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23 April 2015

Mr Peter Brandt
Headteacher
Holly House Special School
Church Street North
Old Whittington
Chesterfield
S41 9QR

Dear Mr Brandt

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Holly House Special School

Following my visit to your school on 22 April 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and the time you took to discuss behaviour in your school.

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 Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about behaviour at the school due to the number of pupil exclusions.

Evidence

I considered 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 information about staff recruitment
- discussions with school leaders and staff.

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

Leaders and managers have taken effective action to maintain the high standards of behaviour and attitudes identified at the school's previous inspection.

Context

Holly House School is a special school for 40 pupils aged between seven and 14 with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. All pupils are boys and they have a statement of special educational needs or education, health and care plans. All pupils have previously had a disrupted education following exclusion from a mainstream

school. The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding is significantly above the national average. This is additional government funding for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, from service families or who are looked after by the local authority.

Pupils enter the provision at different points throughout their school career and leave at the end of Year 9. The school has residential provision for up to six pupils per night. This part of the provision was last inspected in November 2014 and was found to be outstanding in all areas.

The school does not make any use of off-site alternative provision.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

In the previous inspection, the behaviour and safety of pupils was judged to be good. Strategies to manage negative behaviours are well established across the school. The behaviour policy has remained consistent over recent years. This results in staff being clear with pupils about what is deemed to be unacceptable behaviour. You acknowledge that the number of pupil exclusions is high but you are able to demonstrate the positive impact of your approach. You therefore prepare pupils well for the next stage of their education at the next school setting.

The staff team is stable and appropriately qualified to meet the needs of the pupils. However, I checked information about recruitment and not all the necessary checks for new teachers had been completed. You were able to do these checks during the inspection in order to assure yourself about the safety of the pupils.

At the start of the inspection I observed pupils calmly entering school from their taxis. There was no lateness of pupils to school. You have established clear lines of communication with taxi drivers and escorts to address any negative behaviours during the journey to school. All pupils I spoke to knew school staff would be informed about any incidents that took place in the taxis. Pupils move to their classrooms in an orderly manner. They are all smartly dressed and wear their uniform with pride.

Pupils who stay in residence also move to their classrooms on time. You have a clear system for sharing information about pupils between residential staff and day school staff in the mornings. This ensures that any issues regarding pupils' behaviour can be planned for and addressed immediately. During the inspection several pupils commented on how their behaviour had improved through being in residence at Holly House.

Pupils move around the school in an orderly manner. They are well supervised during these times by staff. Any behaviours that fall below the school's high expectations are quickly and effectively addressed by staff. Corridors contain stimulating displays of work and are free of clutter. Clear routes to spaces around the school aid the movement of pupils and staff.

During an assembly, pupils demonstrated good behaviour and well-developed listening skills. This helped to ensure that pupils had opportunities to reflect and contribute their ideas. Pupils clearly demonstrated that they knew the rule about

putting their hand up and being selected if they wanted to speak. The pupils responded with maturity to a discussion and a video clip, before moving on sensibly to their breaktime activities.

Pupils take part in purposeful breaktime activities including the use of tablet computers, dodgeball, use of the library, pool, indoor games, use of the computer suite and cricket. I was able to observe these activities during morning break and all pupils were meaningfully engaged in their choice of activity. Staff are directed to support the pupils during this time. The support provided to pupils was appropriate and not overbearing. I observed excellent relationships between staff and pupils during breaktime.

Most pupils behave well and take pride in their school. Therefore the school site is clean and free of any litter. I did not observe any evidence of damage to property which had been caused by pupils' behaviour. However, staff, pupils, and your records indicate that this has happened on occasion.

In lessons, almost without exception, pupils listen carefully and follow instructions quickly. This is because staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and plan interesting and engaging activities that are relevant to the pupils' lives. Teaching assistants work closely with teachers to ensure pupils get the right level of support at the right time. I observed pupils working well both independently and in small groups.

Strategies to reward positive behaviours are well established. An effective reward system enables pupils to accumulate points which can be converted into rewards, such as, games, toiletries, uniform and electrical equipment. Pupils report favourably on the system and say that it encourages them to behave well during lessons.

There are clear plans in place to support pupils who are at the highest risk of exclusion. You have established an area to provide more intense support to those who are most at risk of exclusion. This space is situated outside your office and the office of the deputy headteacher. It is closely monitored by yourself and senior staff. The area is safe, bright and of an appropriate size for this type of provision. During the inspection, the area was not used by any pupils due to their good behaviour.

Pupils behave well during the lunchtime period. They sit in class groups in the dining hall and are encouraged to chat together whilst they eat their meals. Staff eat their food at the same time and provide positive role models for pupils' behaviour. Following the meal, pupils have a short break in which they can choose an appropriate activity. Pupils were seen to engage in these activities with good humour which continued into the session after lunch.

Pupils say that they feel safe at Holly House School and that staff help them to improve their behaviour. I held formal discussions with four pupils in Key Stages 2 and 3. All pupils were positive about the school and the ways in which staff promoted positive behaviour. Pupils reported to me that staff had helped them to cope with difficult situations more effectively. They explained that they have a key worker to report their concerns to. Pupils value their key workers greatly, and said that their concerns were always responded to appropriately. Pupils said that when

restraints, exclusions or sanctions are used, they believe them to be a fair response to what has happened.

I looked at several documents related to behaviour and exclusions. The information contained in the documents matched what staff and pupils had reported to me during the inspection. When I met with you and the two deputy headteachers you told me that the Governing Body and the local authority have both challenged you to reduce the number of exclusions. You and your senior team also told me about how you have reduced exclusions by brokering many links with other services across the county.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure all the necessary checks on staff are completed prior to them starting their employment.

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

Yours sincerely

Phil Harrison
Her Majesty's Inspector