye and do not take action when younger pupils use inappropriate language directed towards them.

Additional support

Outwood Grange Academies Trust has considerable capacity at senior leadership level to support the school.

The school is working closely with the local authority. Leaders participate with the local inclusion panel to try and reduce the number of permanent exclusions in local schools. The school participates in managed moves to try and give pupils at risk of permanent exclusion a fresh start. More pupils have joined the school than have left in the last year through this process. Most managed moves into the school have been successful.

Priorities for further improvement

- Further develop alternative strategies to improve the behaviour of a minority of persistently disruptive pupils. This is likely to require more bespoke and tailored approaches. Leaders should check whether these alternative approaches lead to further reductions in the use of sanctions.
- Staff making decisions about sanctions should better exercise reasonable adjustments, as the trust's behaviour policy requires, particularly for pupils who are more vulnerable, such as pupils with SEND and those looked after by the local authority.
- Ensure that the curriculum does more to educate pupils about the negative impact of derogatory language and ensure that staff are consistently vigilant in challenging it.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Outwood Grange Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wakefield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector