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Natalie Sheppard
Principal
The Portsmouth Academy
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Dear Miss Sheppard

Urgent inspection of The Portsmouth Academy

Following my visit with Catherine Old and Mark Enser, His Majesty's Inspectors, to the school on 18 October 2023, 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 quality of education, the effectiveness of leadership and management in the school (including governance) and 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 safeguarding. Inspectors met with the principal and others from the senior leadership team, and the chief executive officer of the trust, as well as other trust leaders. This included the chair of the board of trustees and the chairs of the regional governing bodies.

Inspectors considered a variety of documentation. This included audits carried out by the trust, as well as trustee and governing body minutes. We also discussed behaviour and

attendance records with school leaders. Inspectors spoke with pupils and staff throughout the inspection.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Main findings

You and your newly formed senior leadership team have an accurate view of the standard of education being provided by the school. This includes the areas where you see pupils are learning effectively and achieving, alongside the aspects where improvements are urgently required. You, alongside leaders from the trust, are putting in place the much-needed improvements. You are resolute in your determination to improve behaviour across the school to ensure pupils learn and achieve well.

The systems and processes to safeguard pupils are thorough. Safeguarding training, including relating to safer recruitment, is up to date. Recruitment checks are thorough. Staff clearly know their role in reporting any concerns. They are confident these are always followed up to ensure pupils and their families get the support they need. The safeguarding team have a detailed understanding of the risks pupils may face outside of school. Close working relationships with external agencies help to ensure that pupils who may be at risk from harm in the local community are quickly identified. Staff provide a variety of support, including work with local charities to provide essential support to the most vulnerable pupils. Recent improvements have also been made to the security of the site. All of these actions reflect an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

Currently, some pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are not always having their needs quickly and accurately identified. This is of particular concern in Years 7 and 8. Here, some pupils have started their secondary education without a specific plan in place that identifies what support they need to learn and achieve. In these year groups, there is a small minority of pupils who have different social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. All too often, these needs have not been identified early enough and support has not been put in place. As a result, these pupils refuse to attend some lessons. They can also regularly disrupt learning. This has led to a considerable increase in suspensions and the use of internal isolation.

You and your leadership team were quick to identify these significant concerns around the behaviour of these pupils at the end of the last academic year. You have created a detailed action plan in response. Staff are currently receiving training in line with the new behaviour policy that is being put in place. You feel this policy is much clearer in terms of expectations for staff and pupils. In addition, you are restructuring the pastoral support on offer. These changes aim to give pupils the help they need to attend lessons and to focus on learning. You have also recognised the importance of strengthening the early identification of pupils' SEMH needs. This is to ensure intervention can be put in place at a

much earlier stage to help pupils settle in school and their learning. You and the trust recognise this as an ongoing area for further development.

Other leaders within the trust are providing support to the school in meeting the needs of pupils with SEND. This includes support from an additional special educational needs and disabilities coordinator. Some pupils, including those with more complex needs, are already benefiting from these improvements. This is particularly evident for pupils with an education, health and care plan, who attend 'The Bridge' (the school's resourced provision). These pupils are keen to learn and are very positive about the detailed support provided by the well-trained staff who help them.

You and your team are acutely aware of the importance of pupils regularly attending school. Clear systems and processes are in place that highlight if a pupil is absent. Your teams use a variety of strategies to work with pupils who do not attend well. This includes support for pupils who are persistently absent. Work with external agencies takes place if there are any wider concerns about pupils and their families. Further action is now needed to analyse attendance records even more thoroughly to identify any patterns of absence. This will ensure additional support can be put in place to help more pupils attend regularly.

Many pupils recognise the initial impact of the improvements that you and your staff have begun to put in place. Pupils in the older year groups value the knowledge and skills of teachers who provide support to help pupils achieve. There is, however, a frustration that the day-to-day life of the school can be too regularly disrupted by a small minority of pupils. Younger pupils feel they can confidently speak to adults in the school about any worries or concerns they may have. However, they are equally frustrated that their teachers spend too much of their time not focused on teaching the majority of pupils who want to learn. You and your team know this and are determined to listen to the voice of all pupils as you improve the standards of education across the school.

Additional support

The trust is committed to ensuring the improvements in the school are made quickly. Trust-wide leaders are on site daily to provide additional guidance and checks as improved systems and processes are implemented. Those responsible for governance, including the chair of trustees, also come into the school regularly to meet with parents, pupils and staff. They are taking the appropriate steps to get assurances that the actions taken so far are starting to have an impact on improving the standard of education for all pupils.

Priorities for further improvement

- The needs of some pupils with SEND are not being identified early enough. This is particularly evident in the younger year groups. Staff do not have a clear understanding of how to meet the individual needs of these pupils and, consequently, early intervention to meet these needs is not in place. The school needs to ensure that staff have the knowledge and expertise they need to swiftly identify the needs of

pupils. This should include strengthening the transition process from primary school to ensure Year 7 pupils make a successful start to their secondary education.

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

Yours sincerely

Aimee Floyd
His Majesty's Inspector