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13 March 2015

Ann Gardner
Interim Headteacher
The Willows Primary School
Downing Close
Ipswich
IP2 9ER

Dear Mrs Gardner

No formal designation monitoring inspection of The Willows Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 March 2015, 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 because the Chief Inspector was concerned about behaviour and attendance at the school.

Evidence

The inspector considered a wide range of evidence including:

- observations of pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning in lessons
- observations of pupils' behaviour throughout the day, including discussion with pupils
- documentary evidence, including behaviour logs
- discussions with school leaders and staff.

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

Leaders and managers have not taken effective action to maintain the high standards of behaviour and attitudes identified at the school's previous inspection.

Context

The Willows is a smaller than average primary school. Over half of the pupils are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding (additional funding provided for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority), this is well above average. Over a third of pupils are from ethnic minority groups which is also well above average. A higher than average proportion of pupils has special educational needs. A larger than average proportion of pupils enter and leave the school during the academic year.

You are the interim headteacher at the school. You have been employed since 26 January 2015 to lead the school in the absence of the headteacher who is on extended leave, which began in September 2014, due to ill health. There have been five interim headteachers since September 2015. You will lead the school until the end of March 2015, when the headteacher is due to return. The assistant headteacher is acting as deputy headteacher in the absence of the substantive deputy who is on extended leave. Governors have recently approved a new leadership structure for the school and plan to appoint a second deputy headteacher to grow the senior leadership team.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The behaviour policy is detailed and it clearly outlines the procedures aimed at improving behaviour. All teachers use a traffic light system in lessons. Teachers issue 'amber' traffic lights for low level disruption. This includes calling out or talking at inappropriate times. If pupils persist in their low-level disruption, or for more serious one-off incidents, they proceed to 'red' traffic light. This means that pupils must leave their classroom and spend a few minutes with an adult, in the 'exit room, set aside for this purpose. While this system is effective in encouraging the good behaviour of most pupils, records show that a small minority of pupils repeatedly receive the red and amber traffic lights. For these pupils the system is not effective.

My observations and pupils' comments indicate that positive attitudes to learning are not universal. Off-task behaviour, calling out and inappropriate comments to adults and other pupils are commonplace among a small minority of pupils. Additionally, some lessons start slowly because pupils do not enter classrooms ready to learn and they take too long to settle down.

Most pupils behave well at lunch and break times, but not all. Some pupils can be found running inside the building, or playing in the dining room which makes it a noisy place to eat. The playground and fields have a range of apparatus that pupils are keen to use, including climbing frames. However, the rules regarding their use are not always clear enough for pupils. For instance, during the inspection some pupils were using play equipment inappropriately by climbing too high on parts of the apparatus that is not for this purpose. Because adults do not always address this, pupils are unclear about whether or not it is allowed.

Mid-day assistants report incidents of poor behaviour to teachers through 'consequence slips'. If pupils receive three of these slips, they spend time indoors. Again, a small group of pupils appear disproportionately in the 'consequence group' where they sit inside writing lines and reflecting on their behaviour. Staff have not put in effective strategies to reduce repeated poor behaviour.

The school prominently displays the rewards pupils receive and keeps records of sanctions that are issued. However, these records are not analysed to look for patterns and trends or to check that behaviour is improving over time. There are missed opportunities, therefore, to identify good practice or support some teachers to manage behaviour effectively.

The dress code is not applied consistently, and some pupils say they are unclear about when they are allowed to wear trainers and if jewellery is permitted.

The leader for special educational needs and family support workers help pupils who find managing their behaviour difficult. Individual behaviour plans are detailed and the school uses external agencies to provide support, including counselling. This team of adults know the pupils and their families well. This has been effective for some pupils who report that their behaviour has improved and they value the time they have to talk to adults. The school is currently looking for ways to involve parents when drawing up these plans so that they can contribute more fully at home. Despite this work, the proportion of pupils who have had one or more fixed term exclusions is well above average.

Attendance has improved but remains below average. The school works with some families and the education welfare officer to improve behaviour. The school issues fixed penalties where appropriate. However, the school does not intervene quickly enough to identify declining attendance before it becomes a bigger issue. The attendance policy has not been updated recently and includes some conflicting information about the start times of the school day. This is not helpful in encouraging punctuality.

Priorities for further improvement

- Review systems and procedures so that they are effective in improving the behaviour of a small minority of pupils and reducing exclusions.
- Ensure that behaviour and safety rules, and the school's expectations, are clear to everybody
- Review systems to improve attendance so that it is at least in line with the national average
- Ensure that the school acts swiftly to intervene when attendance declines

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk, 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

Michelle Winter
Her Majesty's Inspector

- Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority
- Director of Children's Services for Suffolk
- Secretary of State for Education