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Ms Rosalind Hopkins
Birch Wood (Melton Area Special School)
Grange Drive
Melton Mowbray
Leicestershire
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Dear Ms Hopkins

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Birch Wood (Melton Area Special School)

Following my visit with Karen Lewis, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 3 to 4 May 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 and aspects of the effectiveness of leadership and management in the school (including governance).

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, the leader for autism, groups of pupils, parents, four members of the governing body, including the chair, and a representative of the Forest Way Teaching School Alliance.

Inspectors scrutinised pupils' behaviour plans, risk assessments, behaviour logs, annual reviews for pupils, documentation related to education, health and care plans and statements for special educational needs, minutes of meetings of the governing body, the headteacher's reports to the governing body, minutes of meetings of the senior leadership team, and information about attendance. Inspectors spoke with the local authority designated officer on the telephone. Inspectors also observed pupils in lessons, at breaktime and at lunchtime.

Inspectors reviewed the school's latest parental feedback survey, spoke with parents at the start of the school day, on the telephone and received emails from parents.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

There are currently 154 pupils on roll. Most pupils are of White British heritage. All pupils have an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above the national average. The proportion of pupils who join the school during the academic year is much higher than the national average for all schools.

The headteacher has been in post since August 2016. A leader of autism was also appointed in August 2016. A deputy headteacher was appointed in January 2017.

Main findings

The new headteacher leads safeguarding well. She has reviewed the school's safeguarding procedures to make them much more robust. Everyone in school is fully aware of the importance of following safeguarding procedures and keeping pupils safe. Parents and staff have welcomed the changes she has made. Pupils informed the inspectors that they are happy at school and that pupils' behaviour is good. The governing body is knowledgeable about safeguarding matters and challenge the headteacher on issues related to safeguarding.

The headteacher ensures that the safeguarding of pupils is paramount in the school's practice. Staff have received regular training on safeguarding. They are knowledgeable about child protection and know what to do if they have a concern. The record-keeping of leaders is of good quality. Records show that leaders take prompt action if a concern has been raised. The school works well with other external agencies, for example social care or health professionals, to try and reduce risks and keep pupils safe.

The school site is much more secure. Risk assessments are in place and followed. The doors are locked to avoid unauthorised people from entering the building. All parents and driver escorts have to wear their school-identification badge to gain entry to the school at the start of the school day. Staff comment on how much calmer the school is at the start and end of the day, and they know to challenge anyone in the building who is not wearing official school identification.

The school has reviewed how medication is stored and administered to pupils. Each administration of medicine is counter-signed and robust procedures are in place

when staff take medicines off site. The staff act on the control measures identified in risk assessments for pupils with complex medical needs, to try to reduce the level of risk.

All staff have had training on risk assessments for school visits and are well aware of the new procedures in place. Staff are proactive about the potential risks pupils may face and put in control measures to try and reduce the potential risks identified. All risk assessments for school visits have to be completed well in advance of the trip taking place, in order for a senior leader to approve the visit.

The headteacher has reviewed the behaviour policy with staff and a new policy is now in place. Staff have received training and spoke positively about the changes to how behaviour is managed. They appreciate the support they receive from senior leaders about managing the pupils' behaviour.

The staff focus on the potential triggers for poor behaviour and actively seek to eliminate them. All incidents of poor behaviour are recorded and then reviewed by senior leaders. Staff are involved in these reviews and pupils' behaviour plans are amended to try and eliminate the possible reasons for the poor behaviour. The amendments are communicated quickly to all staff. Scrutiny of the school's behaviour logs shows that the number of incidents of poor behaviour has reduced.

The new leader for autism has quickly identified the needs of the pupils in her class and tailored the provision to meet those needs. The pupils are happy and are making progress. The expertise of the leader has now been shared with all staff through the introduction of the new behaviour policy.

Parents who spoke with inspectors were highly positive about the school. They felt that there was an open dialogue between school staff and parents, and that the school tailors the provision to meet their child's needs. A recent school survey of parents' views, following a consultation evening, showed high levels of parental satisfaction.

The school closely tracks the attendance of pupils. Registers are administered correctly. Any absences are followed up by the office staff to ensure that the reasons for absence are known. Each pupil's attendance is scrutinised fortnightly and the school's new attendance policy is followed.

The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is currently higher than last year. However, scrutiny of pupils' attendance records shows a number of pupils, who have had previously low attendance, are now attending much more frequently.

Pupils who spoke with the inspectors said they were happy at the school. They enjoyed working for their teachers and appreciated the support they receive in class. Older pupils enjoyed the clubs available at lunchtime. In addition, they said lessons are calm and this helps them to learn. Observations by inspectors confirm

these views.

Pupils' behaviour outside lessons is orderly. At breaktimes, pupils access a wide range of activities, including climbing frames, swings and the football area. Pupils are active and conduct themselves well. Pupils learn about healthy eating. One group of pupils were proud of the healthy snacks they had made in school. At lunchtime, pupils know the school routines well and line up quietly. Older pupils are encouraged to be as independent as possible and choose their own meals. There are opportunities for pupils to interact with each other to develop their social skills.

In lessons, pupils listen attentively to the teachers' explanations. They demonstrate a good attitude to learning. The relationships between teachers and pupils are good. Teachers reinforce safety measures at all times, for example showing a pupil how to correctly hold a pair of scissors. Learning support assistants skilfully nip any poor behaviour in the bud, to ensure that learning time is not lost. As a result, there is a positive climate for learning.

However, teachers' assessments of pupils' progress are not robust enough. Teachers do not consistently check if pupils are achieving the targeted outcomes listed in education, health and care plans or statements for special educational needs, particularly in relation to pupils' personal development. In addition, the annual reviews do not consistently report on the progress pupils have made to achieve the outcomes.

The governing body is very knowledgeable about safeguarding. All governors have received training, including those who are relatively new. Governors have challenged school leaders about safeguarding issues, including issues surrounding behaviour and attendance. However, the minutes of governing body meetings do not always reflect the level of challenge that governors provide.

The chair of the governing body regularly checks the school's single central record to ensure that all the necessary checks have been completed on those people who work with pupils. The governing body has reviewed its complaints policy and are aware of the timescales that it should adopt following the submission of a complaint. The school's safeguarding policy takes account of the latest government guidance for safeguarding.

External support

Leaders have worked with external agencies to help inform pupils about how to stay safe. The school has recently worked with the Leicestershire child sexual exploitation learning hub to look at how resources can be used appropriately, to inform vulnerable young learners about the risks of child sexual exploitation. As a result, the school has produced a package of resources to inform the pupils about how to stay safe on the internet. The school has also worked with the police to inform some pupils about the dangers of grooming online. Pupils who spoke with an

inspector demonstrated a good understanding of how to stay safe online.

The school has received effective support from an external consultant from the Forest Way Teaching Alliance. She has written a detailed report about the school's effectiveness and highlighted the next steps for the school to improve further. The adviser judges safeguarding procedures to be a strength of the school. The findings of the inspection confirm this view.

Priorities for further improvement:

- ensure that teachers regularly check on the progress made by the pupils to achieve the outcomes in the education, health and care plans or a statement of special educational needs
- ensure that annual reviews report the progress made by the pupils to achieve the targeted outcomes in the education, health and care plans or a statement of special educational needs.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Finch
Her Majesty's Inspector