

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



17 January 2017

Ms Fran Pass
Southfield School
Gipsy Lane
Wokingham
Berkshire
RG40 2HR

Dear Ms Pass

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Southfield School

Following my visit to your school on 13 December 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 (including governance).

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding, including risk assessments for trips. Her Majesty's Inspector met with the headteacher alone and subsequently met with the headteacher accompanied by the senior staff. She met separately with a group of staff, including teaching assistants, and also met with pupils. Her Majesty's Inspector held individual, separate meetings with the interim safeguarding lead (to review records of referrals made to the local authority), the current lead for collating information on behaviour, the business manager, and the chair of the interim executive board (IEB). Her Majesty's Inspector made a telephone call to the local authority designated officer. Two guided tours were undertaken to see the school at work, one accompanied by the interim headteacher and one accompanied by the interim deputy headteacher. Letters and emails sent by parents to the school over the past term were also scrutinised.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Southfield School is a special school with 48 pupils currently on roll. Nearly three quarters of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. The majority of pupils are White British. All the pupils have a statement of special educational needs or education, health and care plan. The vast majority of pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs. A number of pupils travel to the school from neighbouring local authorities. Four percent of pupils are in the care of local authorities. The school makes use of off-site provision, which includes therapeutic work with animals and vocational college-based learning.

The school has been through a period of turbulence, with a number of interim headteachers and deputy headteachers, since the principal and vice-principal were suspended in April 2016. The current interim headteacher is the fifth and works for the multi-academy trust, which the school is joining in January 2017. She will oversee the school in its conversion to becoming an academy. The current interim deputy headteacher leaves at the end of this term. The two current assistant headteachers have been appointed as interim deputy headteachers from the start of January 2017. In addition, the safeguarding lead is currently on long-term sickness leave and an interim safeguarding leader has recently been appointed. A number of teaching staff have left the school and a number of new staff have been appointed for January 2017. The governing body has been replaced by an IEB.

Following the summer holidays, pupils resumed full-time education at the school on 31 October 2016. This was also the date the new interim headteacher joined the school. During the time from the beginning of the autumn term 2016 to the date of this inspection, pupils attended school sporadically. Over the past term, the school has made progress in becoming an academy. It is scheduled to open as an academy, within the Northern House Trust, at the start of the 2017 spring term.

You have made a tremendously positive difference to the school in a short period of time. Staff have benefited from the training on behaviour they have undertaken since the start of the autumn term. There is now a consistent, coherent and well-thought-out approach to managing pupils' behaviour. The atmosphere in school is calmer, less chaotic and safer. One pupil commented that he was able to 'get on with learning' in a way that had not been previously possible. You have ensured that the staff are better supported in managing pupils' challenging behaviour and, consequently, their practice in this area is developing rapidly. You, and the staff, recognise there is still some way to go before the changes you have made are properly bedded in. You have strong plans to ensure that this process is successful.

The leadership of safeguarding has improved. In particular, under your direction,

staff have succeeded in ensuring that pupils' behaviour is less aggressive and threatening. Of note is your high visibility around school, in lessons and at break time, as well as when pupils arrive and leave. This provides opportunities for other staff to observe your effective style of behaviour management. You also rightly use this as a chance to monitor how well some of the changes you have implemented are working. These approaches have led to a reduction in the number of exclusions. The robust sanctions you consistently applied when you first arrived, in response to pupils climbing on the roofs, have acted as an effective deterrent. The number of incursions onto the roof has reduced greatly. Also, the site is now much more secure, with high metal fences so that the flat roofs are not as easily accessible to pupils. This means that pupils are safer and feel safer. In addition, you have ensured that staff received well-focused training from external providers on how to de-escalate situations when pupils' behaviour is extremely challenging. As a result, the number of times staff have had to restrain pupils has reduced. You rightly have ambitions for this to be reduced further.

Staff are now more confident in their interactions with pupils. One reason is because you have improved the system they use to request assistance from senior staff in managing challenging behaviour. This means that they feel better supported. As a result, staff now have higher expectations of how well pupils should behave than hitherto. They are also more adept at challenging pupils when they do not meet these higher standards. You have successfully introduced rewards for good behaviour and sanctions for when pupils' behaviour slips below expectations. You keep a watchful eye on this to ensure that staff consistently apply these rewards and sanctions. On our tour round the school, I saw pupils enthusiastically handing you reward slips they had earned for good conduct and positive attitudes to learning.

You are working effectively with the newly formed IEB, which has clearly identified the key priorities for the school. The IEB regularly checks that you are on track in delivering them. The chair of the IEB, who has significant educational experience, has used this well, when providing you with additional support and challenge in weekly one-to-one meetings. Minutes from meetings show how the IEB has relentlessly focused on monitoring how safe pupils are and how well they behave. This has contributed to making the school safer.

You have worked successfully with the safeguarding lead (and more latterly the interim safeguarding lead) and the lead for data to ensure that concerns are recorded and monitored more effectively. Of note have been the substantial improvements made to the way safeguarding concerns, and follow-up work, including referrals to the local authority, are recorded and processed. The interim safeguarding lead is also the lead for vocational learning and assiduously monitors the attendance and behaviour of pupils who attend off-site learning. She regularly visits pupils when they are learning off-site, meets with the staff at the provision and checks the provision's safeguarding policies. Due to improved methods for recording why and when sanctions and rewards are given, you now have a clearer

overview of behaviour throughout the school. In particular, you have identified the types of negative behaviour that occur most frequently, as well as any behaviour hot-spots. You are not yet using this to prevent poor behaviour from occurring by working with targeted pupils.

You are working closely with parents to rebuild relationships which have eroded over the last few months. This is having some impact, but there is still more work to be done to rebuild parental confidence. You are sensibly meeting with parents who have expressed concerns. In addition, you have introduced a new home-school agreement. You have wisely identified that pupils' attendance is too low. In response to this, ensuring pupils regularly attend is a key element of the new home-school agreement. In particular, a number of pupils' attendance severely declined following the late start back after the autumn term, typically to between 40 and 60%. This remains an area of concern. You have strong plans in place to improve this. They include rewarding pupils with good attendance and making home visits to those who do not attend. In addition, you are also working hard to develop the curriculum so it better suits pupils' needs and is more accessible. Leaders provide bespoke, effective support for pupils who attend part-time, as agreed by the local authority that funds their places. However, more needs to be done to ensure that the very small number of pupils still on the school roll, who do not attend this school or benefit from alternative provision, access education and learning.

External support

The school has benefited from support and training provided by the Northern House Trust. Staff have also received training from an external provider on diffusing challenging behaviour, including by using restraint as a last resort.

The local authority has also supported the school in ensuring a smooth transition from governing body to IEB and in dealing with some more complex issues relating to staffing. Of note has been the local authority's designated officer's assistance, which has helped leaders in responding appropriately to complaints and concerns.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the attendance of pupils whose attendance significantly declined in the autumn term.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector