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Mr Hugh Bellamy
Executive principal
South Dartmoor Community College
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Dear Mr Bellamy

No formal designation monitoring inspection of South Dartmoor Community College

Following my visit with Sue Frater, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Paul Garvey and Paul Winterton, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 12–13 July 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Please pass my thanks on to all pupils, staff and governors involved in the inspection.

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 because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and related aspects of the effectiveness of leadership and management (including governance) at the school.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and the school's child protection arrangements, including the key policies. Inspectors met with you and other senior staff, the designated safeguarding lead, a group of subject leaders, a group of teachers, a group of teaching assistants and five groups of pupils, including a small group of sixth form students. Inspectors also had many informal discussions with pupils around the site at the start and end of the day, at break and lunchtimes and in the times between lessons. They also met separately with the chair of the governing body (who is also chair of the trust's board of directors), the lead governor for safeguarding and a parent governor. I also spoke with the head of education and learning in the local authority.

Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents related to safeguarding, curriculum documents, minutes of meetings, records of behaviour and other incidents, analysis of information on pupils' attendance and achievement, records of exclusions and the external reviews of safeguarding and behaviour in the school.

One inspector spent much of his time in the communication and interaction resource base. He talked to staff and pupils and looked at records, including those for the use of restraint in the unit. He spent time with the school's special educational needs coordinator and visited lessons to observe pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.

Inspectors also evaluated provision in: the on-site learning enrichment centre for pupils with low literacy levels; 'The House', an on-site unit for highly vulnerable pupils who otherwise would be at high risk of exclusion; and in 'Bright Beginnings', a centre for pupils who find crowds difficult at break and lunchtimes.

Inspectors also made visits with senior staff to a number of tutorial sessions and visited lessons, including in practical subjects. They talked to pupils about what they were doing and looked at their work.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time safeguarding is effective.

Context

The school is much larger than the average-sized secondary school, with a large sixth form. A lower-than-average proportion of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding), although the school takes many pupils from areas with significant rural poverty. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and the proportion whose first language is not English is much lower than average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with the national average. The school includes a specialist resource base, known as the communication and interaction resource base, for pupils who display autistic spectrum disorders. The school includes a much higher-than-average proportion of pupils who join at times other than the start of Year 7; often mid-year.

There has been no change to the school's status since the previous inspection in November 2013 that judged the school to be good. The current head of school, who was previously the deputy principal, took up this new post in January 2016. There have been no other significant changes to the school's leadership. The school does have some difficulties in recruiting staff in subjects where there are national shortages.

Inspection findings

Safeguarding arrangements are effective. The school leaders and governors ensure that the safeguarding policy, arrangements and monitoring all meet statutory requirements and keep pupils safe. As a result, pupils are safe, feel safe, say they are safe and know how to keep themselves safe. There is a very inclusive and caring culture in the school that ensures that pupils, including those who are most vulnerable, are looked after well. Great care is taken with those with the greatest needs.

The governing body monitors the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements well. Governors are well trained and have good expertise to support school leaders, including the designated safeguarding lead, and provide challenge when necessary. The chair of governors maintains a good oversight of safeguarding and is supported well by other governors. The designated safeguarding governor works closely with the school's designated safeguarding lead to check that procedures are up to date and fully adhered to.

The designated safeguarding lead reports to the full governing body meeting about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements every six to seven weeks and is held to account robustly and well. He also meets with the safeguarding governor regularly to keep a close check on how well procedures are applied. This process leads to actions and improvements in the arrangements, such as in the recording and follow-up to incidents involving the restraint of pupils and how to reduce these incidents. School leaders apply their philosophy of continuous improvement rigorously to all matters relating to keeping pupils safe and well cared for. Safeguarding has a high priority for all staff in the school.

