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Mrs Lisa Hughes
Acting Headteacher
Kemball Special School
Beaconsfield Drive
Blurton
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST3 3JD

Dear Mrs Hughes

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Kemball Special School

Following my visit with Marilyn Massey, Additional Inspector, to your school on 14 and 15 January 2015, 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 the Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and about the attendance of pupils at the school. In particular, inspectors sought to establish:

- whether the school has effective and safe procedures for recruiting and ensuring the suitability of staff
- whether the school's policies, procedures and practices are effective in keeping pupils safe
- parents' and pupils' views about safety
- how well leaders, including governors, understand and fulfil their responsibilities with regard to safeguarding
- the reasons for low attendance and the effectiveness of the school's actions to promote good attendance
- how well school staff follow up absence and support pupils who may be absent due to medical reasons.

Context

The school has 94 pupils between two and sixteen years old. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The majority of pupils have profound and

complex needs or severe learning difficulties. However, a smaller but growing group of pupils have moderate learning difficulties. Many pupils have considerable physical and medical needs. The school moved into a new building in September 2013 and pupil numbers have increased considerably since then. Around half of pupils are eligible for free school meals. About a quarter of pupils are from minority ethnic groups. The largest group is pupils of Pakistani heritage.

The headteacher retired at the end of December 2014. You, as deputy headteacher, are currently acting as headteacher and you are supported by an acting deputy headteacher.

Evidence

I scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. Information about pupils' attendance was considered and I reviewed the school's arrangements for following up absences. Meetings were held with the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher and with other members of staff including the teacher in charge of personal, social and health education. I also met with the Chair of the Governing Body and a parent governor and looked at minutes from meetings of the governing body. A meeting was held with two representatives of the local authority. My colleague and I made short visits to all classrooms and break time and lunchtime arrangements were observed. Informal discussions were held with staff, pupils and a small number of parents.

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

The school's safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.

Safeguarding arrangements

Leaders, governors and staff rightly place a very high priority on the safety and well-being of pupils. After some gaps were identified in the checks made when new staff are appointed, leaders and governors have ensured that recruitment procedures have been updated in line with the current statutory guidance. Leaders now ensure that all the appropriate checks are made on the suitability of staff and that these are carefully and correctly recorded. Information provided to potential job applicants is explicit about the school's commitment to keeping pupils safe. References are collected and retained. Leaders ensure that interviews include questions about safeguarding issues and interview panels always include at least one leader or governor who is trained in safe recruitment processes. Training on the school's safeguarding policy and procedures is included in induction training and all staff have regular updates to ensure that staff awareness remains high. All the teachers and teaching assistants that we spoke to had a secure understanding of possible signs of abuse and knew what to do if they were concerned about a pupil.

Leaders, governors and staff have a good understanding of the most recent legislation and guidance on keeping pupils safe. Leaders have drafted a new safeguarding policy to reflect this guidance. This policy is due to be discussed at the next meeting of the governing body.

When safeguarding concerns do arise, detailed records are kept and, when appropriate, leaders seek the advice of other professionals. The designated safeguarding leaders are clear about when they should refer a case to the local authority including the local authority designated officer. During the inspection a sample of case files were reviewed. In all cases, suitable action had been taken and appropriate referrals made following incidents or concerns. Records are kept regarding any meetings attended, recommendations made and actions taken. This information is stored securely.

The day-to-day procedures to keep pupils safe observed during the inspection were appropriate. All visitors to the school have to be admitted by a member of staff and are required to sign in and wear a badge. Levels of supervision in the classroom and during informal times are extremely good, and staff are vigilant about pupils' health and safety needs. Many pupils have very limited mobility and staff are well trained to move pupils safely using hoists when appropriate. All staff complete a basic first aid qualification and a good number of staff have additional qualifications such as in paediatric first aid. All medicines are stored securely and careful records are kept when medicines are given to pupils. Staff are trained to carry out a range of procedures, for example to support pupils' eating and personal care needs. Leaders have ensured that arrangements are in place to deal with any emergency situations and staff are keenly aware of how they should respond.

