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Miss Jennifer Moles
Headteacher
Springmead Primary School
Hillyfields
Welwyn Garden City
Hertfordshire
AL7 2HB

Dear Miss Moles

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Springmead Primary School

Following my visit with Heather Yaxley, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 21 June 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 quality of leadership and management at the school. The monitoring inspection was unannounced and was carried out in response to complaints raised which raised serious concerns.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record of employment checks and a wide range of documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements including the reviews of safeguarding carried out by the local authority. Inspectors met with you, the deputy headteacher and two representatives from the local authority. Inspectors spoke on the phone with the Hertfordshire improvement officer responsible for carrying out the safeguarding review, a member of staff and the former chair of the governing body. Inspectors spoke with staff, a group of Year 6 pupils and other pupils on the playground at lunchtime. Inspectors considered the responses to 66 staff questionnaires and 262 parental responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. Inspectors also considered the online petition set up by some parents at the school.

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

The school's safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.

Context

Springmead is a larger than average primary school. There are 478 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage, with around a quarter from other backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is slightly below average. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is below average.

The school was inspected in January 2014 under the leadership of the previous headteacher and was judged to be good in all aspects.

The headteacher has been in post since September 2015. Over the past two terms, there has been a large number of staffing changes, and there will be more changes at the end of this term.

Since January 2016, Ofsted received a number of complaints regarding the amount of staff changes and concerns regarding safeguarding procedures. While it is not the role of the inspection to investigate complaints, these complaints did form part of the context of the inspection.

The day before the monitoring inspection the whole governing body resigned – expressing concerns about your leadership.

Inspection findings

Safeguarding

In May 2016, the governing body rightly raised concerns regarding safeguarding procedures at the school with the local authority. The local authority responded swiftly, carrying out a safeguarding review and found safeguarding to be ineffective. They identified a number of areas where the school's practices were insufficiently robust, including ensuring that checks on staff were carried out rigorously prior to staff starting at the school and that checks were recorded accurately on the single central register. They also identified the need for better communication between staff regarding safeguarding concerns, the need for clearer information for the safeguarding governor, and clarification of safeguarding roles and responsibilities.

You have responded quickly to the recommendations made by the review, recognising that systems and their implementation have not been rigorous enough and could potentially have left pupils at risk. A follow-up review by the local authority found that much progress had been made but identified further areas for

improvement, which you have responded to. You have ensured that a safeguarding team meets frequently and that all members have clear roles and responsibilities. You have taken on board the advice that safeguarding checks must be entirely complete before any member of staff starts at the school even if the staff member is supervised by other staff when with pupils. You have implemented new procedures for recording child protection concerns, for example ensuring that teachers do not keep separate class concern books, so that all information is kept centrally. You have implemented staff training to ensure that all staff understand precisely what to do if they have a concern about a pupil. You have reviewed the security arrangements for the files containing sensitive information about pupils. Access to the files is now limited to the few professionals who need it and that people who access information are supervised by a second professional. As a result of the recent actions, safeguarding is now effective overall. Pupils spoken to during the inspection said that they feel safe in school and 'there is always someone to talk to'. Nevertheless, there remain areas where further improvements need to be made.

While all checks are carried out for staff, the single central record does not clearly reflect this. For example, for staff who have had an enhanced check, administrative staff have not recorded that this includes a barred list check and dated accordingly. Your administrator is now amending the register to demonstrate that these checks have been carried out.

Files regarding pupils about whom there are concerns are maintained and there is a single sheet listing all these pupils and recording the chronology for each one. This list is updated each time something is added to pupils' files. However, individual files do not each have their own chronology making it difficult for professionals to check the progress of individual cases quickly. In one case, information listed on the chronology had not also been included in the pupil's file. In a few instances, information about the follow-up action taken by the school lacked sufficient detail. You acknowledge that you have not in the past carried out sufficient checks on the recording carried out by the designated leader for safeguarding and so have not ensured that files are kept rigorously, allowing mistakes to be made such as some information going missing.

