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Mr D Hermitt
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hermitt

Ofsted 2010–2011 best practice survey: safeguarding in schools

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 11 and 12 October 2010 to look at work in safeguarding.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our publication about best practice in safeguarding in schools. The publication will include case studies about individual schools. If Congleton High School is included as a case study, you will have an opportunity to comment prior to publication. Individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

Features of good practice

- Senior leaders and staff have been successful in creating a welcoming and inclusive ethos founded on the belief that a child who feels safe, happy and well cared for will make the most of their opportunities in the school. This is reflected in the positive and respectful relationships between students and staff, good behaviour and above average attendance. Whole staff participation in 'meet and greet' each Monday morning underline the school's commitment to reach out and enhance students' well-being. Students say that they feel valued and supported. Incidences of bullying are rare and students are extremely confident that any concerns will be picked up quickly and taken seriously.
- A coherent and holistic approach to safeguarding and student welfare is shared and supported by all staff, students and governors. This is extended through an effective network of agencies that promote the safety and wellbeing of young people and excellent partnerships with

primary schools and local churches. This has resulted in trust and confidence in the exchange of information to safeguard young people. It also ensures that the focus on safeguarding is a seamless process that reaches out into the community. The primary liaison process is used very effectively to ensure that staff identify any specific needs to tailor induction arrangements, care, support and educational provision. A dedicated team of experienced and well-trained staff meet the diverse needs of students. Staff go to great lengths through careful risk assessment to ensure that students with disabilities are able to participate in events and activities alongside their peers. Parents commented that their children, 'are not made to feel different', and 'are one of the group'.

- The XL Centre is a safe haven for students in the heart of the school. Specialist teaching areas and resources, and open access before and after school, and at break and lunchtime provide a warm and welcoming place to meet with friends or to access support. XL Centre staff are always on hand to provide encouragement and support. This is valued highly by students and parents. XL staff share detailed information about students' needs and how they learn best. Thorough tracking of progress for individuals and groups of learners help to identify where additional intervention is needed from the wide range of specialist services.
- The school's approach to safeguarding is underpinned by very clear policies and rigorous procedures, and excellent communications to secure consistent delivery. Responsibilities for different aspects of safeguarding are set out clearly drawing on the most up-to-date guidance. A high priority is placed on staff training with regular updates and briefings to reinforce key expectations and everyday practice. Arrangements for vetting staff, governors, volunteers and visitors are thorough. The governing body's 'student welfare and ethos sub committee' meet regularly to ensure an early response to any emerging health and safety concerns, and to scrutinise responses to parental and student questionnaires. Governors are rightly proud of the very high levels of satisfaction; they value feedback to enable work to be carefully targeted to improve further.
- The curriculum is planned effectively to ensure that students are taught about aspects of safety, risk, care and respect in a way that challenges and engages them. The personal, social and health education and guidance programmes, and the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning programme allow students to explore and reflect on potential areas of risk and abuse in a safe and secure environment. Staff know which students need follow up to reinforce safety messages. Students are encouraged to share concerns in the confidence that they will be taken seriously. As a result, students take safety seriously. For example, they are fully aware of the security measures to keep them safe and the actions required should they feel concerned. The open door policy is valued by staff, students and parents; support, advice and guidance are readily available.

- The promotion of equality and diversity is particularly successful. This has led to a strong sense of shared values; inclusive attitudes and beliefs; and a well-developed understanding and respect for difference among students. Students are very clear that, 'diversity matters', and that 'diversity is respected'. The use of visiting speakers facilitated by local churches enriches the curriculum to bring stories of hope and first-hand experiences so that students are made aware of safety issues in the society. For example, input from ex-drug addicts and people who have been homeless have a powerful effect on young people when considering choices and consequences. Visitors also make a valuable contribution to interactive 'stop days' for students in Years 10 to 13 covering topics such as poverty, prejudice and discrimination. Empathy, respect and tolerance are promoted effectively and shown in students' awareness of shared needs and environmental challenges, a willingness to help each other, and enthusiastic engagement in charity fund raising.
- The school's motto, 'Achieving Success Together' is evident in the promotion of teamwork, achievement and participation. Students speak enthusiastically about the fantastic range of extra-curricular activities, trips and residential experiences. They commented that regular involvement in this programme definitely builds a sense of community and belonging.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop safeguarding in the school.

I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to the school and the opportunity to explore with you the school's outstanding practice in safeguarding. Please pass on my thanks to staff, governors, students, parents and representatives from support agencies and the school's partners who met with me.

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Nada Trikić
Her Majesty's Inspector