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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Stephen Fanthorpe
Interim Headteacher
Howard Community Primary School
Beard Road
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP32 6SA

Dear Mr Fanthorpe

No formal designation inspection of Howard Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 8 February 2018, 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.

Evidence

I scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. I met with your deputy headteacher and home-school liaison officer, both of whom are designated leads for safeguarding. I met with you and the chair of the governing body, and two representatives of the local authority. I also scrutinised a range of documentation provided about pupils' behaviour and attendance, and the actions taken to improve them. Together, we visited lessons to observe pupils' behaviour. I observed pupils' conduct on arrival at school and at playtimes.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Most pupils are white British; very few are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding provided to support disadvantaged pupils is above the national average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is above average. A higher than average proportion of pupils have an education, health and care plan.

The school was inspected in July 2017 and placed in special measures. All aspects of the school's work, including safeguarding, were found to be inadequate. Since the last inspection, the school has experienced an extended period of turmoil. The interim executive headteacher in charge at the time of the inspection did not return to lead the school in September 2017. Instead, a succession of temporary, interim leaders were appointed, none of whom stayed for any significant amount of time. Much of the positive work noted by inspectors at the time of the last inspection has been lost as leaders have failed to capitalise on it.

Regular changes in the school's leadership have disrupted continuity and limited the impact of actions taken to improve the school. In September 2016, the local authority chose to install a new chair and vice-chair of the governing body, rather than establish an interim executive board. This did little to strengthen governance or generate additional capacity to oversee improvement.

It is evident that without the additional capacity a multi-academy trust would provide, the school does not have the capacity to improve. Despite this, slow progress has been made in converting it into an academy. At this stage, a trust has been identified, but this decision has not been confirmed. This process has absorbed too much of leaders' time and has limited their capacity to make widespread improvements.

The newly appointed interim headteacher ensures that the school operates smoothly on a daily basis, and is beginning to hold staff much more accountable for improving provision. He is gaining the confidence of pupils and the support of parents and carers in the local community. He has quickly gained an overview of the quality of teaching, and where it needs improving. However, at this stage, the school remains a serious concern because much of its work remains inadequate.

Safeguarding

Action has been taken to resolve the issues raised in the last inspection relating to safeguarding. For instance, the deputy headteacher has trained as the designated lead for safeguarding. She is supported by another leader also responsible for safeguarding. They lead and share responsibility for managing the child protection policy and procedures effectively, and for supporting the school's most vulnerable pupils. Clear procedures are in place for raising concerns about pupils' safety and welfare. Concerns shared by staff with the designated leads are recorded and acted upon promptly.

Furthermore, procedures for monitoring the care and welfare of children looked after, and a small minority of pupils in alternative provision, have been tightened up to ensure their safety. A greater emphasis is placed on teaching pupils about keeping safe, including how to remain safe online.

Safeguarding has a higher profile in the school because action has been taken to raise awareness of safeguarding matters and make staff more vigilant about recognising and reporting signs that cause concern. Noticeboards in the reception area and the staffroom remind staff of the key contacts and actions needed if they need to raise a concern. All staff have received training on safeguarding children, including on the 'Prevent' duty which focuses on keeping children safe from extremism and extremist ideas. An induction pack to update newly appointed staff is in place.

All calls to school from parents and carers are now logged systematically. The home-school liaison officer has forged strong links between school and pupils' homes. Her presence at the school gate at the start and end of the day enables parents to share any concerns they may have.

Improvements have been made to the school's record-keeping. Child protection records are stored safely in a locked cupboard. The designated leads ensure that open cases are monitored systematically. Responses from local support agencies are reviewed and followed up promptly to ensure pupils' safety. The designated leads meet weekly to review new concerns raised and assess the progress made in resolving existing issues.

Further work has been done by the office manager to ensure that background checks on adults appointed to the school show they are safe to work with children. The limited capacity in the school's governance means that, in the past, governors were not checking how well the school was vetting staff. Records of these checks are now better maintained. Gaps in information held by the school have been filled; only a few remain where the school is awaiting a response to their requests for further information from the vetting authorities.

At the end of the summer term 2017, leaders appointed a member of staff who was later found to not have the required qualifications for the post. The member of staff has left the school. This appointment was made without carrying out all of the necessary checks. Lessons have been learned from this. A scrutiny of the most recent appointments made since the last inspection confirmed that all of the required checks are now made when recruiting new staff.

Since the last inspection, two referrals have been made to the local authority's designated lead for safeguarding. School leaders have followed the appropriate procedures to deal with these disclosures effectively.

Some effective action has been taken to strengthen pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. Visits to lessons confirmed that almost all pupils were behaving well and were suitably engaged in their learning. However, changes made by successive

school leaders have undermined attempts to embed consistent approaches to deal with poor behaviour. Procedures introduced immediately after the last inspection no longer apply. Records show that the use of fixed-term exclusions was far too high last term. The number of exclusions so far this term has fallen significantly.

Not all staff understand their roles and responsibilities in managing pupils' behaviour. Approaches to managing behaviour are inconsistent. Teachers do not log accurately incidents of poor behaviour in lessons. Consequently, records are incomplete. Not enough has been done by leaders, governors and the local authority to challenge these inconsistencies, and hold all staff fully accountable for carrying out these basic duties effectively.

Little progress has been made in improving overall attendance, which is currently below average. The high rates of persistent absence noted at the time of the last inspection remain. Staff continue to use a range of strategies to encourage pupils back into school, ranging from first-day calling, breakfast club and, where needed, issuing fines for parents. This has led to some success with individual pupils but, overall, absence rates are too high. Other pressing priorities and a lack of capacity within the school mean that leaders do not review information fully. Currently, they are unable to show trends in the attendance and behaviour of disadvantaged pupils, or those who have SEN and/or disabilities, and target action to improve it.

External support

Discussions with school leaders, and with the local authority, revealed a lack of coherence in their views of the work done since the last inspection to aid the school's improvement. For example, current leaders and the chair of governors were unaware that the local authority's statement of action had been shared with the school. The local authority's post-inspection action plan prioritises support and challenge for leaders to address safeguarding concerns. Leaders are unclear whether this support has been provided, or what impact it has had.

The last inspection commented on the lack of a rigorous review of safeguarding by the local authority. This is still the case. The local authority's regular visits have not investigated thoroughly the progress made by school leaders in ensuring that pupils are kept safe. Local authority officers have not done enough to help the school to resolve the weaknesses in safeguarding procedures they identified themselves prior to the last inspection.

Regular visits made by local authority officers since the last inspection have focused on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They have had little impact in securing the long-term strategic direction of the school, or in building leadership capacity within the school to secure improvements.

Priorities for further improvement

- Harness the full, coordinated support of the local authority, the regional schools commissioner and the prospective multi-academy trust's leaders to reach agreement on the school's conversion without delay, in order to give it the capacity it needs to improve the education of pupils who currently attend the school.

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

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector