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Dear Mrs Holmes-Carne,

Thank you for your hospitality during our visit on the 6th March. My colleagues and I very much appreciated the extent to which you provided access to staff, pupils and key documentation. This enabled us to conduct a thorough review. Please pass on my thanks to your staff and pupils who assisted on the day.

Context of the review

You invited us into school to conduct an external review into behaviour, welfare and personal development at Kenton School. You asked us to evaluate school systems in these areas and the extent to which they impact on pupils. You also asked us to judge the effectiveness of your work in this area, and the accuracy of your own evaluation.

Breadth of the review

The review team scrutinised school development planning, self-evaluation, exclusion and attendance data, the behaviour policy, the safeguarding policy and the anti-bullying policy prior to visiting the school. In school, we looked at behaviour and attendance documentation, held interviews with senior and middle leaders and tutors, visited a range of lessons including PSHE sessions, talked with pupils formally and informally, visited the isolation unit and the school's alternative provision. We also observed pupils during lesson changes, at break time, at lunch time and in detention. We did not look at careers advice for pupils, nor did we evaluate the quality of post sixteen provision.

Findings of the review

Your evaluation of provision is accurate

You and your senior leadership team have set out a clear vision for pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. You have introduced strong systems to implement this vision and have worked tirelessly to ensure that it is shared by all staff. This is impacting positively on the behaviour of pupils.

- Your leaders are clear about their expectations for pupil behaviour both in and out of the classroom. A set of rewards and sanctions are in place to back this up. Your leaders monitor this closely so that any trends are spotted quickly and acted upon. As a result, pupils say

that the vast majority of staff deal consistently with behaviour. They know the expectations that the school has for them.

- The regular visits that leaders make to classrooms have ensured that they know the quality of teaching and its influence on behaviour. Where standards of teaching are not consistently good, you have ensured that teachers are appropriately supported and challenged to improve. This rigorous approach is reducing incidents of disruptive behaviour in lessons, although pupils recognise that there are a small minority of lessons in which it is more common.

- Over time, you and your leaders have worked intensively to ensure that the school vision and expectations around behaviour are shared by all staff. The success of your approach was evident when speaking to staff about routines and standards. They are positive about the improvements they have seen, they feel well supported around behaviour issues and they value the regular communication from leaders.

Communication between staff is very strong and ensures that pupils are well looked after. Staff know their pupils well. They are trained to identify the signs that might indicate a problem. This information is quickly shared with leaders who act promptly to investigate.

- The introduction of a computerised system has allowed your staff to quickly report any concerns. When questioned, staff demonstrate a strong understanding of safeguarding procedures. They know what to look for, and they understand that seemingly small concerns might be a crucial piece of a larger picture. Consequently, leaders are able to provide timely intervention.

- Your leaders regularly monitor the reporting system and rigorously follow up concerns. They then communicate progress through on a daily basis to relevant staff. This communication is highly valued by staff, and ensures that pupils are well supported by staff who are informed about their current difficulties.

You and your staff have worked with pupils to ensure that systems for reporting bullying are varied and easily accessible. Pupils are confident that staff act on their concerns. They report that although bullying does occur on occasion, it is rare and is quickly stopped.

- Pupils say that it is easy to report bullying if it occurs, because you have ensured that there is a variety of ways that it can be done. Form tutors have strong relationships with pupils, and because of the daily summaries by the year leaders, they are able to watch for any signs of bullying. You have also ensured that suggestion boxes can be used to raise concerns, and have introduced an online app. Pupils know all of these methods, and they also appreciate the work of “respect co-ordinators” (pupil representatives from each year group) who also play a strong role in identifying and reporting bullying behaviour.

- Your strong communication systems work well to ensure that once identified, any bullying can be addressed. Pupils are positive about the response from staff. In conversations, they acknowledged that bullying can occur, and a minority of pupils were able to recount their own experiences. However, these pupils all explained how staff had successfully addressed the problems, and all were confident about the ability of staff to act decisively to prevent bullying. In conversations, the vast majority of pupils said that they would recommend the school to others.

The atmosphere in lessons and around school is calm and orderly. Relationships between staff and pupils are strong and pupils are responsive to instructions. Staff are highly visible during breaks and between lessons and pupils appreciate this.

- Pupils enter lessons calmly and in all lessons seen they displayed a positive attitude to their work. When given the opportunity they work and learn well together, and in these lessons they engage strongly with their learning and develop their understanding. Your framework for evaluating the quality of teaching acknowledges the benefit of this sort of strong behaviour for learning, and moves away from solely valuing “compliance”. You acknowledge that some teachers are further down this route than others, and the review team agree that you are well placed to roll out this strong practice even faster.

- The unusual yet innovative use of high visibility jackets by staff ensures that they can be seen in busy areas such as corridors and social areas. Pupils and staff really appreciate this idea. They say that it makes it reassuringly easy to identify staff, and ensures that pupils feel well supervised. Pupils could not identify any areas of the school where they feel unsafe.

