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Mrs Sally Reay
Headteacher
River Bank Primary School
Bath Road
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Dear Mrs Reay

No formal designation monitoring inspection of River Bank Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 23 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 and aspects of the effectiveness of leadership and management in the school.

Evidence

I scrutinised the school's single central record of pre-employment staff suitability checks and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. I met with you, the deputy headteacher, one of the assistant headteachers, parents, pupils and members of the governing body, including the chair. I also met with a representative of the local authority and a national leader of education, both of whom are supporting the school.

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

Safeguarding is not effective.

Context

The school has continued to grow rapidly in size and 390 pupils now attend the school. This year, there are four classes in each of the Reception Year and Year 1, three classes in Year 2 and two classes in Year 3. Two assistant headteachers have joined the school, one of whom has been given responsibility for provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Main findings

This inspection was scheduled in response to concerns raised about bullying, the school's response to complaints, provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the school's ability to keep pupils safe. Ofsted does not have the power to investigate specific incidents but I looked carefully at the wider leadership and management issues around the matters raised.

All available evidence shows that the school takes parents' concerns and complaints seriously and responds appropriately. The school has a clear complaints policy that it follows and has updated recently.

I found no evidence that the occurrence of bullying is of particular concern at River Bank. There were too few responses on Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire) for results to be made available. However, my discussions with parents as they brought their children to school revealed no concerns about bullying whatsoever. The parents that I spoke with were universally positive about the school. Similarly, the group of pupils that I met with, and all the other pupils that I spoke with during the day, said that they feel happy and safe at school, and expressed no concerns about bullying. It is clear that pupils have been taught about bullying well and they know what they should do if they have any concerns.

Systems and processes around the management of bullying are not secure. The school's behaviour records make no distinction between incidents of bullying and other behavioural incidents. This makes any sort of analysis and tracking of bullying very difficult. The school is currently moving to an electronic rather than a paper-based recording system and you told me that this has the capacity to track bullying incidents and check for patterns in behaviour.

The school's anti-bullying policy has been updated recently and provides useful information such as descriptions of the types of bullying that exist. The policy describes how staff should deal with incidents of bullying but it does not explicitly state what should be done in response to allegations of bullying. This means that individual staff must respond to such allegations in whatever way they think best. As a result, it is possible that a parent who is concerned that their child is being bullied could receive a different response depending on which member of staff they speak to and how that member of staff interprets the information they are given. This also means that it is possible that bullying could be repeatedly reported by a

parent but never recognised by the school if the individual member of staff concerned does not agree that the reported incidents amount to bullying.

The school's single central record of pre-employment checks is up to date and includes all the necessary checks for staff employed directly by the school. However, it does not include members of staff who are contracted to the school but are employed by other organisations (such as the kitchen staff). The school has received 'blanket' reassurance that the suitability of staff has been checked by the companies concerned but has no specific confirmation that the suitability of the individual staff who work at the school has been checked.

The school is not adhering to the recording procedure set out in its safeguarding policy. As a result, the records kept of child protection concerns are inadequate. The school's policy states that 'All staff and visitors will record concerns and give the record to the designated safeguarding lead'. I scrutinised the school's records and found that this is not happening. For example, in a case where a pupil had made a disclosure that required referral to children's social care, the referral was made but no other records kept to support it or to show what had happened as a result of it. The school's policy also states that, 'individual files will be kept for each child [for whom there are concerns]' but this is also not the case, in fact.

You recognised that leadership of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has not been good enough and you have recently reassigned this area of responsibility. However, the newly appointed special educational needs coordinator has no experience in leading this area and does not have the required national qualification. An action plan for improving the quality of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is in place but it is not sufficiently sharply focused to bring about the necessary improvement.

The proportion of pupils who reached a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year improved in 2016. The proportion of Year 1 pupils who reached the expected level in the Year 1 phonics screening check also improved. Both were broadly in line with the national average in 2016.

Attainment at the end of key stage 1 was woefully low this year. Only 38% of pupils reached the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics. This is a matter of grave concern and must be tackled as a matter of urgency.

Governors know the school well and have a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. They are fully conversant with the school's complaints policy and understand well the need to balance their duty to support you, as the school's headteacher, with their duty to ensure that complaints are addressed fairly and independently.

Governors have failed to ensure that child protection procedures are rigorous enough. They have not ensured that the school's policy has been updated in a

timely fashion and that current statutory guidance is followed. Governors have not ensured that the school's leaders follow closely the procedures described in the existing policy.

External support

The governing body has sensibly employed the services of a local authority adviser to support you. The impact of the adviser's work is clear, particularly in terms of improving the quality of self-evaluation and improvement planning. The governing body has recognised that further support is needed and the headteacher of Tennyson Road Primary School (a national leader of education) and members of her team have recently started to work with you. It is too early to see the impact of this additional support.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that the recently appointed special educational needs coordinator is given sufficient support and training to enable her to carry out the role effectively.
- Ensure that all child protection records are detailed and thorough, in accordance with the local safeguarding children board's guidelines and as described in the school's policy.
- Update the school's anti-bullying policy so that it includes clear and rigorous procedures for managing allegations of bullying consistently.
- Ensure that a suitable system is put in place to monitor and track allegations and incidents of bullying.
- Improve outcomes in key stage 1 and for pupils who are currently in Year 3.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the regional schools commissioner. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector