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7 November 2016

Teresa Offer
Headteacher
Liss Infant School
Hillbrow Road
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Hampshire
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Dear Mrs Offer

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Liss Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 19 October 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, which includes aspects of the effectiveness of leadership and management in the school and the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils.

Evidence

I scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour and child protection arrangements. I met with you, a group of pupils and some staff. I spoke to some parents at the beginning of the school day and had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. I reviewed a range of other documentation, including minutes of the governing body meetings, reports from the local authority and results of the school's recent parent survey.

I focused on leaders' effectiveness in creating an inclusive culture, the quality of safeguarding arrangements, how well behaviour policies are implemented, the behaviour of pupils in lessons and around the school and provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Context

Liss Infant School is smaller than the average-sized primary school and has 178 pupils currently on roll. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is half that seen nationally. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those in the early stages of learning English is much lower than the national average. The proportion of pupils receiving special educational needs support is in line with that in other schools across the country. The school has a higher proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs or education, health and care plans than nationally. The school caters for a relatively large proportion of children looked after by the local authority.

There have recently been a number of changes in teaching staff at the school, with three new teachers starting in September 2016. One of these is responsible for leadership of the early years. You have a vacancy for an assistant headteacher and are currently acting special educational needs coordinator.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Yours is a highly inclusive school. You are passionate about the progress and personal development of all pupils. Consequently, parents value very highly the contribution you as headteacher make to ensuring that provision meets the varying needs of the pupils that attend the school. Strong relationships embody the caring culture you have established. Staff know their pupils well and ensure that their personal, academic and, when necessary, special needs are met effectively.

Your commitment to meeting pupils' individual needs, whatever their ability and background, is admirable. Teachers and other staff understand this and work hard to create a stimulating, nurturing learning environment. Teachers and support staff know their pupils well and meet their individual needs effectively through consistently good teaching and well-targeted interventions. You support them skilfully in this and staff appreciate the strong leadership that you provide and the timely training they receive. Consequently, the local authority has rightly recognised that the school is a place where pupils with high levels of need can learn and flourish. This is reflected in the large proportion of pupils who are in the care of the local authority, or who have an education, health and care plan or statement of special educational needs.

The school and you personally are under extreme pressure to deliver all that is required. This is because you are currently undertaking three roles to cover the vacancies in leadership positions. You have rightly prioritised your time to maintaining high-quality provision and ensuring that essential documents, such as policies, are compliant. Consequently, you have not been able to ensure that paperwork consistently reflects the strength of provision you offer.

Staff, including support staff, are skilled and supported well by you as the headteacher. There are well-established routines and structures to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. For example, several pupils benefit from access to their own personalised workstation. Staff are clear about how to respond to pupils when they present with high levels of anxiety and do this effectively.

Governors provide robust challenge and sensitive support to leaders. They ask pertinent questions about the information they receive from you. The newly appointed chair of the governing body is committed to the school and supports you well. Governors accept that the school's website is not sufficiently parent-friendly and that some recently adopted policy documents have yet to be uploaded to it. Work is in hand to address this.

Governors support you effectively to set high expectations for staff that lead to high expectations of pupils' behaviour and learning. The way in which the community was involved in the formation of the behaviour policy is evidence of how well leaders have listened to the views of staff, pupils and parents. The policy gives clear guidance for staff about what steps they should take to promote positive attitudes to learning and what sanctions to apply in response to poor behaviour, and staff apply it consistently. Consequently, pupils really like the policy and the recognition they get for behaving well.

Pupils behave exceptionally well. They love coming to school. Their attitudes to work are exemplary and they play very well together. During playtime, pupils from different year groups played together well, making full use of the stimulating environment provided. Adults supervised them attentively and 'playground pals' helped to ensure that all pupils had someone to play with. Nevertheless, due to their special needs, some pupils present with very challenging behaviour. You recognise that, in the past, the recording of such incidents has not always been thorough enough and procedures are now in place to address this. Scrutiny of more recent behavioural incidents shows that record-keeping is now robust. You also recognise that in the past the rate of exclusion has been higher than average, and you have worked with governors and teaching staff to develop strategies to bring this figure down.

You, supported well by your family link worker and key stage 1 leader, have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are effective. You are very highly regarded by parents because you work well with families and support them very well when necessary. This helps to ensure that links between home and school are strong and that the needs of your families are particularly well known and understood by you and school staff.

Pupils rightly feel safe and recognise the many ways that they are helped to learn to keep themselves safe. For example, a recent visit by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children helped pupils know what to do if they are worried

or concerned. Pupils value their teachers highly. They rightly appreciate that they are very well cared for.

Staff are appropriately trained and know what to do if they have concerns about a child. They follow up these concerns tenaciously. Work with other agencies is well established and together you provide useful support to families through times of difficulty. Staff keep appropriate records, although as you have rightly identified, these could be clearer in their chronology and less ambiguous about what has happened and why.

External support

The local authority has rightly recognised the strengths in provision at the school and your strengths as a highly effective leader. However, when placing pupils with significant needs, not enough account has been taken of the increasing burden on the school and you. In addition to having a negative impact on strategic leadership, school documentation has not, in the past, been maintained systematically. The local authority's recent decision to provide additional support is positive. It is important that this leads to a reduction in the pressure on your time and does not add to it. The local area also needs to review the impact of the proportionately high numbers of placements for those pupils who have the most complex needs at your school.

Priorities for further improvement

- With the support of governors, accelerate the appointments to the key positions of assistant headteacher and special educational needs coordinator.
- The website should be updated to ensure that it is accessible and compliant with statutory expectations for maintained schools.
- Secure a reduction in the need for fixed-term exclusions at the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes

Her Majesty's Inspector