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Mr Anthony Welch
Executive headteacher
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Dear Mr Welch

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Alton Park Junior School

Following my visit with Richard Spencer, associate inspector, to your school on 11 February 2016, 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 Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, aspects of the effectiveness of leadership and management including governance, and the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils at the school. The monitoring inspection was unannounced and was carried out in response to complaints which raised serious concerns. The inspection sought to establish whether:

- safeguarding procedures are effective
- leaders and the governing body are effective in fulfilling responsibilities with regard to safeguarding and pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare.

Having considered the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time, safeguarding is not effective.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record of checks made when staff are appointed and a wide range of documentation relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. Inspectors met with you, the head of school, the Chair and Vice-chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. An inspector spoke to a newly recruited governor and the local authority virtual school headteacher for looked after children by phone. Inspectors visited all classes and teaching areas and spoke with two groups of pupils. An inspector spoke with parents as they collected their children at the end of the day. Inspectors took account of the 34 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and leaders' analysis of responses to the school's parental survey as well as written communication from parents. There were too few responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, for these to be taken into account.

Context

Alton Park Junior School is larger than the average-sized primary school, providing education for pupils between the ages of seven and 11. There are 457 pupils on roll. The majority of them are of White British heritage. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, eligible for support through the pupil premium grant, is over twice the national average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs is above average.

There have been frequent changes in the school's leadership over the past five years. In September 2015, you were seconded to the school as executive headteacher in addition to your position as headteacher of Holland Park Primary school. The head of school was seconded to the school at the same time. A new Chair and Vice-chair of the Governing Body were elected in December 2015. Plans are in place for the school to become part of a multi-academy trust with Holland Park Primary School.

During the autumn term, Ofsted was made aware of concerns regarding the procedures used by staff to manage pupils with significantly challenging behaviour. Local authority advisers carried out a review of the allegations and made recommendations to improve the school's policies and procedures for managing pupils' behaviour. While these concerns were being investigated you did not have access to the school for a period of about 10 weeks. You returned to the school in January 2016.

Following the review, in December 2015 the Chair and Vice-chair of the Governing Body resigned. The governing bodies of Holland Park Primary School and Alton Park Junior School subsequently agreed it was in the best interests of both schools to continue the joint leadership arrangements set in place at the start of the academic year. A new Chair and Vice-chair of the Governing Body were elected in mid-December 2015.

Inspection findings

Since September, you and your senior leaders have not placed sufficient emphasis on ensuring that the procedures and processes in place to protect and safeguard pupils are sufficiently robust. Strong support from South Essex child support services is, however, helping leaders to address the priorities identified at the safeguarding review. A new child protection policy was agreed by governors and implemented early this term.

While progress in this area of the school's work has been made, important weaknesses remain. Although new staff are checked appropriately and training on safeguarding provided, the lack of records and insufficient rigour in ensuring up-to-date information is provided and followed by all could potentially put pupils at risk.

- Paperwork is not well organised and records of training are not dated and signed by staff, so it is difficult to be certain that all child protection training is up to date and secure.
- Records of referrals to wider agencies, for example social care, regarding child protection concerns are similarly weak. Although staff record and submit to designated leaders the issues they identify, over time referrals have not been made promptly.
- While calls to social services have been made to follow up concerns, they have not been recorded in sufficient detail to ensure adequate tracking and sufficient action to follow up these issues.
- A similar lack of attention to detail is evident in other aspects of the school's paperwork. For example, induction packs for new staff include a range of documents but not the child protection policy. The leaflet given to visitors to make them aware of safeguarding approaches includes reference to the previous headteacher and to out-of-date government policy documents.

The inspection considered the concerns expressed about the school.

- The use of appropriate and necessary physical intervention to manage the most challenging pupil behaviour, and the actions taken to isolate pupils to manage their behaviour were central to the allegations investigated in the autumn term. Neither the local authority review or this unannounced inspection identified serious irregularities in these procedures. The school's records show it has not been necessary to use physical restraint since mid-November. You consider this is due to the impact of improving behaviour management in school. As required by regulation, all incidents where physical intervention was necessary had been recorded. However, these records varied in quality and in some instances there was insufficient detail about the kind of restraint used. In addition, the causes of the poor behaviour were not analysed sufficiently well to enable staff to be proactive in preventing it happening again.