The leaders' and governors' own monitoring was supported by an external review of safeguarding. This endorsed the school leaders' own evaluations and led to no significant recommendations for improvement; a few minor alterations included making sure that cleaning staff have access to a printed copy of procedures. This external review reflects another aspect of the school's philosophy: being open to external scrutiny and learning from the experience.

The school's safeguarding and child protection policies are fully up to date and meet all statutory requirements. The single central record is complete, up to date and fully compliant with all requirements. The designated safeguarding lead provides very strong leadership and is held in high regard by senior leaders and by staff. He has the authority, training, time, support and resources to undertake the role highly effectively. He works closely with the special educational needs coordinator to ensure the safety of particular potentially vulnerable pupils.

Staff training is assiduous, frequent and thorough so that all aspects of safeguarding are well understood. Teaching and support staff say that 'no detail is missed'. As a result, there is good practice across the school. Staff are highly

vigilant and 'keen to put the training into practice'. The formal training is supplemented by regular updates on specific aspects, and in response to changes in statutory guidance and requirements and the outcomes of the school leaders' own monitoring of safeguarding arrangements. Safer recruitment procedures are followed diligently. The well-being of any pupils identified by senior staff as potentially vulnerable is very closely monitored formally three times each week by senior leaders and performance (pastoral) leaders.

Pupils behave safely, sensibly and well in lessons and around the site; their behaviour around the site is often impeccable. The use of fixed-term exclusions has reduced markedly over four years. There has been no permanent exclusion in the last two years. The findings from the inspection fully support those of the external review of behaviour. Pupils follow safe working practices in practical subjects, such as science, design and technology, and physical education. They can explain these practices and why they are adopting them. Good safe-working routines are well established. In some of the design and technology workshops, space for practical work is very tight. A group of Year 7 pupils was observed using a range of hand tools and, although finding it difficult to find sufficient space to avoid getting in each other's way at times, they worked sensibly and safely. The limited space introduces an element of risk that the teacher fully understands and does everything possible to mitigate.

Pupils report that they feel safe and that there are no 'no go' areas on the site. They know how to report incidents, such as of bullying, and do so in the confidence that they will be dealt with swiftly and effectively on the rare occasions that they occur. Pupils have a good understanding of the wide range of aspects of keeping themselves safe including risks to their health, safety and well-being, such as internet safety, risks of abuse and sexual exploitation, the risks associated with sexting, and the use of drugs. This is covered well in the formal curriculum used in 'tutor family' (mixed aged groups) meetings and assemblies. Older pupils appreciate the opportunity to have discussions in their mixed age groups, but also the year group assemblies that allow treatment at a level matched well to their greater maturity. Inspectors observed pupils in Years 8, 9 and 10 really caring for the Year 6 pupils, on an induction week, who will be 'part of the family' in September 2016. This fostering of excellent relationships between pupils of different ages is, in part, responsible for the excellent behaviour around the school site.

An audit of the whole curriculum led to good, well-coordinated coverage of issues concerned with pupils' safety and welfare, as well as their understanding of British values and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is also supported further through the school's global links with other schools.

Sixth form students speak highly of the assemblies that cover topics related to their safety, welfare and well-being at an appropriate level, given their maturity. They spoke very positively about an assembly on the school's 'Prevent' duty and how to avoid radicalisation and deal with extremism. Students also report that there is a

very good system for detecting potential mental health concerns and providing support. This includes good early detection through self- and peer-referral and good training for teachers to spot early signs. The students are confident that they can discuss any concerns with their tutors.

