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Mrs Hayley Scargill
Victoria Primary Academy
Finedon Road
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Dear Mrs Scargill

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Victoria Primary Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 16 March 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 and aspects of the effectiveness of leadership and management at the academy.

Evidence

I met with you, the academy's vice-principal and the inclusion officer, as well as the chief executive officer and the director of finance of the Hatton Academies Trust. You and I visited the classrooms of pupils in Years 1, 4 and 6, spending time in each, talking to pupils, observing their behaviour and looking at work in their books.

I scrutinised the single central record of checks carried out on staff and other documents relating to safeguarding. Child protection arrangements and attendance were reviewed. I examined records and documents relating to pupil behaviour and well-being. I reviewed the academy's policies on child protection and safeguarding, pupil behaviour, inclusion, special educational needs and disability, and the staff handbook which contains policies relating to the management of staff.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the academy's safeguarding arrangements are effective.

Context

Victoria Primary Academy converted to a sponsor-led academy in January 2014, following its predecessor school being judged to require special measures in May 2013. The academy is part of the Hatton Academies Trust, along with two other academies. You took up the post of principal, permanently, in March 2015, following a two-year period of instability in senior leadership. This year, a number of staff have left the academy at short notice but you are addressing this and attempting to minimise the disruption to pupils' education.

The academy is a larger than average primary school with 375 pupils on roll. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language are over twice the national average. Currently, 37 different languages are represented at the academy and there has been a recent rise in the mobility of pupils in and out of the school, particularly from eastern Europe. The proportions of pupils entitled to the pupil premium (additional funding from the government) and those who have special educational needs or disability are slightly higher than average.

Main findings

Although you took up the position of principal in March 2015, you have been a senior leader for some time, including periods of acting headteacher at the predecessor school and head of school at the academy. As a result, you have a good knowledge of each pupil's background and their social, emotional and academic needs. You are passionate about the academy and have a clear vision for its future, including the raising of pupils' and teachers' expectations and aspirations. While other academy leaders are clear about your vision for the academy, you have not communicated this as effectively as you might to all staff members and this is slowing school improvement.

You have taken steps to address staff underperformance, resulting in a greater degree of teacher accountability for the outcomes of pupils. This level of rigour was not previously present at the academy and has not been well received by a small minority of colleagues. There has been some unexpected staff turnover and it has been a challenge to fill teaching vacancies with experienced teachers. However, you have acted decisively by ensuring that pupils have the best teachers available and this has given opportunities to colleagues who are not yet fully qualified or are new to the profession. There is a mentoring programme in place with senior leaders offering support and guidance to these teachers. Work in pupils' books shows that teachers are following the academy's policies on teaching but there are some inconsistencies in the quality of pupils' work and the pace of learning.

Academy leaders have significantly improved the systems and procedures for safeguarding pupils during the last year. There is a trust-wide policy for child safeguarding, providing a consistent approach and reducing the level of risk to pupils across the trust. All staff are required to sign documents confirming that they have read and understood statutory requirements and the expectations placed upon them by the academy. Records show that staff training on safeguarding and child protection is regular and up to date. The academy's inclusion team is tenacious in pursuing any concerns about a pupil's welfare and there is an effective and comprehensive recording system in place. Pupils of different ages feel that the academy is a safe place and are sure that adults will help them in times of need.

You and the chief executive officer of the trust review the single central record regularly. However, a number of minor administrative errors were identified during the inspection. These were the result of a lack of attention to detail, brought about by insufficient clarity in the delegation of duties between the trust and the academy.

There are very clear policies and procedures relating to the behaviour of pupils. This includes a child-friendly version of the academy's behaviour code as well as a version for adults. Staff record incidents on a recently introduced electronic recording system that is monitored regularly for trends or patterns of behaviour. Academy leaders and members of the inclusion team use this information to support and improve the behaviour of individuals, while reducing incidents at particular times of the day. The number of incidents recorded is declining, although there is still some over-recording by staff. This suggests that not all staff are clear about behaviour expectations or the importance of accurate information in improving the academy as a whole.

Pupils who display more challenging behaviours have a personal support plan. These plans are highly tailored to the needs of each individual, identifying support and de-escalation strategies that are specific to that pupil. The unique needs of the pupils identified within these plans are not shared with staff consistently well and this can lead to some misinterpretation of the actions taken, particularly by leaders. However, the plans appear appropriate and proportionate to pupils' needs, with careful thought given to the safety of the pupils and their peers.

The introduction of clearer behaviour expectations resulted in an increase in the number of fixed term and permanent pupil exclusions in the 2014–2015 academic year. Senior leaders used this information to review and modify the academy's behaviour systems. Pupils at risk of exclusion now have an additional support plan and more staff have been trained in the use of de-escalation and physical handling techniques. As a result, the number of exclusions has dropped during the current academic year. However, because not all staff have received this training, there are year groups that do not have this expertise readily available. This creates misunderstandings and inconsistencies for some staff in how they deal with behavioural issues.

Academy leaders have taken effective steps to improve the attendance of pupils. In 2015, pupils' attendance dropped below the national average. Leaders have identified the causes of this dip and current attendance is in line with the national average. However, rates of persistent absence have risen and are currently above the national average. This is because too many families take extended or unauthorised absences from school. Pupils are encouraged to attend on time and regularly, through a range of initiatives such as rewards and citations in the academy newsletter. The inclusion team follows up absences swiftly and doggedly to maximise attendance and minimise the risks posed to children missing in education, such as child sexual exploitation, extremism and female genital mutilation.

External support

The trust provides the academy with effective business support which is allowing you to concentrate on leading the improvement of pupils' outcomes. Consequently, you and your leadership team monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning regularly and have a good understanding of the academy's strengths and areas for improvement. The trust provides the academy with a direct link to a teaching school and further expertise is available through the recent partnership with a teaching school alliance. The trust's chief executive officer provides you with mentoring and support but also holds you rigorously to account for the academy's performance during your regular meetings. These collective actions are contributing to important developments and improvements at the academy.

Priorities for further improvement

- Academy leaders must ensure that they communicate effectively with all staff members to eliminate inconsistencies in pupils' work, learning and behaviour, thereby bringing about more rapid school improvement.
- Academy leaders must revisit the scheme of delegation to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of the academy and the trust are clear in relation to pupil safeguarding.
- Academy leaders must reduce levels of pupils' persistent absence by ensuring that extended and unauthorised pupil absences are eliminated.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephen McMullan

Her Majesty's Inspector