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17 July 2018

Mr Paul Ramsey  
Headmaster  
Verulam School  
Brampton Road  
St Albans  
Hertfordshire  
AL1 4PR

Dear Mr Ramsey

### **No formal designation inspection of Verulam School**

Following my visit to your school on 3 July 2018, 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 because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the school.

### **Evidence**

I met with you, other senior leaders and five members of the governing body and I scrutinised the single central record of recruitment checks of staff and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. I met with two groups of pupils and visited a number of lessons, including your internal exclusion room, to observe pupils' attitudes to learning. I also met with a selection of staff to evaluate their understanding of safeguarding and child protection procedures.

I met the designated lead person for safeguarding and her deputy to discuss your systems for managing safeguarding, and together we reviewed your child protection files.

I also evaluated the quality of your recruitment procedures.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

## **Context**

The number on roll is 1,147. The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school. The majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average. The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is below average. A below-average proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities attend the school. The proportion of pupils who have a statement of SEN or an education, health and care plan is also below average.

The school plans to join the Alban Academies Trust from September 2018. A deputy headteacher has gained promotion at another school from September 2018 and a replacement has been appointed. You have also appointed a new business manager. A new senior leadership team structure will come into effect from September 2018.

## **Safeguarding**

The school's single central record of recruitment checks of staff is regularly monitored by leaders and governors to ensure that it is kept up to date. Any minor administrative flaws identified during this inspection were very quickly remedied before I left the school. Personnel records are well maintained.

Your recruitment checks are thorough. You closely adhere to your recruitment policy, typically requesting references before you shortlist candidates. Your recruitment documentation and activities are comprehensive and thorough and reflect your commitment to the safeguarding of children.

Staff are well trained in matters relating to safeguarding and have received and read all of the essential documentation. They demonstrated a strong awareness of how to recognise signs of abuse and neglect and were clear about the procedures they should follow to raise their concerns. Your safeguarding policy is compliant with current requirements.

Your designated safeguarding lead and her deputy are knowledgeable and skilled in their areas of responsibility. Child protection records I scrutinised are well maintained, with chronological details of actions and the involvement of external agencies, and they record details of any resolutions. Records are kept safe and secure. A medical needs policy for pupils is now in place and is being implemented effectively.

As a school, you responded with great urgency to the findings of the previous section 5 inspection in October 2017. Your statement of action astutely identifies proposed actions to address the areas of improvement. Progress in carrying out these actions and demonstrable success have been suitably recorded on the plan as part of your rigorous monitoring procedures. Undoubtedly, the findings around safeguarding identified in the previous inspection were taken very seriously, and you have been proactive in identifying any weaknesses and in strengthening your management of

safeguarding in the school.

You have rightly taken on board the findings about pupils demonstrating discriminatory behaviour, particularly towards people who lead alternative lifestyles. An assistant headteacher has received training from Stonewall, an organisation which provides information and support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities and their allies. You are providing training on diversity to all members of staff at the start of the autumn term. Pupils have had specially planned assemblies to tackle homophobia and you have amended your personal, health, social and economic (PHSE) education programme to include a unit on understanding the LGBT community. You have also staged an assembly on the theme of feminism, an important topic in a school which is predominantly providing an education for boys. Additionally, the physical education department also delivered an assembly on homophobia in the world of sport. You have redefined your anti-bullying policy to include aspects of homophobic bullying and have circulated this to all parents at the school. Pupils told me that although they still hear the word 'gay' being used as an insult, this is becoming much less frequent, and they are confident that teachers and other members of staff would tackle the misuse of this word if overheard. Your 'Stonewall' plan of action also identifies your intention to introduce an LGBT group from September so that these pupils can meet regularly and discuss any areas of concern. Posters around the school drawing pupils' attention to the rights of the LGBT community are also having a positive impact.

You have sought to more readily listen to pupils' concerns about feeling unsafe in the school. Following the inspection you arranged one-to-one sessions with all pupils in Years 7 to 9 to provide them with opportunities to identify in which areas of the school they felt unsafe. You swiftly acted on the findings of these discussions by increasing the presence of staff on duty across the school, by introducing a 'keep to the left' rule when moving around the corridors and by increasing the coverage of closed-circuit television cameras around the school. Pupils' responses to surveys confirm that they feel safer in the school than previously, and this was confirmed following my discussions with groups of pupils that I selected at random. However, your surveys conducted in January and June 2018 do not offer pupils the opportunity to express their views in the same way, which makes comparison more difficult. Pupils acknowledge that some bullying still takes place, but now have a better understanding of what constitutes bullying, and they are adamant that if reported, it will be dealt with swiftly.

