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Mr Scott Holder
Interim Executive Principal
Philip Morant School and College
Rembrandt Way
Colchester
Essex
CO3 4QS

Dear Mr Holder

No formal designation inspection of Philip Morant School and College

Following my visit to your academy on 17 October 2018, 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 effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the academy.

Evidence

I scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection, and behaviour and attendance. I met with you and other senior leaders, two groups of pupils, a representative of the local authority and a member of the Thrive Trust representing the academy's current governance. The chief executive of the Sigma Trust attended the final feedback meeting.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

The academy is much larger than average. Most pupils are white British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average. The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is below average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is below average but the proportion of pupils who have a statement of SEN or an education, health and care plan is above average. The academy hosts a specialist resourced provision for pupils who have a hearing impairment. A small minority of pupils attend nurture provision in the academy's 'Thrive Centre' or are on part-time timetables or attend alternative provision at Ipswich Town Football Club.

At its last inspection in May 2018, the academy was judged to be inadequate. Serious weaknesses were found in its safeguarding arrangements, pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, the sixth form and leadership and management. Two vice-principals were leading the academy in the absence of the chief executive officer of the Thrive Trust and the executive headteacher, who had been absent since March 2018. Since then, the chief executive officer of the Thrive Trust and the executive headteacher have left the academy. The management of the academy is being re-brokered. The Sigma Trust is expected to take charge in January 2019.

Safeguarding

An experienced vice-principal now leads a team of designated leaders for safeguarding. All of them have been suitably trained to fulfil this role. Communication within the team has improved, and designated leaders meet weekly to review safeguarding matters and to ensure that staff follow procedures routinely. Senior leaders hold 'panel' meetings every two weeks to ensure that the academy's most vulnerable pupils are kept safe.

The academy's approach to raising concerns about safeguarding matters are more systematic. Its 'red card' procedure has been amended to simplify what staff must do if they have a concern. This includes clear guidance on who this information should be passed to. Senior leaders review red card concerns promptly to determine what action is needed. Further improvements are planned for implementation later this term to test the robustness of these new procedures.

My scrutiny of your safeguarding files confirmed that your senior leaders have overhauled their record-keeping. Procedures are secure for logging concerns and maintaining personal written records of pupils at risk. Actions are recorded chronologically and link directly to documentation provided by other child protection agencies. These records are stored securely.

The single central record is complete, but untidy. All the necessary checks are made when appointing adults to work with children. However, the record lists the pre-

employment checks made of all employees of the Thrive Trust and a range of other people who work with pupils within and outside of the academy. It does not delineate clearly between teachers, assistants, governors, coaches, support and supply staff. This makes it too large and unmanageable.

My scrutiny of the single central record noted errors in the recording of some information. For example, six members of staff had no records of checks of their identity although these checks had been made. There were no barring service checks recorded for a large number of advisory and support staff, even though these checks had already been carried out. Section 128 checks of governors and trustees were not recorded accurately. All these details were updated by the end of the inspection. Further scope exists to tighten up these procedures.

Currently, as the management of the school changes between trusts, governance remains weak. The safeguarding policy has been updated this term but does not identify a governor responsible for overseeing its implementation. It is unclear who monitors the single central record. Confirmation of the Sigma Trust as the new sponsor provides an ideal opportunity to rectify this weakness and to consider ways in which the single central record could be simplified.

My discussions with pupils confirmed that, generally, they feel safe. They told me that, this term, staff are more responsive to their concerns about bullying and are helping them to sort out their concerns about name-calling and physical bullying. Your logging of bullying issues needs improving. Currently, your logs record how many incidents occur but do not show what actions you and staff are taking to resolve and reduce bullying.

I found behaviour outside to be calm and orderly. Pupils behaved themselves during lunchtime. Most of them choose to play games or eat lunch together in friendship groups. The perimeter is secure and supervisory staff are on duty. However, older pupils feel that newly-arrived pupils in Year 7 do not always behave well enough at breaktimes and lunchtimes. Your own monitoring shows that there have been several altercations this term.

My short visits to lessons with one of your senior leaders found most pupils to be attentive and respectful towards staff. They conduct themselves appropriately when lining up and leaving lessons. They follow instructions and engage in questioning and discussion. Where teaching captures their interest, and challenges them to think for themselves, pupils work hard and show real interest in their work.

You and your senior leaders acknowledge that more needs to be done to eliminate low-level disruption in lessons. Current procedures of issuing warnings, which can escalate to removal from classrooms, are not deterring all pupils from misbehaving. Referrals to the isolation room remain too high. Pupils told me that these procedures work in some lessons but not in others, mainly because not all teachers apply them consistently. You are currently taking the views of staff and pupils to

determine how these procedures can be strengthened so that staff use them consistently.

Attendance in the main academy and in the sixth form is improving. Your data shows that attendance is higher at this stage compared with the same time last year. You have extended the responsibility for monitoring attendance and following-up regular absence to all tutors and pastoral leaders. You have shared your raised expectations of pupils with parents. These new procedures are working. However, persistent absence rates in the sixth form remain too high.

External support

You commissioned the local authority to provide support for senior leaders in strengthening the academy's safeguarding arrangements. This support has helped leaders to make improvements. There is greater clarity in the roles and responsibilities of those responsible for safeguarding. Procedures are more robust. Further visits by the local authority are planned later this term to validate their views on the effectiveness of the actions taken so far to improve safeguarding.

Your appointment, facilitated by the Sigma Trust, to lead the academy on an interim basis is providing much needed stability and added impetus to making improvements.

Priorities for further improvement:

- evaluate the impact of your revised systems and procedures for recording safeguarding matters to check that they work and become firmly established
- consider ways of simplifying the information contained on the single central record so that it is accurate and easy to manage
- strengthen procedures to manage pupils' behaviour in lessons and check that they are used consistently by all staff
- improve the monitoring of bullying and use this information to plan your actions to reduce the number of incidents occurring.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the representative of the Thrive Trust and chief executive officer of the Sigma Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector