

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Julie Prentice  
Executive headteacher  
Shinewater Primary School  
Milfoil Drive  
Langney  
Eastbourne  
East Sussex  
BN23 8ED

Dear Ms Prentice

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Shinewater Primary School**

Following my visit with Leah Goulding, Ofsted Inspector, and Peter Wibroe, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 1 and 2 November 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, aspects of leadership and management at the school, and pupils' behaviour and attendance. This inspection was carried out with no notice.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. Inspectors carried out a thorough review of the school's actions and record-keeping relating to recent serious safeguarding incidents. Inspectors met with the executive headteacher and co-headteachers. Her Majesty's Inspector led a meeting attended by all staff, including teachers and support staff. Individual meetings were also held with groups of staff, middle leaders and staff new to the school. Her Majesty's Inspector spoke to both the chief executive officer and the primary director of the Swale Academies Trust. Information relating to safeguarding incidents was provided to Ofsted by East Sussex local authority and was considered alongside other evidence.

Inspectors toured the school and the grounds, and observed pupils in all classes and during playtimes and lunchtimes. Inspectors spoke informally to pupils in and out of lessons and selected representative groups of pupils in Year 2 and in Years 5 and 6 for more formal meetings. Inspectors spoke to over 20 parents at the start of the second day of the inspection. The school's records of pupils' attendance, pupils taken off roll and records of their behaviour were scrutinised. Inspectors reviewed the school's documentation related to safeguarding training, the work of the previous interim executive board of governors, curriculum planning and the school's own evaluation of its performance.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

### **Context**

Shinewater Primary school is a larger-than-average primary school, with 413 pupils on roll, including some children who attend part-time in the Nursery. The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is above average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. The school is led by an executive headteacher and two co-headteachers, all of whom were appointed over the last seven months. The school converted to an academy under the Swale Academies Trust in September 2017. The school is currently governed by a new local governing board.

The school has experienced considerable turbulence since the predecessor school was inspected in July 2015. There have been a number of changes of headteacher, including a period when senior staff were acting as headteacher in an interim capacity. In October 2015, the previous school building was burned down and the school was rebuilt on the same site. Inspectors were aware during this inspection that serious incidents of a child protection nature had been investigated by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the incidents were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time to inform inspectors' judgements.

### **Main findings**

Inspectors judged that the school's arrangements for safeguarding and child protection are effective. The co-headteachers are the designated senior leaders for safeguarding and are experienced in child protection. They keenly feel their accountability for the safety of the children in their care and place children at the heart of their work. Senior leaders know the pupils in the school extremely well.

They are equally determined to work supportively with parents in the community to keep children safe. For example, following some serious safeguarding incidents in the summer term of 2017, the co-headteachers made themselves available throughout the summer holiday to meet parents, address their concerns and reassure them that they were doing everything they could to keep children protected and safe from harm. The headteachers took on the responsibility of this work with little extra support from other agencies.

Since their arrival, the co-headteachers have completely tightened up child protection arrangements in the school. Staff have been thoroughly trained to identify pupils at risk of harm or neglect. Additional training has helped staff to spot signs of inappropriate behaviour, unhealthy relationships, dangerous play and peer-on-peer abuse. The training has resulted in staff being highly vigilant and protective during structured and unstructured times in the school day. They are alert to any worrying signs or disclosures from pupils. Staff have welcomed the improved system for reporting concerns. They make sure that they share information promptly and in detail with senior leaders, who then inform the relevant agencies or local authority children's services in a timely manner. The school's record-keeping is orderly, with helpful chronologies and detail, enabling any patterns to be identified swiftly. Senior leaders do not shirk from pursuing their concerns with the police or local authority if they feel that they have not had sufficient support or guidance.

On her appointment, the executive headteacher carried out a thorough review of the co-headteachers' response to serious safeguarding incidents. In conclusion, she was satisfied that they had done everything they could reasonably have been expected to do, in line with their statutory duties. In addition, the Swale Academies Trust commissioned an independent review of safeguarding procedures in the school in September 2017, which had a positive outcome with only minor administrative improvements recommended. Nearly all the parents who spoke to inspectors commented on how much they appreciated the 'open door' policy of the co-headteachers. Parents find the headteachers approachable and feel that communication has improved.

Other aspects of safeguarding procedures in the school meet statutory requirements, such as the safer recruitment of staff to ensure their suitability to work with children. School leaders have introduced a sensible code of conduct for staff. The school has stringent policies, procedures and approaches to dealing with any staff behaviour that does not meet the school's high standards.

Nevertheless, inspectors identified that the context of the school and its particular challenges pose potential risks to pupils' safety and well-being. In the past, these risks were not considered sufficiently deeply. Leaders are acutely conscious of the high number of child protection concerns that are reported to them by staff, most of which are about neglect, inappropriate behaviour or domestic violence. Staff and leaders act promptly to share information with children's services, support pupils and work with parents to minimise risk of harm. Nevertheless, leaders are rightly

concerned that more needs to be done to improve pupils' overall well-being in school and in the community as a whole.

Inspectors found clear evidence that pupils' behaviour in the school had improved since the start of the academic year. The number of exclusions and serious behaviour incidents has decreased. The new behaviour policy is having a positive impact on pupils' conduct and the atmosphere in the school. Many parents welcome the new policy. Some are making use of similar approaches and a common language to support their children's behaviour at home. Pupils, particularly those in the early years and at key stage 1, are responding very well to the school's new 'rainbow rules'. During the inspection, pupils told inspectors that behaviour, particularly in lessons, had improved, and inspectors found a generally calm, orderly and purposeful atmosphere. However, a few pupils told inspectors that the boisterous behaviour and rough play of some pupils at playtime and lunchtime made them feel vulnerable and unsafe. Pupils clearly understand the behaviour policy and the consequences of poor conduct. They feel that staff tackle poor behaviour quickly. Nevertheless, a small group of pupils are not wholly confident that incidents of rough behaviour will stop completely.

