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Mrs Lindsay Robertson
Headteacher
Willow Fields Community Primary School
Winslow Close
Wetherwack
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
SR5 5RZ

Dear Mrs Robertson

No formal designation inspection of Willow Fields Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 26 September 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This 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 wished to determine the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the school as concerns had been raised with Ofsted.

Evidence

During the inspection, I scrutinised documentation relating to the school's child protection arrangements and the record of checks on the suitability of adults to work with children. Records of pupils' attendance and exclusions, as well as the school's arrangements for following up absence and incidents, were also reviewed. The school's policies and records of safety checks were examined. The impact of the curriculum in supporting pupils to learn how to stay safe was considered. I observed and spoke with pupils at various times during the school day and at lunchtime. I also spent time in classrooms. I met with a group of pupils from key stages 1 and 2. I spoke with parents and carers at the start and end of the school day. I met with you, some middle leaders and a group of teaching and non-teaching staff. A meeting was held with representatives of the local authority. I also met with three members of the governing board, including the chair of the governing board.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Willow Fields Community Primary School is smaller than the average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. Until recently, and since the previous inspection, there has been significant instability in the leadership of the school. During the second half of the summer term in 2017, an interim headteacher was seconded from a local school. You took up your post as headteacher in September 2017. During the last academic year, there has been a high turnover of members within the governing board. A number of governors left the school during the spring term in 2017. Several new governors, including some with substantial experience of governance in other schools, have joined the governing board. During the past academic year, the local authority has provided additional support to the school, including helping governors to secure stable leadership.

Inspection findings

Teaching and support staff show a keen awareness of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding. They have benefited from regular training and briefings and have an impressive understanding of the indicators that might trigger concerns about pupils' safety. Procedures for reporting those concerns are appropriate and well understood by staff. Despite the turbulence in leadership since the previous inspection, the deputy designated safeguarding leader has maintained a sharp focus on the school's arrangements for protecting children who may be at risk. Records of the school's work to safeguard pupils at significant risk of harm are exemplary and illustrate the tenacity of staff in following up issues. Most importantly, they evidence the school's willingness to challenge families and other professionals where the right actions are not being taken quickly enough to ensure pupils' well-being.

Leaders have made sure that a range of checks, required by statutory guidance, are conducted to ensure the suitability of adults, including staff, visitors and volunteers, to work with children. However, over time, leaders have not ensured that the confirmations of these checks on the suitability of adults are collated into one single central record, to comply with statutory guidance. Staff began the process of addressing this during this inspection. Leaders recognise the need to record the information in one document so that it can be easily checked.

The school provides a safe environment for pupils. Recent changes to the arrangements for dismissing pupils at the end of the school day have improved pupils' safety. The appointment of the new site supervisor in June 2017 has ensured that important safety checks, such as tests of the fire alarm and emergency lighting, are conducted frequently and recorded appropriately. Improvements have been

made to the evacuation routes in the event of fire. Staff risk assess activities, such as educational visits, carefully. They record their findings and subsequent actions appropriately, ensuring that pupils remain safe.

Staff and pupils report that, since the previous inspection, the behaviour of pupils had declined. In particular, until recent times, some pupils felt unsafe at breaktimes because of the unruly behaviour of others. The interim headteacher, who led the school during the summer term of 2017, helped to stabilise the school and took action to support those pupils who were persistently demonstrating more challenging behaviour. You have built strongly on those foundations and established a clear behaviour policy which is understood and valued by staff and pupils alike. Pupils are delighted by the range of rewards for their good behaviour, which include special art sessions, gift vouchers and, most prized of all, a visit to your office to share their work with you. Staff have absolute clarity about the 'ladder' of consequences they should apply where pupils do not behave well. They feel well supported by you in tackling weaker behaviour. The school now maintains appropriately detailed records of behaviour incidents and takes prompt action to involve other agencies where a pupil or family is in need of additional support. Pupils and staff report that, since the summer term, behaviour has improved significantly and is now generally good around school. During this inspection, I found that most pupils concentrated well in their lessons and took pride in their work. At breaktime and lunchtime, pupils play together well, enjoying the carefully supervised outdoor play equipment and football training. Almost all pupils are polite and respectful to adults, and are kind and show concern for their peers.

Historically, staff have not had complete clarity about what should be taught, and when, in relation to the curriculum to help pupils to stay safe. However, despite this, pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the issues that may pose a risk to their safety. They can articulate what they should do to stay safe online. Pupils know the risks attached to fireworks and the importance of staying away from railway lines. Pupils also appreciate the similarities and differences in the population, recognising the diversity of religions and cultures that make up modern Britain. They show tolerance towards others from backgrounds that are different from their own. Pupils say that, although pupils call each other hurtful names occasionally, staff deal with this quickly and bullying is rare.

You have taken steps to implement a new curriculum for pupils' personal, social and emotional education, with an appropriate focus on issues relating to pupils' safety. Staff now indicate that they understand the progressive development of pupils' skills because they are clear about what they need to teach. Leaders recognise that they need to keep a close check to ensure that the new curriculum is helping all pupils to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding they need.

Over time, pupils' attendance has fluctuated and is below the national average. Too

many pupils are persistently absent from school. In particular, pupils eligible for free school meals and those who are eligible for support for their special educational needs have low attendance. Staff check and follow up absence on a daily basis to ensure that pupils are safe. However, leaders' actions have not been sufficiently effective in improving attendance. You have taken recent steps to strengthen the school's procedures for tackling absence and this is beginning to pay off. However, you have correctly identified that this needs to be a continuing priority to ensure that no pupil is disadvantaged or put at risk by weak attendance.

Governors recognise that, historically, they have not kept a close enough check on the school's work to keep pupils safe. However, in the last academic year, this has begun to improve. During the autumn term of 2016, the chair of the governing body commissioned a review of safeguarding. This resulted in improvements to the security of the main entrance of the school and the safe running of the breakfast club. In the spring term of 2017, the governing board, supported by the local authority, instigated a full review of governance. This led to the appointment of a number of new governors who have the skills needed to support and challenge leaders. More recently, new governors have worked with leaders to closely scrutinise new policies relating to pupils' safety and well-being. Governors know that there is still more to do to ensure that they hold leaders to account fully for all aspects of safeguarding. Their extensive action plans demonstrate that governors know what needs to be done and are already on their way towards this goal. They recognise that they must better prioritise their monitoring of some aspects of the school's work, such as the checks on the suitability of adults to work with children.

External support

The local authority's routine monitoring enabled officers to quickly identify, in September 2016, that some aspects of the school's work were not strong enough. They provided good support to develop the skills of middle leaders to build additional capacity for improvement in the school. The local authority also provided support for the governing board and coordinated the secondment of an interim headteacher in the summer term of 2017. This resulted in much-needed stability and helped the school to improve pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning so that pupils feel safer in school.

Local authority officers have not assured themselves that the school's single central record of checks on the suitability of adults to work with children meets statutory guidance.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that details of the checks conducted on the suitability of staff to work with children are fully recorded in one single, central document.
- Continue to develop and implement a detailed programme of monitoring so that governors can assure themselves that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.
- Monitor the newly introduced curriculum for pupils' personal, social, health and emotional development to check that it is enabling all pupils to make strong progress.
- Reduce the absence and persistent absence of pupils, particularly those eligible for free school meals and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, to at least in line with the national averages.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector