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Mr Jonathan Smart
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Smart

Urgent inspection of King Alfred's

Following my visit with David Cousins, Martin Dyer, Ian Howie and Ginny Rhodes, Ofsted inspectors, to the school on 07 February 2024, I write on behalf of His 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 the school.

This inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for urgent inspections. The inspection was carried out because His Majesty's Chief Inspector wished to determine the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the school as concerns had been raised with Ofsted about aspects of the behaviour and attitudes of pupils.

We do not give graded judgements on urgent 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 graded inspection, which will be carried out under section 5 of the Act and be brought forward. If we have serious concerns, we will deem the urgent inspection as a graded inspection immediately.

Evidence

We scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to behaviour, safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We met with senior leaders, groups of pupils, teachers, pastoral leaders and non-teaching staff. Inspectors also spoke with representatives of the local governing body, the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the trust. Inspectors visited a range of lessons on each of the school's sites and spoke with pupils during break and lunch times. We gathered evidence

about your work to improve the behaviour of some pupils, this included visits to the school's inclusion hub. We also looked at paperwork and discussed individual cases of pupils moving to elective home education, accessing alternative provision or being persistently absent from school.

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

Safeguarding is effective

Main findings

Leaders have a clear vision to create a collaborative, respectful and kind culture at the school. They have made significant progress towards this goal, and this is evident in the behaviour of most pupils. In lessons, pupils behave extremely well, which contributes to a focused learning environment. Leaders have made improvements to the school's behaviour policy and systems, which are now more clearly understood by both pupils and staff. Any disruption to lessons is addressed quickly and effectively, so that all pupils can continue learning. There is also effective support in place for those pupils who need to show more courteous and respectful behaviour with the aim of restoring positive relationships.

Break and lunch times are managed through strong routines and systems. The school has increased the level of adult supervision, and this is helping to ensure a calm and orderly atmosphere. Pupils generally get on well during social times and verbal or physical aggression is a rare occurrence. When it does take place, staff respond appropriately. Leaders treat such incidents very seriously, and deal with them effectively.

Bullying and unkindness is not tolerated at the school and is uncommon. Pupils feel safe in school. They know that there are a range of places they can go for support if they need it. They are rightly confident that staff will take appropriate action to address any issues. The school's approach to dealing with bullying consists of multiple stages. Staff use these procedures to escalate concerns if needed. This minimises the chances of bullying recurring and pupils feel reassured by this.

The development of the school's culture is supported by a well-planned programme of personal, social, health and economic education. This includes effective work on values and character education as well as teaching related to mental health and anxiety. Pupils also learn about the importance of diversity and treating others with kindness and respect. This is also reinforced through the school's assembly programme and the work of pupil anti-bullying ambassadors.

Although the school's work to improve behaviour is clearly having an impact, leaders are right to ensure that it continues to be their top priority. The majority of pupils embrace the school's culture and values fully, but there are some who need additional help and support. While there has been a rapid reduction in the number of pupils suspended this academic year, leaders are aware that the overall number remains high.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding are robust. Every member of staff has rigorous safeguarding training which is updated regularly to reflect any emerging needs within the school. All other relevant training, such as safer recruitment, is also kept up to date. Staff feel confident to identify and report concerns and do so as appropriate. All such concerns are triaged and followed up on quickly. The school's safeguarding team work closely together to identify those pupils who are most at risk, reviewing each case on a regular basis to ensure the correct support is in place. This includes any pupils who are persistently absent from school or who are educated off site. The school has invested heavily in the expansion of the pastoral support it offers to pupils, bringing these together in one coherent hub for pupils to access easily. This work is helping pupils to attend school regularly because they know there is high-quality pastoral support available if they need it. In addition to this, the school works closely with external agencies to secure help for pupils and families where required.

The trust is committed to providing support and challenge to school leaders. This includes regular reporting, guidance and checks in relation to safeguarding. Those responsible for governance receive regular information about behaviour, attendance and related issues such as elective home education and use of reduced timetables. They use this information to monitor the school's work in terms of behaviour and attitudes. Governors rightly recognise the positive changes in the school's culture and ethos and understand that these are ongoing.

Priorities for further improvement

- The school's work to embed a respectful and kind culture has been effective but is not yet fully embedded. The number of pupils who are suspended for disruptive or disrespectful behaviour is still high. Leaders should continue with their work to strengthen the support and interventions in place for these pupils, and therefore reduce the need to suspend pupils from school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the Vale Academy Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Oxfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Ellison
His Majesty's Inspector