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4 April 2014

Mrs Vanessa Frank
Gracelands Nursery School
Grace Road
Birmingham
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Dear Mrs Frank

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Gracelands Nursery School

Following my visit with Michelle Winter, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 2–3 April 2014, 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 monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with the no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out following a request from the Secretary of State.

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. In addition, they looked at minutes of governing body meetings, the curriculum, pupils' attendance records, the school's management of pupil behaviour, and conducted learning walks during lessons and at playtimes. Inspectors considered the responses of 14 staff questionnaires. They met with the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, staff, pupils and parents. They held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority and met with a local headteacher who provides additional support to the school.

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

The school's safeguarding arrangements meet requirements
The quality of leadership and management requires improvement

Context

The school currently provides nursery education for 52 children. Nearly all children are from South Asian backgrounds and speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled children and those who have special educational needs is

similar to that found nationally. The proportion of children known to be eligible for free school meals is average. In May 2013, governors appointed a new headteacher. Four governors and a new Chair of the Governing Body have been appointed since September 2013.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Children's behaviour is good and they enjoy school. The school provides a stimulating environment for children and the teaching engages the children's interest. As a result, children become more confident in their use of language and develop good social relationships with other children.

Playtimes and lunch breaks are well supervised. They include activities that encourage children to play together in small groups. Relationships between staff and children are positive and caring.

Each year, a small number of children find the change from home life to school difficult. In September 2013, staff went out into the community and visited each child's home before they started at the school. Parents and carers report that the home visits helped the majority of children to settle in quickly at the school.

The school has also introduced a new behaviour policy to reduce the few incidents of pupils' challenging behaviour during their first weeks of school. However, a recent visit to the school by governors to look at this aspect of the school's work did not lead to any evaluation of whether the new policy was making a difference.

Children's attendance is average overall. The school monitors attendance well. On the first day of a child's absence, the school telephones the family. If they are unable to contact home, staff visit the family to check the reason for the child's absence. Governors' monitoring of attendance is satisfactory. They consider each individual request for an extended absence because of a holiday and in so doing monitor children's well-being.

The quality of leadership and management

On her first day in office, the headteacher identified weaknesses in the way that staff were recruited to the school and acted promptly to ensure a safer environment for staff and children.

Following this, senior school leaders carried out a full safeguarding audit. This identified a number of weaknesses and led to a remedial action plan to improve safeguarding. Checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are now in place. A new governor has been nominated for safeguarding responsibilities and has attended appropriate training.

In the past, the governing body failed to take up references or ensure that suitable checks on staff were done. Governors are now aware of the need for better safeguarding and have agreed the actions in the action plan. However, it was left to the new headteacher to initiate all this. In this area of their work, as well in evaluating the effectiveness of the school, the governing body has not done its job well enough.

At the time of the inspection, school leaders were unaware of local authority or government guidelines on the prevention of extreme and radical behaviour as set out in the 'Prevent' programme. The school has since updated the safeguarding policy with reference to 'Prevent' guidelines and placed the policy on the school website. However, staff and governors require further and immediate training to ensure that the new policy is understood and appropriately monitored.

The turnover of members of the governing body is high. Four governors were recently elected to the governing body, from six nominees, but parental participation in the election was limited. With some support from the local authority, the school is changing the constitution of the governing body to ensure more stability and better continuity in governance. A number of governors are inexperienced and will require further training and support if they are to discharge their roles and responsibilities well.

External support

Overall, the support provided by the local authority has been weak. The local authority has commissioned some support for the new headteacher from another local school. However, the local authority has failed to provide enough support for the school's safeguarding arrangements, which should have included identifying and minimising risk around extremism. Local authority oversight, and support for, the work of the governing body has not resulted in good governance.

Priorities for further improvement

As a matter of urgency, the school should:

- conduct an external review of governance in order to assess how this aspect of leadership may be improved
- ensure that key policies such as the child protection policy, anti-bullying and behaviour policies include reference to identifying and minimising extremist behaviour
- train all staff in recognising risk of potential radicalisation and extremism and in the correct procedures to follow should they have concerns, supported by the local authority as appropriate.

Her Majesty's inspectors will continue to monitor the school and will consider this is in determining the timing of the next full inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Lindfield

Her Majesty's Inspector