- Allegations were also made about the inappropriate use of a room for detaining pupils. Pupils and staff are clear that the identified 'Leas Suite' of two rooms is used for supporting pupils who need extra help to manage difficulties in their learning or behaviour. During this unannounced inspection, pupils were effectively supervised and supported in one of the rooms while the other, normally used to provide extra teaching space, was empty.
- Parents, staff and pupils expressed concerns about the consistency and effectiveness of behaviour management. Pupils said that there are frequent fights in the playground and this view is reflected in the class behaviour logs, which record a number of incidents with apparently little action taken. There is no overall analysis by you and your senior leaders to show whether these incidents are increasing or decreasing. The recording of incidents of poor behaviour seen, in common with the physical intervention records, did not identify what had escalated the poor behaviour so that staff could act quickly to prevent similar events re-occurring.
- Pupils do not have confidence that staff will address the issues of rough behaviour in the playground even if they raise them. Pupils understand what the various forms of bullying are, but are not confident that all incidents are managed well.

The impact of new leadership is clear in some elements of the school's safeguarding work. With strong support from South Essex child support services, you have taken positive steps to address the priorities identified at the safeguarding review. A new child protection policy was agreed by governors and implemented early this term. You have improved unsafe aspects of the environment and increased the security of access to the school site and buildings. You have raised the aspirations of staff and pupils. Provision for Year 3 pupils as they start at the school has been upgraded and relocated. This has increased their feeling of security as they start their first year.

While it is clear there is still much to do to improve behaviour, you have made this a priority and some impact of your actions is already evident. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and inside school has been improved well. Staff and pupils say it is much better. During the inspection, pupils concentrated extremely well and tried hard in their lessons. They said that expectations of them are higher and behaviour in lessons is well managed using the new card systems, which show whether their behaviour is good or deteriorating. Between lessons and around the school, pupils move calmly and converse with each other amicably. Without exception, they showed polite courtesy to visitors, holding doors open and greeting staff and inspectors enthusiastically and with respect.

Governors are developing a more robust understanding of safeguarding arrangements. The new Chair and Vice-chair of the Governing Body have significant expertise in school leadership and this is enabling them to ask challenging questions. Through a series of planned visits to the school and meetings with a number of local authority advisers, the Chair has ensured she has an informed view of the quality of the school's work. Further visits to scrutinise procedures for vetting new employees

and for managing behaviour are already in the calendar. The governing body is currently small; however new governors have been recruited to increase further the level of expertise available to both challenge and support the school. A new governor, with expertise in school improvement, had already visited the school to gain a better understanding of its work.

The Chair of the Governing Body is working with leaders to address the urgent need to improve pupils' attendance. She is drawing on her own experience to support leaders to work with families to provide advice, help and challenge where children do not attend school regularly. As yet, there has been insufficient time to judge the impact of these actions. Current information shows that attendance rates remain similar to the low rates of the previous academic year. These are well below the national average.

In summary, there are important issues identified in this inspection that remain to be addressed, but there is also robust evidence to demonstrate that improvements are being made. You have made your higher expectations clear to staff and pupils. As a result, classrooms are calm and well-focused learning environments and pupils are making improved progress in their learning. A member of staff has recently been identified specifically to lead on managing and improving behaviour. Leaders demonstrate the capacity and determination to give the school community a strong sense of purpose and to improve the outcomes achieved by pupils.

External support

Local authority officers made the arrangements for your secondment and that of the head of school. Their monitoring of the work of the school has endorsed that the early actions taken by you and other leaders have improved pupils' behaviour in classes and improved teaching so pupils are making better progress. Until the emergence of the allegations about behaviour management, advisers had not looked at the quality of safeguarding, which was an important oversight on their part. The local authority acted swiftly once issues had emerged. Priorities to secure pupils' safety were identified and appropriate support organised to effect the changes necessary. However, some important aspects of safeguarding, for example child protection, were not included in the review so they have not been addressed with the same rigour.

Priorities for further improvement

- Urgently improve the rigour of the recording of child protection concerns and of the actions taken to secure support for pupils at risk of harm.
- Ensure that the administrative procedures underpinning safeguarding arrangements are rigorous and fit for purpose.

- Establish a detailed overview of pupils' behaviour, set clear targets for its improvement and regularly measure whether it is improving against these targets.
- Ensure that incidents of bullying and poor behaviour are recorded in sufficient detail so that swift action can be taken to address the causes and prevent further occurrences.
- Implement rigorous systems and guidance so that all staff can manage behaviour effectively when pupils are at play.
- Ensure the systems in place for increasing attendance result in improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Prue Rayner

Her Majesty's Inspector