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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



13 October 2016

Ann Pringleton
Headteacher
Corporation Road Community Primary School
Corporation Road
Darlington
County Durham
DL3 6AR

Dear Mrs Pringleton

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Corporation Road Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 22 September 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.

Evidence

I scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. I met with you, members of staff, groups of pupils, parents, a member of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and the chief executive officer of the Heathfield Trust, the school's proposed academy sponsor.

I also reviewed a wide range of other information, including the local authority's safeguarding audit, minutes of meetings of the governing body, attendance records, risk assessments and school policy documents.

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

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Context

Corporation Road is a large primary school with 340 pupils currently on roll. Just over half are from White British backgrounds. Approximately one quarter of pupils are from Asian British backgrounds, mainly Bangladeshi, and a small proportion are from other ethnic groups. Almost half of the total number of pupils on roll are supported through the pupil premium. The proportion of pupils who receive support for special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average. The school has a higher proportion of pupils joining and leaving the school at times other than is usual, compared with schools nationally.

The school was placed in special measures following the Ofsted inspection that took place in February 2016. Safeguarding was judged to be ineffective. Since February, there have been significant changes in staffing and governance. Eight members of staff have left the school and both the chair of the governing body and the vice-chair have tendered their resignation with effect from 30 September 2016. Leadership has undergone restructuring to increase and redistribute leadership capacity.

An academy order is in place and the school is due to become part of the Heathfield Trust on 1 October 2016. The trust is already working informally with the school to support leaders and fund improvements. No representative of the local authority or governing body was at the final feedback meeting where the findings of this inspection were shared.

Inspection findings

Governors have not ensured that the school's arrangements for child protection and safeguarding meet statutory requirements. They have a weak understanding of the effectiveness of the school's current safeguarding systems and procedures. Policies do not reflect the most recent guidance from the Department for Education. Governors and leaders, other than the headteacher, cannot convincingly identify the most recent changes nor articulate how these have impacted on the school's current safeguarding and child protection practices. Other documents that inform school-wide practices relating to the care and welfare of pupils, such as the anti-bullying policy, are outdated. In some instances there are multiple, inconsistent versions of policies being utilised simultaneously.

While checks on the suitability of staff to work with children and young people, in particular the taking up of references, are now in place, the school's record of the required checks did not meet statutory requirements at the start of the inspection.

Risk assessments state that governors 'still need training' and 'do not demonstrate awareness or understanding of the risk of radicalisation and the vulnerability of children'. School leaders and governors have not been supported or challenged to address these weaknesses quickly.

You have considerably improved site security. For example, an acceptable use of mobile phones and cameras agreement has been put in place. There are new entrance and exit arrangements, secure gates and coordinated identification badges for staff, all of which contribute to pupils feeling safe and better protected. Any adult not wearing a school-issue identity badge is promptly challenged and all visitors to the site must now follow strict signing-in and out procedures.

Child protection and safeguarding training has taken place since the previous inspection. Leaders have tightened systems of recording attendance at these events to ensure that all staff undertake critical training within required time parameters. Teachers and other adults are knowledgeable about the signs of abuse and the potentially additional vulnerabilities of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. There exists an appropriate 'it-could-happen-here' attitude. A newly established computer program has been instrumental in enabling staff to access and log essential information efficiently. This means, for example, that repeated issues of poor attendance or behaviour can be more easily monitored and addressed.

Pupils are taught to keep themselves safe while online. The Heathfield Trust has enabled the school to make use of its enhanced internet filtering systems. This means that risks of exposure for staff and pupils to inappropriate content have been minimised.

Staff and parents are in agreement that you are approachable and highly visible around the school premises. They are united in their opinion that you support and challenge all parties to meet the welfare and safety needs of pupils. Parents are appreciative of this consistently vigilant approach and the regular opportunity presented to discuss concerns. Staff are also confident that issues they raise are listened to and acted upon promptly.

Pupils' punctuality has significantly improved since the previous inspection. Tactics such as a 'late book' and a new bell system of entry have contributed effectively to this improvement. The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school, however, remains higher than the national average. In an effort to tackle this lingering issue, you have recently introduced a text-to-parents service. This is proving to be a popular reward and incentive for good attendance, effort and behaviour. Evidence of its impact on further reducing the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school though, remains to be seen.

You and your leadership team have created a welcoming ethos that is positive and calm. Pupils, unprompted, hold doors open for each other and visitors, conducting themselves in a confident, respectful manner. Relationships between adults and pupils are constructive. Good work ethics, behaviours and attitudes displayed by pupils are consistently praised by staff. The recently formed 'well-being team' is developing valuable links between home and school, further strengthening the school's ability to meet the needs of vulnerable pupils and families more effectively.

External support

An external review of the school's safeguarding arrangements was commissioned by the local authority at the request of the headteacher in July 2016. Recommendations from this review, however, did not meet the most recent statutory guidance in terms of child protection and safeguarding. Attention was not drawn to significant changes in legislation required for implementation by schools by 5 September 2016.

Priorities for further improvement

- Urgent action must be taken to strengthen the leadership and management of safeguarding. The governing body must ensure that the school's child protection and safeguarding arrangements are robust and comply with all statutory requirements.
- Leaders and governors must update policy documentation and procedures for the protection and safeguarding of pupils. These should take heed of best practices and be pertinent to the bespoke needs of pupils at Corporation Road Primary School, with immediacy.
- Leaders and governors should ensure that systems for checking and recording staff suitability for working with pupils prior to employment, including the taking up of references, are strictly adhered to.

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

Yours sincerely

Fiona Manuel

Her Majesty's Inspector