Pupils in the communication and interaction resource base (CAIRB) are safe and cared for well. Pupils in the CAIRB are included in the thrice-weekly meetings of senior staff for vulnerable pupils in the school. Following some concerns about the records of the use of restraint in the CAIRB, school leaders introduced a new and improved reporting and recording system. The leaders' and governors' response was thorough and effective. Governors monitor the new arrangements frequently and carefully. There have been two incidents of the use of restraint since this time. These show that the new recording arrangements are working well, although some small revisions are still needed, as is accepted by leaders. Currently, all records are not kept in one central place, making retrieval and analysis more difficult. Although parents and pupils are fully involved in the follow-up to the incident and recording is thorough, some training is required for staff to use more precise and 'technical' language in the records and to ensure that the follow-up with pupils, parents and staff is recorded in more detail. Lessons have been learned about alternatives to the use of restraint and how to use 'de-escalation' strategies. External guidance and support to develop these strategies has also been sought and acted upon. These strategies have been used with some success, are recorded well, and reflected upon so that further lessons can be learned and applied. The school policy on the use of restraint is currently not entirely consistent with the new arrangements.

Pupils who attend the school's on-site learning enrichment centre are well looked after and kept safe. This is a centre for pupils currently in Years 7 to 10, but will be extended to Year 11 next year. Most of the pupils in the centre are younger and are 'not yet ready for secondary school'; mainly those with low literacy levels, but often with social and personal skills that need further development. Pupils spend some of their time in the centre and time in some lessons, based on their individual needs. Older pupils spend less time in the centre but, for example, have additional literacy support in place of some lessons. The social, personal and emotional skills of these pupils, as well as their self-confidence and self-esteem, are developed well. They are carefully prepared to spend more time in lessons and increasingly do so.

The few pupils who attend 'The House' are safe and protected well. This on-site unit provides a very safe environment for highly vulnerable pupils who otherwise would be at high risk of exclusion and/or likely not to attend school regularly. The unit also hosts the internal 'exclusion room' that provides a safe place for pupils who need some time out of lessons.

'Bright Beginnings' provides a very safe and valuable place for some pupils who find crowds difficult at break and lunchtimes. The time these pupils spend in this centre gives a good chance for the teaching assistants working there to check up regularly on these pupils' welfare.

Pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan are very well looked after in their specialist provision and in mainstream lessons. Teachers keep a close eye on these pupils and they are given a lot of encouragement and help to become fully involved. Teachers often direct questions to these pupils and give them the first chance to respond to points they want to raise with the whole class.

The school makes very little use of off-site provision. Currently, two pupils spend some of their time elsewhere. The school leaders are relentless in checking that these pupils are safe when they are not in the school.

The inclusive nature of the school and leaders' principle of 'never giving up on pupils' means that the school has admitted and retained significant numbers of highly vulnerable pupils. Many of them join the school at different times of the year in all year groups. Most arrive with records of poor attendance, persistent absence and poor attitudes to learning and to teachers. This often means that these pupils' progress is slow at the outset and their attainment is low. School leaders and teachers work hard to improve these pupils' attitudes, attendance and, eventually, their attainment, although this often remains low. The support they receive means that they have a safe and secure base in school. Many progress to appropriate post-16 courses in further education, training or apprenticeship. School leaders take great care to ensure that these pupils are kept safe and are well informed about risks to their safety, health and welfare. School leaders track these pupils' progress and compare the data with that for other groups of pupils. However, they do not systematically analyse the impact of the actions they take on improving these pupils' attendance, the time they are able to attend lessons and other indicators of the success of these actions.

The latest analysis of Parent View, Ofsted's online parent survey, shows that 80% of parents recommend the school. High proportions of those who responded say their children feel safe and are well looked after in the school.

External support

The school's leaders and governors are very open to external scrutiny. They invited the local authority to undertake a full review of safeguarding arrangements and arranged an external review of pupils' behaviour. They also maintain close links with the local authority and work closely with primary and secondary schools in the area and more widely. The school also has extensive links with schools around the world and uses these well to widen pupils' understanding of global issues, other cultures and faiths, and the need for effective interrelationships.

Priorities for further improvement

- Align the school policy on the use of restraint with the changed procedures; and more precisely record the follow-up with parents, pupils and staff.

- Undertake more detailed evaluation and analysis of the impact of the actions taken to support the most vulnerable pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner, the director of children's services for Devon and the Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

James Sage
Her Majesty's Inspector