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20 July 2017

Mr Mathew Atkinson  
The Sacriston Primary School  
Witton Road  
Sacriston  
Durham  
DH7 6LQ

Dear Mr Atkinson

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of The Sacriston Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 18 July 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**

During the inspection, I scrutinised documentation relating to child protection arrangements and the school's record of checks on the suitability of adults to work with children. Records of attendance and exclusions, as well as the school's arrangements for following up absence and incidents, were also examined. The school's policies, curriculum documents and records of safety checks were reviewed. The school's work to support pupils in learning how to stay safe was investigated. I undertook a tour of the school site, accompanied by you, to check on security. I observed and spoke with pupils at various times during the school day and at lunchtime, in addition to meeting with a group of pupils formally. I observed pupils' conduct and spoke with parents and carers at the start of the school day, as well as during sports events, the family picnic and the school's summer fair. I met with the interim headteacher, acting deputy headteacher and a group of teaching and non-teaching staff. A meeting was held with a representative of the local authority and with the school's interim executive board of governors.

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

## **Leaders have taken appropriate action since the previous inspection to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective.**

### **Context**

The Sacriston Primary School is an average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is also above the national average.

Since the previous inspection, the interim headteacher has left the school. The previous acting deputy headteacher took up the role of interim headteacher at Easter on a temporary basis, until the end of the current academic year. An acting deputy headteacher has been seconded to the school on a part-time basis since the beginning of May 2017 until the end of the current academic year. An academy order is in place, and the school is scheduled to close on 31 August 2017. A new primary academy is planned to reopen on the same site on 1 September 2017.

### **Inspection findings**

Interim leaders, including the interim executive board (IEB), supported by the local authority, have taken swift action to address the areas for improvement related to pupils' safety and welfare which were identified at the previous inspection in November 2016. Pupils feel safe in school. The vast majority of parents and carers consulted during this inspection indicated that they feel that their children are safe and well cared for. Most parents recognise the significant improvements to the arrangements to safeguard pupils.

All staff have now received the training they need to help them to recognise the signs that pupils might be at risk. Staff can articulate, for example, the changes to pupils' behaviour that might alert them to the possibility that pupils are being radicalised, or subjected to other types of abuse. A new, electronic system of recording is ensuring that safeguarding concerns are dealt with swiftly and that relevant information is cascaded to the appropriate staff. This ensures that staff keep a close check on the progress of pupils who are subject to child protection arrangements.

Much attention has been given to improving the security and suitability of the school site. Following the previous inspection, the local authority conducted a full review of the site, alongside leaders, and identified a clear plan for improvement. Repairs to windows, the roof and the heating system have enhanced the environment. A new security system has ensured that access to school buildings is restricted to authorised personnel only. Leaders have been proactive in identifying the remaining aspects of the site which require further attention and have taken the correct action to minimise any risk to pupils. This reflects the high priority given to pupils' safety. Most parents speak favourably of the new approach to dropping

pupils off at school and collecting them at the end of the day. Parents recognise that their children are safer because of these arrangements.

Leaders have taken all reasonable steps to try to address the gaps which previously existed in the checks on the suitability of staff to work with children. The school has one, single central record of checks which complies with statutory guidance. Procedures for the recruitment of staff have been strengthened. The recent recruitment of lunchtime staff shows that leaders apply their knowledge of safer recruitment to test candidates' knowledge of safeguarding practice and to explore any gaps in employment.

Pupils acknowledge that their behaviour has improved since the previous inspection, as a result of the new traffic light system. Around school, most pupils conduct themselves well. During the inspection, younger pupils participated enthusiastically and sensibly in sports activities, thrilled that their families were watching their performance. Pupils identify, however, that the behaviour of a few pupils in key stage 2 remains a concern and can impede their learning. Pupils are confident that bullying is rare in the school. However, they report that when pupils fall out with their friends, they sometimes resort to name-calling. This includes, on occasion, the use of homophobic language. While class teachers keep some logs of this type of behaviour incident, you acknowledge that this is not consistent across the school. Leaders recognise that they need to keep a careful check on the number and types of incidents. This will enable leaders to evaluate where behaviour is improving and take more focused action where any patterns of poor behaviour are identified so that all pupils continue to feel safe in school.