- The vast majority of pupils share the high standards and expectations of leaders. They take pride in their appearance and in the appearance of the school. The environment is clean and tidy, and staff are relentless in their pursuit of consistency of expectations

Pupils have a strong understanding of how to stay safe because of a very detailed programme of PSHE that runs throughout the school. It is linked to key safeguarding issues and covers difficult issues sensitively but thoroughly.

- You have ensured that pupils benefit from a comprehensive “lifeskills” programme which they attend weekly. Pupils are very positive about this programme, and were able to describe how issues such as online safety and anti-bullying are covered and provide them with useful information about how to stay safe.

- You have not shied away from introducing difficult issues to pupils through the “lifeskills” programme. Current safeguarding issues are covered sensitively yet directly. The effect of this is that pupils find the sessions relevant, and consequently value them highly.

- Your leaders monitor the quality and coverage of the lifeskills programme, and they feed back general issues as well as teacher specific areas for development. As a consequence, staff feel well supported in delivering the programme, and the quality of the sessions seen was strong.

The most vulnerable pupils in school are well looked after. They benefit from the strong systems outlined above, but also from additional support which begins before they enter Year Seven and lasts throughout their time in school.

- You have established strong transition arrangements with feeder primary schools, so that by the time pupils enter the school in Year Seven they feel well prepared for this stage in their education. Pupils spoke positively about the experience and of their time in Year Seven, with several being able to talk about how various issues had been resolved by staff.

- For more vulnerable pupils, you have ensured that the regular transition arrangements are extended and that you have a strong relationship with feeder primary schools. Consequently, these pupils arrive in school to find that they have a “safe space”, easy access to support, and that teachers are sensitive to their needs.

- Where pupils breach the school’s code of conduct, you have ensured that there is a range of provision to deter and support them. You analyse patterns of pupils who are sent to the

internal isolation unit. Whilst this isolation unit is used as a consequence rather than as rehabilitation, your leaders work with pupils who are regularly sent there to try to break patterns of disruptive behaviour. This is not always successful, but pupils in the unit were positive about the lengths to which staff have gone to in order to help them access the normal school routines.

- For older pupils who are at risk of permanent exclusion, you have developed an alternative provision programme (Personalised Learning Centre). This provision has been successful in ensuring that all of these pupils have left school to enter education, employment or training over the last two years. Unfortunately, this provision is to be discontinued due to financial restructuring. You know that the re-integration of these pupils into mainstream classes will pose a challenge. Both the pupils in the centre and the school staff expressed concerns about the future. However, you are preparing for the change, and know that the significant improvements you have made over the last two years make the re-integration more likely to be successful.

- These strategies, combined with the systems described above, have resulted in a significant drop in the number of permanent exclusions, from 28 four years ago to four within the last three years. Your staff say that this is down to a “culture shift” as well as strengthened systems. They speak powerfully about the best place for all learners being in the classroom, and about a shared responsibility for the most challenging pupils.

- We scrutinised behaviour records for pupils who had been excluded and found that your efforts to keep pupils in school had been exhaustive, which confirmed what the pupils themselves told us. We therefore judged your inclusion practice in this area to be very strong, even though this inclusion impacts negatively on your headline outcomes data.

Pupils are positive about the school and appreciative of the efforts that staff make. Despite this, there are still too many pupils whose attendance is low. You and your staff know this and are constantly evaluating and refining your approach.

- You correctly identify attendance as a key school priority. Overall school attendance is lower than the national average, and the proportion of pupils missing significant amounts of their education through poor attendance is high. This is particularly the case for pupils who are or have been eligible for free school meals.

- Your leaders are active in their efforts to improve attendance. They scrutinise attendance data for trends, resulting in initiatives such as “Operation Friday”, and they target support at individuals who might be at risk of persistent absence. They seek best practice from other schools in Newcastle and further afield, use social media to get positive messages out, gather pupil advice and opinion about attendance issues, and run a variety of high profile initiatives with incentives for good attendance. Overall attendance is improving, but more slowly than you would like.

- Your leaders are also relentless in tackling families of pupils who are not engaging with education and thus missing significant amounts of learning. Attendance officers liaise with and challenge parents, and your use of fines accounts for 22% of the total fines in the city. The overall percentage of persistent absentees is still high, but your staff are adamant that the attendance of these pupils is improving. Further analysis of this individual attendance data would show whether this is the case.

- You have a small number of pupils who are educated off site. Your efforts for these pupils, all of whom have significant barriers to learning in school, are laudable. All are monitored

regularly, and most have a teacher who delivers a personalised learning programme to meet pupils' needs.

Areas for development

- **Continue to address the challenges posed by the forthcoming closure of the alternative provision (PLC) so that staff and pupils are supported in advance of and during the transition to mainstream education**
- **Continue to improve the consistency of good teaching so that it builds on the willingness of pupils to engage in their learning, particularly in some parts of the Maths and Science departments**
- **Continue to refine and develop strategies to improve attendance, and to reduce the proportion of pupils who miss more than 10% of their schooling**

Newcastle City Council review team:

Ian Dawson	Head of School Effectiveness
Sandra Davison	Vulnerable Learners Manager and Safeguarding Lead for Schools
Karl Harms	Vulnerable Learners Advisor