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Miss Rebeckah Hollingsworth
Headteacher
Spring Brook School
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Dear Miss Hollingsworth

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Spring Brook School

Following my visit to your school on 4 May 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 the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils at the school. In particular, the inspection sought to establish:

- whether the school's policies and procedures are effective in keeping pupils in key stage 3 and key stage 4 safe.

Evidence

I scrutinised the single central record (the checks made on behalf of the governing body on the suitability of adults to work with children) and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. I also checked the minutes of meetings of the governing body. I met with the headteacher, the chair of the governing body, the off-site tuition leader, two representatives of the local authority and a small group of pupils. I observed and spoke to pupils in a number of lessons as well as before and after school and during lunchtime. I also spoke to a small number of staff as well as parents or carers of pupils.

Having considered the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time safeguarding is effective.

Context

There are 73 pupils on roll, almost all of whom are boys. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan relating to their social, emotional and mental health needs. Many of the pupils have been excluded from previous settings before joining the school. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below the national average, as is the proportion reported to speak English as an additional language. More than three quarters of pupils are known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium, which is much higher than the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those known to be eligible for free school meals and for those who are looked after by the local authority. The school operates with upper and lower school departments on two sites, some 2.6 miles apart. The lower school is co-located with a mainstream primary school.

The school is currently in the process of converting to become a sponsored academy. It is planned that the school will become part of the New Bridge Multi-Academy Trust in July 2016.

Leaders, governors and staff all display a strong commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of pupils who attend the school. Policies, including those concerned with child protection, are generally clear and ensure that staff are given suitable guidance on how to respond should they have concerns about pupils. Checks to ensure that all staff are suitable to work within school have been undertaken and are recorded on the single central record. Nonetheless, the school needed to make some minor administrative additions during the inspection to ensure that it fully met statutory requirements.

All staff have undergone child protection training during the last year and as a consequence have a good understanding of the signs to be aware of if a pupil is at risk of abuse. Leaders have also made good use of expertise within the school to deliver training to staff about the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. As a result, staff have a strong understanding of this aspect of keeping pupils safe. Furthermore, a significant number of staff have recently undertaken advanced training to enhance their expertise in the de-escalation of behavioural issues, as well as the positive handling of pupils during serious incidents. While this training has only been very recently delivered, leaders state that it has given greater confidence to staff.

Visits to lessons and observations before school and at lunchtime evidence strong relationships between staff and pupils. These relationships underpin the support that is in place to help pupils with the challenges that they face in managing their emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. During lunchtime, for example, staff joined pupils for their lunch, supported games of football and joined in other recreational activities, such as pool. Staff greet pupils warmly at the start of each day and consequently establish a positive climate for pupils, irrespective of any problems that may have been faced the day before. A significant number of pupils arrive and depart by taxi. Leaders and staff ensure that this aspect of the school day is well managed so that during the inspection the majority of pupils were observed arriving and leaving the school calmly.

Leaders and governors take effective and reasonable steps to minimise identified areas of risk associated with the health and safety of pupils. New fencing, for example, has been erected to address the issue of a very small number of pupils climbing on the outside of the school building. Leaders have also sought expert advice from the local authority to ensure that they have fully explored possible solutions and mitigated against the identified risk of pupils being able to leave the school grounds through the front gate. As a result, clear procedures are in place to ensure that should a pupil leave the premises all reasonable steps are taken to make sure that they are safe. Records show that since September there has been a significant fall in the number of pupils who have absconded from the school. Nonetheless, a small number of pupils continue to leave the school grounds at lunchtime and congregate outside the school gates, often to smoke cigarettes. While leaders ensure these pupils are safe by closely supervising them, they have not addressed this issue with the determination necessary to bring about the change required to make sure that pupils remain on the school premises during lunchtime or to discourage them from smoking.

During observations of lessons and at lunchtime, pupils were generally respectful of one another and adults. Where this was not the case, staff robustly challenged pupils to modify their behaviour or language. However, some pupils who spoke to the inspector stated that racist or homophobic name-calling is occasionally carried out by a small number of pupils. Nonetheless, they stated that leaders address this issue extremely firmly and appropriately. A broad range of assemblies promote respect and tolerance. This year, for instance, assembly topics have included homophobic bullying and the inappropriate use of homophobic language. Furthermore, the school is a 'Stonewall Champion', further demonstrating leaders' commitment to address homophobic, biphobic and trans-phobic bullying.

Poor attendance, identified at the time of the previous inspection, remains a weakness. This is mainly because a small but significant number of pupils refuse to attend school. Leaders have also made the decision that the needs of some pupils cannot safely be met by the school and they are, therefore, tutored at home for part of the day. Efforts to address this issue are beginning to show some early signs of impact, as this term a number of pupils have been re-integrated back into school. Nonetheless, a number of pupils have remained absent from school for a significant period of time without improvement. Leaders take reasonable steps to ensure that pupils not in school are safe. The off-site tuition leader, for example, speaks to the carers of looked-after pupils on a daily basis. Furthermore, the school works closely with a wide range of external agencies to provide pupils and families with support. Where the school has serious concerns about pupils' well-being they take swift action to make referrals to social care.

Staff are vigilant and high levels of supervision, particularly during social times, ensure that pupils are kept safe. Staff know the pupils in their care very well and use their expertise successfully to de-escalate and address behavioural incidents effectively. Those pupils who spoke to the inspector stated that they had trust in staff and leaders to sort out any issues that they have. Pupils particularly value the work undertaken by the staff in 'the hub'. They say that being able to access the support available in these areas of the school helps them to 'calm down and improve their behaviour'.

At the time of the previous inspection, some younger pupils reported that they sometimes did not feel safe due to the disruptive behaviour of a minority of older pupils. Leaders have addressed this issue by introducing separate lunchtime breaks for younger and older pupils. As a result, those younger pupils who spoke to the inspector say that they now feel safe within school.

External support

Leaders have utilised health and safety expertise within the local authority effectively to ensure that the school is taking all appropriate and reasonable steps to keep pupils safe in relation to the school premises.

Priorities for further improvement

- Urgently review and improve pupils' attendance.
- Take action to stop pupils leaving the site to congregate at the school gates during lunchtime.
- Continue to challenge and, therefore, reduce the use of homophobic and racist language.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Oldham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Martin Bell

Her Majesty's Inspector