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Mr J Hamp
Principal
Springfields Academy
Curzon Street
Calne
Wiltshire
SN11 0DS

Dear Mr Hamp

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Springfields Academy

Following my visit with Sharron Escott and Paula Lahey, Social Care Inspectors, to your academy on 30 September – 1 October 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 Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and leadership and management at the academy. At the same time, there was a full inspection of residential provision under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools. The findings of the full inspection of the residential provision are aligned with this monitoring visit and are also reported separately.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We met with senior leaders of school and residential provision, members of the governing body, staff and parents. We spoke formally and informally with pupils. Behaviour was observed at mealtimes, breaktimes and in classrooms. We reviewed governors' minutes, the academy's tracking of behaviour, records of incidents and sanctions and risk assessment procedures. We communicated with the local authority designated officer (LADO) and a representative of the Education Funding Agency (EFA).

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

- the academy's safeguarding arrangements do not meet requirements
- the quality of leadership and management is inadequate.

Context

There are 105 pupils currently on roll at the academy. Around half of all pupils board in one of the academy's three residential houses during the week. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and the vast majority of pupils have autistic spectrum disorder. The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is above average. The academy is in a period of staff change and is also undertaking a reorganisation of the senior leadership team; around 10% of staff are due to leave over the course of the next academic year.

Behaviour and safety

The academy's arrangements to safeguard pupils and ensure their safety do not meet statutory requirements. In particular, academy staff are not fully implementing strategies to manage pupils' safety. There remain gaps in staff's understanding and application of safeguarding procedures.

Walking around the academy it is noticeable that, in several classrooms, pupils are attentive and positive, enjoying the level of challenge that is provided, and are concentrating on the task in hand. The majority of pupils listen to staff and respond to their instructions, but in too many lessons pupils leave or are absent from classrooms. This is because behaviour management systems are not applied consistently by all staff. New procedures have been introduced but these are not embedded across the academy and are not yet effectively moderating pupils' behaviour. In particular, strategies used currently are not helping pupils to remain in classrooms and participate in lessons.

Members of the pastoral support team are on hand and able to respond to a high proportion of the occasions when pupils absent themselves from lessons. Several staff are skilful in engaging with pupils, talking quietly and providing support that helps pupils to manage their behaviour and return to classrooms. Where physical restraint is used to manage more challenging behaviour, records confirm that pupils are now more regularly asked to sign to confirm that staff have recorded an accurate account of the incident. However, pupils spoken to formally and informally report that not all staff listen to them during and after physical restraint. Written records confirm that the academy has not yet developed sufficient opportunities for pupils to express their views after an incident and help to agree actions to prevent future occurrences.

At breaktimes, pupils have access to a wide range of different areas around the grounds and are appropriately supervised. Pupils cooperate and join in with each other's games in small groups. Primary pupils enjoy playground facilities appropriate to their age and located in a separate area of the grounds. At mealtimes, pupils develop their behaviour and social skills as they chat to their peers and adults in a friendly and sociable atmosphere.

Leadership and management

Safeguarding arrangements at the academy are not being effectively monitored by senior leaders, managers and governors. Whilst the senior leadership team can point to improvements in working with external agencies, there are a number of gaps in procedures that have not been identified. Not all staff understand their duty to manage risk and some do not follow the statutory safeguarding process to share concerns. The single central record does not show that all of the required checks on professional visitors to the academy have been completed. The safer recruitment policy has not been reviewed recently and is out of date.

In response to budget constraints, the academy is in a period of change in staffing levels. The Principal and governors have recently completed a reorganisation of senior leadership roles and responsibilities. Whilst some senior leaders are new to their roles, leaders and managers recognise the necessity for increased vigilance to ensure that safeguarding procedures are applied in all cases. Where the academy's designated safeguarding staff are informed of concerns, they communicate with other agencies and maintain written accounts that accurately record and monitor progress. Senior leaders have developed closer working relationships with local authority designated officers to share concerns and agree actions to manage pupils' welfare and safety. Despite these improvements, staff's failure to share all safeguarding concerns limits the designated leader's ability to ensure that all cases are dealt with fully, swiftly and appropriately.

Governors meet regularly to monitor safeguarding arrangements, but current procedures are not identifying weaknesses and fully holding senior leaders to account. Senior leaders, managers and governors are not placing sufficient emphasis on seeking the views of pupils and in drilling down to review individual cases. Governors are clear about the challenges and show a strong determination to iron out inconsistencies. They have not shirked from their responsibilities in ensuring the transition to new classrooms, in making difficult decisions around future levels of staffing and the reorganisation of the senior leadership team. They have responded positively to an external review of governance. They are more actively monitoring pupil admissions to ensure the academy is a suitable placement appropriate to an individual child's needs. The governing body has introduced new procedures to ensure that visits to classrooms by governors focus on how well staff manage pupils' behaviour.

External support

Pupils at the academy have benefited from a closer working partnership between the academy and the local authority designated officer. Support from the local authority has helped to provide an external evaluation of the restructure and deployment of staff and helped to broker a review of governance.

Priorities for further improvement

- More effectively monitor safeguarding procedures and policies to ensure pupils' safety, and reduce risk of harm, by:
 - ensuring policies and procedures are implemented effectively
 - placing pupils' voice at the heart of monitoring procedures.
- Ensure that agreed behaviour management strategies to praise, reward and administer sanctions:
 - are understood by all pupils
 - are applied consistently by all staff
 - reduce the frequency of physical restraint.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Lindfield

Her Majesty's Inspector