Since the introduction of the new behaviour policy, the number of instances of pupils being excluded from school has risen. However, records of these exclusions demonstrate that you are working with pupils and their families to reduce the risk of repeat exclusions. The appointment of a school counsellor, in January 2017, to work one day each week, has enabled you to intervene quickly where pupils are in need of additional support to meet their social and emotional needs.

You have improved the curriculum to ensure that pupils are taught how to stay safe. Pupils now receive weekly teaching focused on their personal, social, health and emotional needs. Visits from external organisations complement this routine teaching. The fire brigade has helped pupils to understand safety in the home. Sessions with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) have raised pupils' awareness of healthy relationships and stranger danger. All pupils are now receiving sex and relationships education, in line with statutory guidance. The teaching of religious education has been improved and is ensuring that pupils have a stronger awareness of different types of religion and key concepts such as tolerance and respect. Pupils demonstrate an appropriate awareness of different types of bullying. They can explain, for example, how to stay safe online and how to respond if they are subjected to cyber bullying. Leaders have also ensured that parents are provided with helpful information so that they

can keep their children safe online at home. For example, the school's website includes sensible advice on the risks associated with social media.

Leaders have taken rapid action to review and introduce a number of key policies in school relating to pupils' safety. Leaders' expectations of staff are outlined in a new staff code of conduct and reinforced in the new health and safety policy. Staff report that new procedures and systems are much clearer and better understood. For example, new approaches to recording and informing parents about the administration of first aid or the provision of intimate care are now used consistently by staff.

Leaders show appropriate awareness of the importance of risk assessment, particularly in relation to events which are outside the usual routines of the school day. Educational visits are planned carefully and staff demonstrate knowledge of the correct priorities in relation to pupils' safety. During the inspection, a number of activities were taking place in school which involved families accessing the premises. You had given careful consideration to maintaining appropriate security on site. Staff implemented sensible systems to release pupils safely into the care of their families, while maintaining suitable supervision for those pupils who remained in school. However, leaders had not given enough thought to the implications for evacuation protocols when so many visitors were accessing the school site, so that, in the event of fire, all persons could be accounted for. In addition, insufficient staff have received training to act as fire marshals to manage the smooth evacuation of the school buildings.

Leaders acknowledge that, until recently, they have focused more on celebrating good attendance rather than tackling weak attendance. As a consequence, pupils' attendance has been slow to improve. However, over the past term, you have begun to contact families on the first day of pupils' absences so that you can be assured that pupils are safe. You have refocused your parent support adviser to work intensively with a group of persistently absent pupils and their families. Leaders are beginning to take tougher decisions, including refusing to authorise some absences where you believe they are not genuine. The school's work with other agencies has also increased. Leaders have made good use of the early help assessment process to involve other professionals where families have been in need of support to improve their child's attendance. Leaders' work has resulted in some notable reductions in absence. For example, the attendance of pupils who receive support for their special educational needs has improved and is now above the national average for all pupils. However, you recognise that there is much more to do to ensure that all pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, attend well.

### **External support**

The local authority has worked closely with leaders, including the interim executive board of governors, to set clear priorities for improvement. The local authority has provided considerable additional resources, since the previous inspection, to

upgrade aspects of the school building and ensure that the site is secure. Leaders and governors have benefited from the support and challenge of local authority officers, including through the monthly 'school scrutiny group' meetings. This has helped to ensure that the pace of change has been rapid in the school over the past two terms.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

Leaders should take action to ensure that:

- pupils' behaviour across the school is carefully and routinely monitored so that appropriate action can be taken to eradicate any inappropriate behaviour, including the use of homophobic language
- more staff are trained as fire marshals and that all activities involving visitors to the school are risk assessed thoroughly, so that any necessary changes to the usual protocols for evacuation can be made
- pupils' attendance, including that of disadvantaged pupils, improves to at least in line with the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Brown  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**