You have also placed boxes around the school into which pupils can place forms detailing any concerns they may have. You have set up a confidential email system which allows pupils to express their concerns in confidence and this has been used by some pupils. You acknowledge that not all pupils wish to spend their lunchtimes outside, and so have created a common room and a study room for each year group. While pupils appreciate this move, they say that sometimes they still feel uncomfortable using the common rooms, as these are sometimes dominated by groups of boys who are of the same friendship group, and this makes others feel uncomfortable. Staff who are on your supervision rota now have these rooms

included in their duty rota. You have also reorganised your lunchtime queueing system so that younger pupils queue up first, followed by older pupils, and this system alternates every week so as to ensure fairness and equality.

You have relaunched your 'five fingers of faith' scheme, which requires all pupils to identify five people they would talk to if they are worried or want to express areas of concern. You require that these identified people include members of staff as well as friends and that the names are recorded in pupils' planners. Pupils were clear that should a friend approach them and disclose a sensitive issue, they would take their friend to a responsible adult to follow this up.

You have completely overhauled the arrangements to supervise pupils who attend any off-site provision to ensure that they are kept safe. Previously, pupils walked the two-mile round trip to the off-site sports ground and were unaccompanied. You now ensure that pupils are registered before they leave the school and are accompanied by three or four members of staff who are positioned at the front, middle and end of the line of pupils. Registration takes place again on arrival at the sports ground and before they leave. A final check takes place when the pupils arrive back at the school site. Suitable risk assessments have been put in place for this activity as well as all others which involve pupils leaving the school site. Pupils who attend the nearby mosque on Fridays are also well supervised. Any pupils who attend alternative provision, such as the pupil referral unit or Oaklands College, either on a part-time or full-time basis, regularly have their attendance checked and recorded, as well as the progress they are making.

You correctly regard safeguarding in its wider context and have taken clear action to promote pupils' well-being and positive behaviour in the school. You have reviewed the content of your PHSE programme and have carefully considered the topics for your curriculum extension days, which now include drugs, sex education and mental health. Your pupil surveys taken over time suggest that pupils feel safer and better cared for in the school than previously. You recognise and celebrate positive attitudes and behaviours through your headteacher's commendations and head of year rewards assemblies.

Your introduction of the Verulam Exclusion Room (VER), which serves as an internal exclusion facility, has helped to improved behaviour in the school. The number of pupils who returned to this room for a second time has dramatically reduced and is a sign of its effectiveness. While you monitor the admission to this room by time of day and lesson, you do not yet analyse by pupil group, so you are not aware if disadvantaged pupils or those who have SEN and/or disabilities are over-represented. Pupils who are at risk of exclusion go onto a behaviour support plan with their heads of year, and this is reviewed for impact by senior staff, parents and carers and the pupil concerned every two weeks. In order to make clear to staff that it is everyone's responsibility to manage behaviour effectively, you now require all teachers to take part in detention duties. Equally, at the start of the day on Mondays, pupils told me that they now have to line up outside in form groups before entering the school. This settles them for the start of the week and enables you and your staff

to check uniform and to issue key messages so that all pupils receive these at the same time. Whole-staff responsibility for pupils' well-being and safety has been highlighted through your expectation that staff carry out an increased number of supervisory duties throughout the week, and staff acknowledge the rationale behind this. I observed pupils demonstrating positive attitudes towards their learning in lessons and moving sensibly and purposefully around the school between lessons and at breaktimes and during lunchtime.

The members of the governing body whom I met were able to validate the improvements you say the school has made since the previous inspection. This is not simply because you have reported on these in your headteacher's report but also because they have carried out activities to test out for themselves what they have been told. For example, governors have held discussions with members of the school council, they have formed a working group to gain staff's views on progress made, and the human resources and curriculum committees monitor closely the impact of the actions you have taken.

### **External support**

The local authority conducted an audit of your arrangements for safeguarding in the school shortly after the previous inspection. This resulted in a helpful report, and you included points for action in your improvement planning processes and acted on these with urgency. The local authority also looked at your procedures for the recruitment of staff and made helpful suggestions for improvement.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Remind pupils of the expectations for the use of the common rooms so that pupils feel more at ease in using these.
- Analyse the pupils who are sent to the internal exclusion room by groups to ensure that vulnerable pupils who are referred there are not over-represented.
- Conduct a third pupil survey which is more comparable to the content of the second version, so that findings reflect a more accurate picture of pupils' perceptions of the progress the school is making.

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

Yours sincerely

John Daniell  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**