

Tribal
1-4 Portland Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0117 311 5359
Direct F 0117 315 0430
Email: christina.bannerman@tribalgroup.com

25 September 2013

Helen Anthony
Headteacher
Fortismere School
Southwing
Tetherdown
Muswell Hill
London
N10 1NE

Dear Ms Anthony

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Fortismere School

Following my visit with additional inspectors Ann Sydney and Raminder Arora to your school on 24 September 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a no-notice monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the school.

Evidence

Ofsted has investigated a qualifying complaint which raised concerns about the safety of students attending the school who have special educational needs. The inspection team found no evidence to support these concerns, having carried out a wide range of evidence-gathering activities.

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. School policies were evaluated. The inspectors observed how the school records incidents of poor behaviour and how attendance is monitored. They checked how the school communicates with parents, including how it responds to complaints. They met with the headteacher, other senior staff, the special educational needs coordinator and a group of middle managers. They met groups of students and spoke to others throughout the inspection. Telephone conversations were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. They examined a number of case files

concerning students with special educational needs. Inspectors also talked to several parents and met with the headteacher of the special educational needs school for hearing-impaired students that share the school site. More than 20 lessons were visited and inspectors monitored how students, including those with special educational needs, are supported in lessons. They also observed how students moved around the site at lesson changes and the way they left the school at the end of the day.

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

The school's safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.

Context

Fortismere School is a larger-than-average secondary school with a sixth form. Most students arrive at the school with above-average attainment and leave having achieved higher-than-average examination results. Just under half of students come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school has lower than the national proportion of students with special educational needs and disabilities but a higher-than-average proportion with statements of special educational needs, predominantly for autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). The proportion of students known to be eligible for the additional government funding known as the pupil premium is below average. The school site is extensive. Additional time between lessons is timetabled, to allow for movement between activities.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

A strong focus by school leaders on reinforcing good behaviour has resulted in the number of fixed-term exclusions steadily declining over the last three years. For the first time there were no permanent exclusions last year. The school has recently reviewed its behaviour policy and additional changes have been implemented from the start of this term. These have included the need for students to wear identity badges at all times to ensure that they can access the site safely and to allow unauthorised visitors to be more easily recognised in this non-uniform school. The new badges are also helpful for some students, who use them to carry around timetables and other visual prompts or reminders. Students appear well informed about the changes and are aware of the consequences of any inappropriate behaviour. They say that they feel safe and that staff support them well.

Behaviour in lessons is generally good and movement around the site is well managed and usually orderly. When students waited outside classrooms for teachers to arrive from other lessons, some pushing and jostling was observed. However, this was for very short periods of time and was good natured. Students told inspectors that fights were uncommon and were quickly dealt with by staff when they occurred. Most considered that incidents of bullying were unusual, and this view is supported by the records that are kept by the school. Some did express concern about the use

of homophobic language and felt that this was not always challenged by staff in a consistent way.

School leaders are very aware that some students with autistic spectrum disorders struggle to cope with the large site and high numbers of students. They have therefore reviewed where the inclusion facilities are placed on the site and have relocated this area, known as 'The Linc', to the centre of the site. Students who are vulnerable or who have special educational needs use this area as their base. They know where to find support here should they need it. Risk assessments are carried out that determine whether some students should be restricted to certain areas of the school. Staff monitor this carefully but the large site makes it difficult for them to do so effectively. Tutor groups, that include all year groups, together with hearing-impaired students, have helped to support all members of the community. This can be seen in the attitudes of older students who stated that they would intervene if they saw younger or more vulnerable students in difficulty.

Attendance rates for all year groups are well above average because most students, including those with special educational needs, attend school regularly. This is because the school actively encourages them to do so and quickly follows up any absence that is recorded. When students with special educational needs are unable to attend timetabled lessons, high levels of support are provided. This allows them to continue to attend on a full-time basis, while alternative placements are sought.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher is passionate about ensuring that the school is an inclusive community where all students are valued and their needs met. Her commitment to these values is recognised by staff and shared by other leaders and governors.

School managers of inclusion, safeguarding and special educational needs are knowledgeable and have implemented efficient procedures for keeping students safe. These include arrangements for recruiting and training staff. Teaching assistants are well deployed and sensitively support the needs of students in lessons and during social times. Strategies for supporting the needs of students, particularly those with autistic spectrum disorders, are shared with teaching staff. However, not all teachers use the strategies and some lack an awareness of the need to do so. This limits how much progress some students make in their lessons.

A few students with statements of special educational needs require very high levels of support which the school is unable to maintain. Leaders recognise this through the careful collection of evidence, including from parents and from specialist agencies, to inform their annual reviews. However, the local authority can be slow to respond to their requests for a change in provision for these students. The school manages the safeguarding implications that this causes by providing high levels of supervision and individual support.

Communication with parents is not always effective. The school website lacks key pieces of information, including how the school supports students with special educational needs. Some policies are not clear about the actions that should be taken. It is not easy for parents to know who they should contact if they have a concern. As a result, parental complaints have not always been responded to in a timely and effective manner. School leaders are aware of these concerns and are working to address them, for example by reviewing the website content and ensuring that parental concerns are responded to more quickly. The parents who spoke to inspectors during the inspection felt that the school values diversity and supports the individual needs of their children well.

Governors share the headteacher's vision and help to ensure that the school is a safe place. They provide strong support and challenge to leaders so that the needs of all students, including those with special educational needs, are met. They have appointed members of the governing body to take responsibility for inclusion and safeguarding at the school. These members visit regularly and work closely with school leaders to ensure that standards of care and safety are suitably high. Regular presentations and reports are provided by leaders to keep governors informed.

External support

The school uses specialist organisations to provide training for staff to support students with special educational needs. This has included specific training for some staff in how to support students with autism or speech, language and communication difficulties. Expertise and advice on teaching students with hearing impairments are obtained from staff at the special educational needs school.

The school has built effective partnerships with a wide range of organisations and external services. Members of staff work as part of multi-agency groups in an effort to ensure vulnerable students are supported through carefully planned interventions. As a result, some students have been able to make considerable progress, despite their challenging circumstances or special educational needs.

The local authority provides ongoing training and support to the school in safeguarding and special educational needs. This has included seconding an autism specialist to support staff at the school. The local authority recognises that some students with special educational needs are not appropriately placed because the school is unable to meet their needs. Local authority officers are planning to work with headteachers within the borough to review how students with statements that identify high-level needs are provided with appropriate educational provision.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve communication with parents by providing clearer information on the website and in policies so that they know who to contact if they have a concern and understand exactly what staff are responsible for.

- Ensure that all teachers are making effective use of the strategies that are provided to support students with special educational needs, especially those with autistic spectrum disorders.
- Work with the local authority to ensure that appropriate provision for students with high levels of special educational need is found as quickly as possible.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Director of Children's Services for Haringey and the Chair of the Governing Body. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Cox
Her Majesty's Inspector