

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



31 January 2017

Mr Ced de la Croix
Headteacher
Robert Barclay Academy
Cock Lane
Hoddesdon
Hertfordshire
EN11 8JY

Dear Mr de la Croix

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Robert Barclay Academy

Following my visit with Simon Webb, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 12 January 2017, 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 us and the time you took to discuss the work of the school.

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 unannounced and carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about safeguarding arrangements and the behaviour and welfare of pupils at the school.

Inspectors were aware that, during this inspection, serious allegations of a child protection nature were being investigated by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate individual concerns, the school's response to the allegations was considered alongside other evidence available.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. Inspectors also reviewed attendance records and the school's policies, including those related to pupils' behaviour, safety and welfare. Pupils' behaviour was observed in lessons and around the school. Meetings were held with groups of pupils and staff, senior leaders, including the chair of the local governing body, and the chief executive of the Sir John Lawes Academies Trust.

As the school has recently converted to an academy, there were not enough responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, for inspectors to consider. Therefore, we took account of the most recent survey of parents' views carried out by school leaders.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Robert Barclay Academy, previously Sheredes School, opened as a new school, part of the Sir John Lawes Academies Trust, in September 2016. It is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. Education is provided for 569 pupils, in Years 7 to 11, and for 88 students, in Years 12 and 13. The school population is mainly White British, with lower than average proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups and of those who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils (those eligible for support through pupil premium funding) is below average, as is the proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, or who have an education, health and care plan.

Ofsted was made aware of concerns regarding the school's safeguarding systems and whether these were effective enough to keep pupils safe. In the light of this, the inspection focused on the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and the impact of leaders' work to improve pupils' personal development, behaviour, safety and welfare.

Safeguarding

Working together with other senior leaders and the support of the Sir John Lawes Academies Trust, you have ensured a smooth transition from the predecessor school to new arrangements within the trust.

The evidence shared with us during the inspection showed that staff are vigilant. A culture of safeguarding is well promoted. Concerns about pupils' welfare are appropriately recorded. Follow-up actions are swift and regularly reviewed by the designated team to ensure that they are effective and to determine the next steps to take. School staff work well with external agencies and local primary schools to ensure that all relevant information is made available. As a result, vulnerable pupils typically get the support they need promptly. Where serious concerns arise, you and senior leaders make sure that appropriate action is taken, including referrals to social services and the police if required.

All staff, including non-teaching staff and governors, have undertaken mandatory child protection training. An update to previous training was put in place prior to the opening of the new school in September 2016.

Staff new to the school are supported well through their induction programme. The teachers and support staff we spoke with during the inspection know that pupils' safety is the responsibility of everyone. Appropriately, they were able to explain to inspectors the signs to look for and what to do if concerns are raised.

The required routine training, linked to the 'Prevent' duty, ensures staff awareness of the potential dangers young people face from radicalisation and extremism. This training equips staff with appropriate generic knowledge and understanding but lacks content tailored specifically to the context of the local area of the school.

As part of the transition to the trust, the school has reviewed all its policies and procedures. The latest child protection and related policies take account of the most recent guidance and meet statutory requirements. However, the school's new website is under construction. As a result, policies and other information, for example procedures to follow in the event of a complaint, were not accessible through this route at the time of the inspection. Senior leaders are aware of the need to ensure that this work is completed as soon as possible, so that parents have easy access to information they may need quickly.

Governors are regular visitors to the school through their link governor roles. They are clear about their safeguarding responsibilities. The chair of the governing body has taken the role of lead safeguarding governor. Although senior leaders and governors receive regular reports on safeguarding matters, there are no formal audits of child protection files. In our discussions, you agreed that checks on routine operational processes are not as sufficiently detailed, or as rigorous, as they could be at senior level.

Senior leaders, the chair of the governing body and the chief executive of the trust recognise the need to sharpen further the effectiveness of current systems to secure accountability at all levels. Resources from within the trust are available to support some of this work. For example, a regular audit of the contents of the single central record is planned to ensure that all statutory requirements are continuously met.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

You have rightly placed a strong emphasis on ensuring that pupils attend school regularly. Rigorous monitoring systems are in place and routine calls are made to parents when pupils do not turn up to school. As a result, overall attendance has improved. The whole-school focus on ensuring that pupils arrive on time is equally strong. Teachers were keen to tell us about the changes recorded in pupils' attendance and punctuality information since the new systems were introduced.

In their discussions with inspectors, pupils explained that they feel safe, bullying is rare and they know whom to go to in school if they have a concern. They are taught about safe use of the internet and the dangers associated with social media. Typically, parents who responded to the school's own survey of parents' views were positive about the work to keep pupils safe.

Greater staff presence is ensuring that pupils' conduct around the school, and at break and lunchtimes, is more calm and orderly. Expectations are set out clearly for pupils and parents in 'rewards and consequences' documentation. They are also made available in policies and in the staff handbook.

There is an increasing emphasis on the positive impact of praise for improving pupils' attitudes to learning. The implications of behaviour that falls short of the standards expected are well understood. As a result, incidents, in particular those requiring senior staff intervention during lessons, have reduced markedly in the new school. Pupils are proud of the school's new status. They looked smart in their uniforms during the inspection.

External support

If serious concerns arise, you do not hesitate to seek specialist advice to ensure that appropriate action is taken. This includes, where necessary, advice from social services and the local police.

The school receives good support from within the trust –for example, access to professional development opportunities for middle leaders and opportunities to share good practice with colleagues from other trust schools. The trust's chief executive worked closely with the predecessor school prior to conversion to academy status. This had a positive impact on ensuring that the new school got off to a good start in September 2016.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that governors and senior leaders have sufficient information to check that child protection procedures are embedded fully in the day-to-day life of the new school by sharpening systems for monitoring the rigour and efficiency of operational arrangements, so that swift action can be taken in the event of any identified changes needed.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Dick
Her Majesty's Inspector