

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



5 October 2016

Miss Anne Isherwood  
Three Towers Alternative Provision Academy  
Leyland Park House  
Park Road  
Hindley, Wigan  
Greater Manchester  
WN2 3RX

Dear Miss Isherwood

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Three Towers Alternative Provision Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 21 September 2016, 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 behaviour of pupils at the school. These concerns were triggered by a complaint regarding pupils' behaviour. This inspection was unannounced, which means that the inspector arrived at the school without previously notifying the school.

### **Evidence**

The inspector considered evidence including:

- Observations of pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning in lessons
- Observations of pupils' behaviour throughout the day, including discussion with pupils
- Documentary evidence
- Discussions with school leaders and staff.

Having evaluated all of the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time leaders and managers have taken effective action to improve behaviour and secure consistently positive attitudes to learning.

## **Context**

Three Towers is larger than the average-sized pupil referral unit. The school became an academy in February 2015. The school is part of The Rowan Learning Trust. Prior to the school's conversion to an academy, pupils who were educated on a number of different sites across the local authority were moved onto two main sites. One site, the Whelley campus, caters for pupils in key stage 2. The other site, the Hindley campus, offers provision for key stages 3 and 4 pupils. The majority of pupils in key stage 2 are dual-registered with their mainstream school and only attend the pupil referral unit on a part-time basis for a limited period of time. Three Towers offers places for key stages 3 and 4 pupils who have been permanently excluded, are at risk of permanent exclusion, have medical needs or are without a school place.

The overwhelming majority of pupils are White British. Over two thirds of the pupils currently on roll are boys. The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than the national average. Almost all pupils join the school part-way through their education. Most pupils join the school in key stage 4.

The school uses a number of alternative providers as well as home tuition and online learning packages to complement the education it offers to pupils on the main sites.

A significant proportion of the staff have worked at the school since its formation, as well as at the predecessor school.

The staff working with key stage 2 pupils and pupils with medical needs have given support to other schools.

## **Behaviour and safety**

Behaviour around the school during the inspection was generally good. Staff and pupils confirmed that this was a fairly typical day in the life of the school. However, they agreed that at least once a week there is a day where pupils' behaviour is more challenging. Everyone agreed that this deterioration in standards of behaviour is most often triggered by the arrival of a new pupil, usually in key stage 3. You and your colleagues have recently put in place further measures to try to stop this happening.

Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. This was exemplified on the day of the inspection by the way the staff greeted pupils warmly when they arrived. Most pupils complied readily with the school's expectation that they put all their personal belongings, including mobile phones, into a locker for the duration of the

school day. Those pupils who arrived punctually enjoyed chatting to staff and peers in the dining room before registration. Your staff were very skilful at helping those pupils who had not come to school in the right frame of mind for learning to get back on track. I saw tutors make good use of the registration lesson. For example, they help the older pupils get started with their curriculum vitae and younger pupils to develop social and emotional skills. These activities will stand the pupils in good stead for returning to mainstream school. Staff encouraged pupils to respond quickly to instructions so that no learning time was lost and generally lessons got off to a prompt start. However, on a day-to-day basis, too many pupils arrive late, do not attend or are excluded. This means that these pupils are not able to make the most of their time at your school.

Throughout the school day, most pupils got on with the work set by their teachers. Key stage 4 pupils, in particular, value the enhanced learning opportunities afforded by the small class sizes. Pupils enjoy harmonious relationships. For example, during the visit pupils were observed chatting with staff and friends in the dining room and playing football in the sports hall.

The staff working with your pupils who have medical needs have created a calm and nurturing environment for these vulnerable young people. Parents and pupils are appreciative of the high levels of support your staff provide, making sure that these pupils do not fall behind in their education during a time of immense personal challenge.

The warm, welcoming atmosphere at the Whelley campus makes your youngest pupils feel safe and valued. The strong partnerships that staff build with parents and the teachers in pupils' mainstream schools provide the firm foundations for securing pupils' successful reintegration into their mainstream schools. The school's meticulous record-keeping and well-developed communication systems ensure that nothing is left to chance.

Staff and pupils talked to me at length about the consequences for breaches of the school's behaviour policy. However, the strong emphasis on rewards that I saw on the Whelley campus, where pupils are highly motivated to be recognised for their 'random acts of kindness', is not as apparent at Hindley.