Leaders have ensured that playtimes and lunchtimes are closely supervised by staff, who are an obvious and alert presence on the playground. High levels of control and supervision are appropriate during this period, when leaders are prioritising improvements to pupils' behaviour. However, there is not enough positive interaction between pupils and adults and there is simply not enough for pupils to do during playtime and lunchtime. Pupils are not developing enough of a sense of responsibility for their own behaviour. Understandably, many pupils run about to let off steam, but without any equipment this sometimes leads to potentially dangerous physical behaviour. Pupils would like to have more equipment, toys and games to use. Leaders have not focused enough on linking pupils' positive play with overall safety and healthy risk-taking.

Pupils, particularly those in key stage 1, clearly want to learn and are willing to please their teachers. They enjoy getting rewards for good conduct and are gradually building up more pride in themselves. On the other hand, some of the older pupils can be diffident and do not display enough interest in learning or trying hard. Some pupils are not confident when speaking to visitors or contributing in lessons. Pupils' lack of self-assurance has developed over a period of time when expectations were not high enough and when there was little clear direction from leaders. It is encouraging that the school's ethos is in the process of changing. Current leaders are providing more ambition, higher aspirations and better direction. However, more urgent change is required for the oldest pupils in the school. They are not as prepared as they should be for secondary school. Pupils do not all attend school as often as they should. Attendance figures are below national averages and persistent absence is too high. Nevertheless, over the last year, attendance has improved and there are fewer pupils who are persistently absent. The trust has wisely appointed an education welfare officer to work with

parents and other agencies in order to ensure that attendance continues to improve.

School leaders have rightly identified that the current personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum is not good enough. It does not provide pupils with enough guidance and information about how to respect themselves, stay healthy and play safely. Other aspects of the curriculum are not sufficiently engaging or inspiring for pupils. As a result, a few pupils 'switch off' from learning in lessons and produce very little.

For those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, the provision is improving, but has historically been weak. A few pupils' needs have not been adequately identified and, as a result, their behaviour has not been understood and has deteriorated. Inspectors observed a few pupils in many classes who were willing to try, but were 'lost' because planning for their particular needs has not been good enough. However, there have been some important and positive changes for the most vulnerable pupils. Leaders have completely transformed the provision for these pupils with the 'rainbow rooms', which provide a soothing, but at the same time, purposeful learning environment. Here, pupils are safe, learn to regulate their behaviour and emotions and, importantly, they make progress with their learning.

The executive headteacher has provided strong, thoughtful and humane coaching for the co-headteachers through a very challenging period. Her careful evaluation of exactly what the school needs to improve has helped leaders to carry out their roles with increased confidence. The co-headteachers work well as a team and have won the respect and commitment of staff. In addition, the co-headteachers' determination to support parents, listen to their concerns and open the doors of the school is gradually beginning to restore the reputation of the school locally.

However, there is still a long way to go. The school has been through an extremely difficult time. The bulk of the work to lead the school falls wholly upon the shoulders of the executive headteacher and the two co-headteachers. Wisely, the trust has appointed some staff as middle leaders, but their initial planning, while sound, has not had enough time to make a full impact.

In the past, those responsible for governance had not done enough to stem the decline in the school or ensure that safeguarding was a high enough priority. Members of the current local governing board are very new to their roles, although it is encouraging that many have experience of leadership in local schools. They have a strong understanding of what strong safeguarding practice looks like. They have already carried out checks of safer recruitment and are also prepared to challenge school leaders and leaders in the academy trust if they are not satisfied with the school's performance.

There is considerable credit due to staff who are loyal to the school and its

community, despite the challenges. Teaching and support staff are resilient and determined. They also know what they need to do to improve and are united in their commitment to pupils. When asked by inspectors, staff said that they loved working in the school and found their jobs rewarding. They are confident that they keep children and pupils safe because they love and care for them.

## **External support**

The local authority's support for the school has not been effective in preventing a decline in performance. In addition, school leaders had to carry out their own investigation of serious safeguarding incidents and at times, were isolated and felt unsupported by the local authority with this difficult and challenging work.

Some actions to support the school have been positive. Swale Academies Trust commissioned an independent safeguarding review in September, which found that the school's arrangements met requirements. The academy trust appointed the executive headteacher from another local primary school in order to strengthen leadership in the school, and to review provision, pupils' behaviour and safeguarding. In this way, the academy trust's understanding of the community and context of the school has been enhanced and planned improvements are having more impact. The school is now likely to benefit from strong working partnerships with other primary schools and leaders in the area. However, it is early days for the school as a new academy. The trust and school leaders are under no illusions about the scale of work to be done to improve the school.

## **Priorities for further improvement**

- Ensure that the curriculum and teaching meet pupils' needs at all levels and that standards quickly rise.
- Develop the skills of middle leaders and fully establish their roles and responsibilities to strengthen leadership throughout the school.
- Ensure that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported with their learning and behaviour, and that they make progress in both.
- Ensure that pupils learn how to play safely, look after themselves, form healthy relationships and gain self-respect.
- Sustain the improvements made to safeguarding arrangements, maintaining vigilance and the current high levels of training for staff.
- Build upon the recent improvements in the school's relationship with parents and

the community and thereby improve its reputation.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive of the Swale Academies Trust, the chair of the local governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for East Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce

**Her Majesty's Inspector**