In responding quickly to recommendations made, you have not communicated with staff as well as you could. Staff do not always understand why changes are being made. For example you have not fully explained the rationale for the removal of class concern books. Similarly, in striving to maintain confidentiality, you have not ensured that staff know that concerns passed to you or a member of the safeguarding team are being followed up. This means that some are uncertain about whether concerns have been taken seriously. This is reflected in discussions held with staff during the inspection. Similarly, some parents are anxious about pupils' safety because your communication about these matters has not been sufficient and has not conveyed your commitment to keeping pupils safe.

Leadership and management

Governors and some parents and staff are understandably concerned about the high turnover of staff in your first year at the school. You also recognise that this has had an unsettling effect on pupils and parents alike, particularly in some year groups such as Year 3.

When starting at the school you discovered a number of issues relating to staffing and pupil achievement and set about tackling these. In doing so, your communication with staff has not been good enough and has resulted in some staff and governors feeling unhappy, unsettled and unsupported.

You rightly recognised that many support staff had been left on temporary contracts for far too long and needed to have permanent contracts. However, in addressing this you did not communicate with staff sufficiently and many felt that steps taken, such as asking them to re-apply for their posts, demonstrated that you did not value their work.

You identified that some teaching staff were underperforming in relation to their positions of responsibility and rightly challenged them about their performance. However, in doing so you also did not ensure that staff understood the expectations of teachers nationally and in your school. You did not reassure staff sufficiently that you recognise and value good performance as well as identifying where things could be better. This has created a climate where some, but not all, staff are unsettled and where those who are unhappy because their performance has been challenged are persuading others that systems are unfair.

The relationship between you and the governing body has collapsed because of poor communication by both parties. There has been a lack of trust on both sides. This means that, in relation to staffing, governors were unclear about what was happening and why, and so feared that actions taken may not be correct or fair. For example, you found evidence of underperformance from some staff and also that pupils' performance was not as good as the governing body believed. The local authority concurred with your findings and these were shared with governors. However, in doing so, you did not ensure that governors fully understood the basis for what you told them. You did not involve them sufficiently in the decisions about actions that needed to be taken to address the issues.

You have identified the need to improve pupils' behaviour, recognising the impact of the small number of pupils with challenging behaviour. You implemented a new behaviour policy to address this. In doing so, you did not talk with staff about what they felt would work, or draw on the expertise that you have in school, for example from the leader of the behaviour unit. Staff do not feel the behaviour policy is as effective as it could be. As a result, some staff have developed their own systems, which leads to inconsistent practice.

Staff told inspectors that they did not have a clear understanding of your vision for the school and felt that too often they were presented with plans for which they had

no input and which they had not been encouraged to comment on. One member of staff said 'We don't want to just be presented with a plan; we want to be part of creating it.' They also feel that you did not recognise strengths in the school sufficiently, and that the sense of strong team work was lacking because communication was not good enough.

External support

The local authority judged the school to require 'light touch' support at its annual school review because the school had been judged good at its previous inspection and pupils' academic standards remained good. When you took on the headship, the local authority carried out introductory visits.

When concerns were raised recently, at the request of governors the local authority quickly intervened to deal with the safeguarding concerns. They carried out a review and follow-up review. The local authority met with the chair of the governing body and you to help build bridges when relationships broke down but failed to ensure that both parties recognised the legitimate concerns of the other.

The local authority continues to support the school and has rapidly put together a new interim governing body following the resignation of the governing body. It is also supporting senior staff in taking steps to re-establish parents' confidence in the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the recording of safeguarding concerns and safeguarding checks carried out so that records demonstrate clearly the actions taken.
- Improve communication with staff and parents through:
 - regular meetings with teaching and non-teaching staff with opportunities to provide information and listen to staff feedback
 - being visible and approachable to staff and parents
 - working with all staff who will be at the school in September to create a whole-school vision and plan of action to ensure the new school year begins positively.

I am copying this letter to the director of children's services for Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Maria Curry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Heather Yaxley
Her Majesty's Inspector