You and your senior leaders responded promptly to the concerns raised by the complaint made to Ofsted about the behaviour of pupils at the Hindley campus. The executive headteacher conducted a thorough investigation into the allegations made by the complainant. Moreover, you commissioned an external review of systems and processes in the school, from Wigan Educational Psychology Service. This review was carried out during the summer term. During the inspection, members of staff talked to me about the improvements which senior leaders have made to some of the systems and processes used in the school, as a result of the findings from both the investigation and review.

Your staff are clear that the behaviour of pupils, particularly at key stage 3, is very challenging. As I stated earlier in my letter, staff report that pupils' behaviour generally deteriorates when new pupils join the school. This is particularly the case when groups of pupils coming from the same school, or who know each other from home, join the school at around the same time. While you and your colleagues endeavour to put in place measures to avoid this situation, the small number of classes often thwarts your plans. Despite the fact that the appointment of a member of staff with responsibility for the integration of new pupils is relatively recent, this has already had a positive impact. The integration process has been refined and improved, so that your staff can put in place a programme which best meets the new pupil's particular needs and develop more thorough risk assessments. I spoke to several pupils who had recently started at your school; they spoke positively to me about this new approach, which has helped them settle in well.

You and your colleagues make sure that incidents of poor behaviour are carefully followed up. Your staff record each incident on the school's information management system. The daily debriefing meeting gives staff an opportunity to reflect on the incident and consider what needs to happen next. The recent strengthening of behaviour contracts and more consistent use of face-to-face meetings to resolve the issues which lead up to incidents are beginning to make a positive difference.

You and your colleagues have had some success in improving pupils' behaviour, for example following the launch of the school's uniform and no smoking policies. During the inspection, I noticed that all key stage 3 and 4 pupils were wearing the school's uniform. Moreover, pupils told me that they abide by the school's zero-tolerance approach to smoking on school premises. However, leaders cannot be complacent. You understand that the incidence of exclusions, particularly at key stage 3, is still very high and that more needs to be done to address this.

You have reviewed the deployment of teaching assistants to make sure that teachers and pupils are well supported in lessons. Staff told me that the change to the allocation of teaching assistants from departments to class groups is helpful.

Relationships between pupils and staff are a strength of your school. Staff are skilful in picking up quickly on changes in pupils' moods, making sure that as far as possible they help pupils to conform to the school's expectations. Pupils appreciate the care, guidance and support that staff offer and for the most part are contrite when they feel that they have let the staff down by their poor behaviour.

Staff who spoke to me feel well supported by their colleagues as well as by leaders and managers. They feel comfortable to approach any one of the senior leaders, including the director of education and executive headteacher, to discuss any worries, both personal and professional, knowing all of you will take time to listen and offer help. A number of staff talked to me about how much they enjoy working at the school and how well they pull together to secure improvements. They

recognise that there is still more work to do to ensure that they all adopt a consistent approach to dealing with incidents of poor behaviour. We agreed how important it is that senior leaders seek regular feedback, both formal and informal, from staff as the new systems and procedures are rolled out, to check how well things are working on the ground.

The trustees and governors recognise the importance of establishing clear protocols with the local authority for the admission of pupils to the school. Moreover, you shared with me the challenges of securing mainstream and specialist school places for those pupils who need them. I am heartened that regular meetings are now taking place between the trust and the local authority to address these challenges.

The director of education for The Rowan Learning Trust is now working with you to promote better use of information to analyse patterns and trends in pupils' behaviour as well as the use of sanctions and rewards. You understand that this analysis is key if you are going to be certain that you are focusing attention on the most pressing issues. You have developed a behaviour improvement plan. However, as we discussed, you have not considered how your planned actions should and would have an impact on outcomes for your pupils. It is important that you address this urgently and that the governors and trustees then use this to more effectively hold you to account.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Further develop the analysis of patterns and trends for pupils' behaviour and attendance by cohort and group. This information should be used to accurately determine how effectively leaders are managing this, and you can therefore be certain you are focusing on the most pressing issues.
- Monitor the impact that the new systems and procedures are having on pupils' behaviour, attendance and learning.
- Make sure that there are measurable success criteria, linked to pupils' outcomes, in the behaviour improvement plan which are used by governors to hold school leaders to account.
- Ensure that the behaviour policy is compliant, up to date, reflects the practice in school and is made available to parents, including through publication on the website.

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

Yours sincerely

Pippa Jackson Maitland  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**