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Mr James Franklin-Smith
Executive principal
Sowerby Bridge High School
Albert Road
Sowerby Bridge
West Yorkshire
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Dear Mr Franklin-Smith

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Sowerby Bridge High School

Following my visit to your school on 9 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 at the school.

Evidence

I scrutinised the record of pre-employment security checks on staff and many other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. I met with you, other senior leaders, and members of the interim executive board (IEB). I also met with two local authority officers, pupils and a group of teachers and teaching assistants.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Sowerby Bridge High School is smaller than the average secondary school. The school has a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who speak English

as an additional language. Pupils speak over 40 different languages. The three largest ethnic groups are White British, Pakistani and Gypsy Roma. The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is above average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is also above the national average.

The school was placed in special measures following the inspection that took place in October 2016. Safeguarding was judged ineffective. Following the inspection, the headteacher was on long-term absence and left the school in April 2017. The local authority commissioned Trinity Academy Trust in January 2017 to lead the school. The school is due to become part of the Trinity Academy Trust from September 2017.

The governing body has recently been replaced with an IEB. The executive principal of Trinity Academy has assumed overall responsibility for leading the school and the trust has appointed an acting principal to lead the school on a daily basis. Leaders have taken the decision that they will not be recruiting students for the sixth form. Current Year 12 students will transfer to either Trinity Academy Sixth Form or Maltings College when they are in Year 13.

Inspection findings

You and other leaders from the trust have provided clear, firm and decisive leadership. You have successfully raised the profile and importance of safeguarding in the school. All staff are in no doubt that it is everyone's responsibility to play their part and keep children safe. Leaders regularly brief staff to remind them of important updates and this ensures that safeguarding is on everyone's radar. You have introduced simple and effective systems to make sure staff can confidently and consistently refer concerns they may have about pupils' safety. These actions have considerably improved safeguarding in the school. This approach is also helping both the child protection officer and the designated safeguarding leader to gain a clear perspective of safeguarding in the school. Staff I spoke to, including teaching assistants and office staff, are also clear about the school's whistleblowing policy and how to report concerns they may have to senior leaders or IEB members.

You quickly took steps to ensure that the suitability of staff is confirmed before any appointments are made. These arrangements are now effective. You have successfully streamlined what was a cumbersome and confusing process. Leaders now make sure that checks on staff appointments are concise, clear and well ordered. This makes it easier to see that all appropriate checks are completed in a timely manner. Records also clearly show the levels of safeguarding training that all members of staff have received. Personnel files are now de-cluttered and references can be easily located. When paperwork is missing, you have taken sensible steps to ensure all staff are fit to work with pupils.

Pupils say that the changes you have made have had a dramatic and positive impact on both their safety and well-being. Lunch and breaktimes have been restructured and improved so that fewer pupils need supervising at any one time. There are now more staff to supervise pupils and this is helping pupils feel safe and well cared for. Leaders have also made certain areas out of bounds at breaktimes, including the tennis courts and the all-weather pitches. Pupils say that this has reduced the number of incidents of poor behaviour and improved the quality of staff supervision.

You and other leaders are not complacent. You continue to seek out ways of further improving safeguarding. School buses now park up in the school car park, and this avoids pupils having to cross a busy and congested road at the end of the day. A one-way system for getting to and from lessons has helped reduce incidents of pushing and shoving.

You recognise that sustained efforts are needed to improve overall attendance and reduce fixed-term exclusions. There have been some quick wins. Leaders have taken effective action to improve the checks on the attendance of sixth form students. Students now have to sign in and out of school. This has helped leaders keep a watchful eye on students' attendance and punctuality. Leaders have also meticulously analysed registers. This has helped them get an accurate picture of the scale of the challenges they face in improving attendance.

House managers, the educational welfare officer and office staff are now sending a clear message to pupils and parents about the importance of regular attendance. You have not been afraid to fine parents for their children's poor attendance. Phone calls and visits to pupils' homes are also being used to try to improve attendance. However, overall absence rates and fixed-term exclusions remain high. You rightly recognise that there is still much to do before they are even in line with national averages.

Members of the very recently created IEB are working hard to get to know the school. They have made a number of valuable and focused visits to school to see for themselves the impact that leaders are having on improving safeguarding. Members of the IEB are using their wide range of experiences and backgrounds to effectively challenge as well as support leaders, particularly in relation to safeguarding matters. IEB members have ensured that policies related to safeguarding, child protection, behaviour and anti-bullying are up to date and on the school website.

External support

Following the previous inspection, the local authority acted quickly and commissioned Trinity Academy Trust to lead on school improvement. As a result the local authority have taken a light touch approach but keep in regular contact with leaders to reassure themselves that suitable progress is being made.

The local authority carried out a useful review of safeguarding practices in the school following the previous inspection. The recommendations made following this review helped leaders in prioritising and tackling specific safeguarding practices that needed immediate improvement.

The designated safeguarding leader and the child protection officer have benefited from attending the safeguarding network meetings arranged by the local authority. Attending these meetings has helped sharpen and improve their practice in school.

Priorities for further improvement

- To continue to develop a range of suitable strategies that will reduce overall absence and fixed-term exclusions so that they are at least in line with national averages.

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

Yours sincerely

Phil Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector