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Mr Geoff Wilson
Acting Executive Headteacher
Noel-Baker School
Bracknell Drive
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Derbyshire
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Dear Mr Wilson

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Noel-Baker School

Following my visit to your school on 17–18 January 2017, 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 at the school.

Evidence

I scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements, including the school's safeguarding policy and records of safeguarding incidents. I also reviewed attendance information and records of behaviour, bullying and first aid. I looked at a sample of risk assessments, including the school's most recent fire risk assessment. I also considered a recent review of the school's safeguarding procedures. I met with the acting executive headteacher; the senior assistant headteacher (who is also the designated safeguarding lead); the deputy safeguarding lead; the assistant headteacher for inclusion and attendance; support staff; and year managers. Meetings were also held with the senior school improvement officer from the local authority, who is also a governor of the school, and the director of schools from the L.E.A.D. Academy Trust.

I made short visits to lessons and observed an assembly. I met formally with four groups of pupils and spoke informally with others at breaktimes. I observed pupils' behaviour at break and lunchtime, during lesson transition and at the end of the school day.

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

Safeguarding is not effective.

Context

Noel-Baker School is an above average-sized secondary school with a sixth form. There is a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils than that seen nationally. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium funding is much higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average. However, the proportion of pupils who are supported by an education, health and care plan is below average. The proportion of pupils who arrive at or leave the school during the academic year is slightly higher than the national average.

The headteacher, who was absent at the time of the previous inspection, has now formally resigned. Two deputy headteachers, who were acting headteachers at the time of the previous inspection, have also now resigned. The school had been receiving support from the headteacher of the special school located on the same campus, but this formal arrangement has now come to an end. Two science teachers have left the school since the previous inspection. The chair of governors has resigned and a new chair has been appointed. In total, eight new governors have been appointed to the school. There are currently three vacancies for teaching and leadership posts.

You were appointed as acting executive headteacher in November 2016 and took up post in December 2016. An assistant headteacher has been appointed with responsibility for learning and teaching and staff development. A new curriculum director for social sciences has also been appointed. The curriculum director for mathematics has stepped down and a new leader has been appointed.

The school converted to academy status on 1 February 2017, and will be sponsored by the L.E.A.D. Academy Trust.

While the school has improved its arrangements to promote and safeguard the welfare of pupils, these systems have not yet sufficiently embedded such that a culture of safeguarding is thoroughly established in all areas of the school's work. Leaders have taken steps to improve the safety and well-being of pupils in the school, but are currently hamstrung by a lack of capacity to ensure that all staff fully understand and carry out all their duties relating to safeguarding. Changes to

leadership have left some staff unclear about roles, responsibilities and policies relating to some aspects of safeguarding.

Leaders responded with due urgency to the findings of the section 5 inspection, and work to improve the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements has continued to develop. For example, the previous inspection found that staff, for the most part, took appropriate action in response to serious safeguarding concerns, but inspectors identified weaknesses in the school's arrangements to monitor all pupils about whom concerns had been raised. In response, leaders put in place much-improved systems to ensure that vulnerable pupils do not slip under the radar and that staff keep a close eye on their ongoing welfare. Staff now log all such concerns centrally and keep cases open for six months, even when no follow-up action is deemed necessary. Regular meetings of the pastoral team allow staff to share information and discuss the actions taken for pupils about whom there are concerns.

Communication between different members of staff has improved, so that staff are now able to make the important links between pupils' attendance and their welfare. There are systems in place to ensure that staff conduct 'safe and well' checks on vulnerable pupils who are absent from school. However, staff do not always follow these systems to the letter. They do not always record their checks with sufficient detail, so that it is still not clear whether contact with home has in fact been established.

When capacity allows, safeguarding leads make visits to pupils' homes to ensure that contact is made and to encourage pupils to come to school. These home visits are an important opportunity to build links with families and gain an insight into the further support that pupils and their families may need. However, staff are not always able to make these visits due to their other commitments in school.

Some areas of safeguarding practice remain vulnerable to human error and are over-reliant on individual members of staff. For example, sixth-form staff, who would not necessarily know when concerns had been raised about younger siblings, do not currently attend the pastoral meetings. Not all records of safeguarding incidents are sufficiently detailed or accurate.

Leaders have introduced a system of rewards to encourage better attendance at school. They have reviewed pupils' individual education plans to identify how they might better support pupils in attending school. Systems to check on attendance in the sixth form have improved and leaders are becoming more tenacious in checking up on staff who do not complete registers. However, the impact of these initiatives is yet to be seen. The high absence rates of some pupils, and particularly of those who are disadvantaged and who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, remain deeply concerning. Although there is no longer a formal support mechanism with the special school on campus, you acknowledge that much could be learned

from these leaders' expertise in providing a safe, welcoming environment for vulnerable pupils.