During the inspection pupils behaved very well. Several were very keen to talk to inspectors and said that they enjoy school and feel safe. Pupils said that there is no bullying. One pupil explained that his teacher says 'we should use our hands, feet and words kindly'. There have been no responses to the online survey Parent View and the school has not carried out any recent surveys of parents views. The small number of parents who spoke to inspectors were extremely positive about the school and the staff. They are confident that their children are safe and well looked after.

Any significant incidents of poor behaviour are carefully recorded. Physical restraint is used only occasionally when pupils are at risk of hurting themselves or others. Any incidents are recorded and reported to parents. Records of poor behaviour and physical restraint are reviewed by teachers and leaders and used to inform individual pupil risk assessments which identify potential triggers and ways of calming or distracting pupils which are usually effective. Although records are regularly reviewed by leaders, there is limited evidence of analysis to determine any overall patterns or trends. This means that leaders are unsure of whether the number of incidents is increasing or decreasing as a result of their policies and procedures.

The curriculum at Kemball has a strong focus on personal, social and health education. Leaders have a good understanding of the risks facing pupils, including risks of child sexual exploitation and extremism. Leaders and teachers carefully consider the implications of these risks for different pupil groups. A detailed plan sets out the topics that are scheduled each term for each class. These plans are then carefully adapted by teachers to meet the needs of each individual pupil. Pupils are taught about a broad range of topics such as personal hygiene, food and exercise, taking responsibility towards others, following rules, rights and choices, relationships, road safety and internet safety. Pupils are taught about sex and relationships at an appropriate level but the school's written policy on sex and relationships education has not been reviewed for some time and so does not reflect the good work that is going on within the school. The school is effective in promoting internet safety and is working towards external accreditation for this aspect of its work. Pupils' understanding of these important topics is carefully assessed and recorded in order to inform future teaching. This is very effective practice.

Governors place a high priority on pupils' well-being but acknowledge that in the past they have been too reliant on school leaders to keep them up to date with current requirements regarding safeguarding. They acknowledge that they did not know about the gaps which previously existed in the single central record of checks made on the suitability of staff. They now have a more secure understanding of the current requirements and have ensured that all appropriate checks have been made and that the safeguarding policy is being updated. Minutes from meetings of the governing body show that safeguarding is a regular item on the agenda. Governors have attended training on safeguarding but recognise their need for further training which has been organised. Governors also acknowledge that they must ensure that they receive regular updates on their responsibilities and use this information to provide appropriate challenge to school leaders to hold them to account for their work.

Attendance

Attendance has improved slightly but remains low overall. The attendance of the majority of pupils is in line with or above the national average, but around a quarter of pupils are persistently absent. The attendance of pupils with moderate learning difficulties is generally much higher than the attendance of other pupils. This is because many pupils have considerable medical and health issues which result in frequent and sometimes lengthy absences and hospital stays. When pupils are in hospital, school staff liaise with the hospital education service in order that pupils can continue lessons when they are well enough. Any absences are followed up promptly by school staff and registers are maintained accurately. In line with national guidance, the headteacher does not agree to pupils taking holidays in term time except in exceptional circumstances. The attendance of individual pupils is

carefully checked but leaders do not regularly monitor the attendance of different groups of pupils. This means that leaders and governors are not able to identify and tackle differences between groups or evaluate the impact of the school's work to promote good attendance.

External support

Local authority representatives have focused their work on ensuring that achievement and teaching remain good. They have also commissioned support for the acting headteacher. The local authority has a good understanding of the school's strengths but is less aware of areas for improvement. The local authority representatives know that the school completes an annual safeguarding audit but are unsure of the findings of this audit. The local authority sends regular updates to schools about important changes to safeguarding requirements but has not checked that these have been implemented. The local authority acknowledges that it has not provided appropriate challenge to the school regarding pupils' attendance. The governors' support service is providing further training for governors regarding safeguarding.

Priorities for further improvement

- School leaders and governors should ensure that systems are in place to gather and respond to the views of parents.
- Leaders should regularly analyse information about attendance, behaviour and the use of physical restraint so that any variations between groups are quickly identified and so that the impact of school policies can be evaluated.
- Governors should ensure that they keep up to date with statutory requirements and guidance so that they are not overly reliant on school leaders. They should use this information to provide challenge to school leaders and hold them to account for their work in keeping pupils safe.

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

Yours sincerely

Morag Kophamel
Her Majesty's Inspector