On taking up your post, you identified a number of simple, practical steps that could be taken to improve safety and well-being. For example, you recognised that the design of the timetable does not always promote positive behaviour and engagement and have taken steps to address this. You have plans in place to reintroduce a much-needed programme of personal, social, moral and health education. Although only in post for a short time, you recognise, rightly, the need to reimagine how the building might be better used to ensure that pupils are safe and well supervised at all times. You have a clear understanding of the challenges, as well as the opportunities, that academisation will bring, and of the work that is needed to be done to further improve all aspects of safeguarding.

The changes you have made to the lunchtime arrangements have improved the queuing system and have led to a calmer, more orderly environment, at least in the dining area. Younger pupils appreciate having their own designated area in which to eat. However, some issues remain. Pupils are now required to leave the building and remain outside once they have eaten their lunch. They do not fully understand the reasons for these new arrangements. Not all pupils feel that there is sufficient supervision in the outdoor area. I observed some unsafe, boisterous behaviour, not all of which was addressed by staff. Pupils told me that some outdoor areas are too crowded, and that there is insufficient seating and cover for them to enjoy the school grounds as much as they might. They continue to be concerned about the unsafe behaviour exhibited by some pupils, such as smoking. They do not feel that teachers address this with sufficient rigour.

The layout of the building presents challenges in ensuring that all indoor areas are adequately supervised. You now serve hot food in the indoor 'plaza' area, but no risk assessment has been carried out to ensure that any potential hazards are minimised.

Some pupils expressed the view that not all staff would deal effectively with incidents of bullying, and would see these issues as behaviour concerns rather than bullying incidents. This perhaps goes some way to explaining the relatively few bullying incidents that are recorded. When incidents do come to the attention of senior leaders, records confirm that appropriate action is taken. I am concerned that not all incidents reach the ears of senior leaders. While all pupils know who the safeguarding leads are and have faith in these people, and the pupil year managers, to deal with their concerns, some feel that not all teachers apply policies consistently, listen to their concerns or address issues with due seriousness. You and your senior leaders recognise the need to change this culture, and have taken steps to model the values of the school by being a visible presence on corridors, available and approachable. There is more work to do to fully engage parents, keep them well informed of the changes that are taking place and of the arrangements that are in place to keep pupils safe.

Changes to leadership and staffing have led to a lack of consistency in how well the rules have been applied. Not all staff apply the same consistently high standards that you expect of them. Pupils I spoke with told me that not all staff would address instances of homophobic language, for example, which some say are commonplace. As one pupil thoughtfully commented: 'They should teach us about this and why this is offensive.' Pupils' understanding of British values, and in particular of the need to respect those with protected characteristics, remains underdeveloped.

During this recent period of instability and uncertainty, pupils' voices have not always been heard. They have much to say about the changes they would like to see in their school, not least in wanting to learn more about what one of them termed 'the real world'. This includes, for example, learning to stay financially secure, and knowing how to stay safe once they leave home and go to university. More than anything, they crave consistency and would like to see all of their teachers and support staff apply the rules fairly.

The year managers, who have good knowledge of pupils and their concerns, lack the capacity currently to be anything other than reactive to issues. Currently, they do not play a role in ensuring that the assembly or tutor group programmes address the concerns and issues that are most relevant to their year group.

Despite these weaknesses, there are emerging strengths. In the assembly I visited, pupils listened with respect and empathy to a thought-provoking and moving assembly on schooling in the third world. Staff's many kindnesses to pupils are evident, for example in supplying bicycle lights for pupils who cycle to school and guitars for those who would not otherwise be able to attend music lessons.

External support

At the time of the previous inspection, ongoing negotiations about the status of the school were having a detrimental effect on the school's capacity and ability to focus on improvement. It is pleasing to note that, since that inspection, lines of responsibility have been made clearer and there has been improved cooperation and communication between the local authority and the new sponsor. The path to conversion has been made smoother by this improved partnership working between both parties. The local authority has provided ongoing support through the senior school improvement officer, who has continued to support the school with safeguarding, leadership and in the mathematics department. Moreover, the local authority and the school's new sponsor took joint action to improve governance; the current governing body consists of members appointed by both parties. Although it is early days for the newly-constituted governing body, they have already taken steps to improve safeguarding; for example, by commissioning an external review of the school's safeguarding arrangements.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the leadership capacity at the school, to ensure that systems to improve all aspects of safeguarding can be fully embedded.
- Ensure that all staff share the same high expectations in terms of pupil behaviour, safety and welfare, insisting on high standards in their classrooms and ensuring that all pupil concerns are dealt with appropriately.

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

Yours sincerely

Deirdre Duignan
Her Majesty's Inspector