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Angela Nicholls
Groombridge St Thomas' Church of England Primary School
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Tunbridge Wells
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Dear Ms Nicholls

No formal designation inspection of Groombridge St Thomas' Church of England Primary School

Following my visit with Mary Ellen McCarthy, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 20–21 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 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

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and a wide range of other documents and policies relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. Records of governing body meetings and reports of visit from external advisers and consultants were considered, including those relating to the recent external reviews of governance and safeguarding.

Inspectors also considered leaders' records of pupils' attendance and behaviour. They met formally with you, other leaders, teachers, non-teaching staff and two groups of pupils. Inspectors also spoke informally to small groups of pupils at breaktime and lunchtime. The lead inspector held meetings with four members of the governing body including the chair of governors and the governor with responsibility for safeguarding. Contact was made with the local authority's senior manager for safeguarding and assessment whose views and reports of visit were

considered.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Groombridge St Thomas' School is a slightly below-average-sized rural primary school with 206 pupils currently on roll. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is below national figures. The percentage of pupils who are supported by the pupil premium is well below the national average. The proportions of pupils who are from minority ethnic groups or speak English as an additional language are below national averages.

The school was last inspected by Ofsted in May 2009, when it was judged to be outstanding. Staffing at the school is stable, and most leaders and teachers have been in the school for some time. Five new governors have recently joined the governing body.

Main findings

Together with governors and senior leaders, you lead dedicated and well-trained staff who have high aspirations for your pupils, both academically and pastorally. The school is at the heart of the local community and offers a warm and welcoming environment where pupils feel safe and well supported by adults, who care for them well. Staff provide well-organised layers of care that meet the needs of individual pupils effectively. This enables pupils to benefit from the broad curriculum on offer, and a high proportion achieves impressive academic success. All of the pupils that we met during the inspection knew whom they would speak to should they have any concerns. They feel confident that staff and other pupils would support them should they need any help. Information about key staff to contact if needed, both within and beyond school, is readily available to pupils and their parents and carers. Pupils told inspectors that they trust staff to deal with any issues they may need to raise. When asked the best thing about their school, older pupils all gave positive answers such as: 'We are kind, compassionate and caring,' and 'Nobody feels left out. We make friends with everyone in our class and other years too.'

You and your governors have demonstrated considerable resilience and strong leadership over the past few months. Through your open and honest self-reflection and decisive actions, you wasted no time in addressing the procedural errors and training requirements identified during the external reviews of safeguarding and governance conducted last term. You have sought and embraced a range of appropriate external advice and support where necessary. The latest reports of visits from consultants and inspectors' judgements recognise that all recommendations made during these external reviews have been actioned. Refined

systems and additional training have ensured that leaders, governors and staff are better informed about safeguarding, behaviour and welfare issues, and procedures have been improved. More needs to be done to embed these improvements and ensure that regular monitoring and review of safeguarding are better recorded in school improvement plans.

Governors now hold leaders more stringently to account for their work to keep pupils safe. The vice-chair of the governing body acts as the designated safeguarding governor and works alongside school leaders to check the quality of safeguarding arrangements in the school. Safeguarding is a regular feature of governors' meetings. Governors have challenged leaders to refine and enhance provision for pupils and to sharpen safeguarding systems. As a result, leaders have strengthened the school's already well-established safeguarding culture with improved policies, more staff training and better record-keeping. Consequently, there is a shared culture of vigilance across the school.

Appropriate safeguarding and qualifications checks are made on all staff, and meticulous records are maintained. All staff, volunteers and governors receive regular, helpful training, which meets requirements and is appropriate to their roles in school. Revised induction packages have been introduced so better training will be given to new recruits. Leaders ensure that staff have easy access to a wide range of relevant documents and materials. Consequently, staff know what to do if they have a concern about any pupil, and can describe well-rehearsed routines for seeking support from the designated safeguarding lead where appropriate. They understand their specific responsibilities relating to e-safety and reporting any suspected cases of abuse or radicalisation. Some staff are less clear about their responsibilities arising from some of the new policies including the school's whistleblowing policy. While leaders have ensured that all staff have received training and information, more needs to be done to check their levels of understanding and confidence to recall relevant procedures.

In this small school, staff know each of the pupils very well, and communication between the staff is strong. Leaders ensure that teachers and teaching assistants are vigilant to the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Clear systems are in place to track and monitor any vulnerable pupils. Leaders regularly monitor the attendance, behaviour, health and well-being of pupils, although more could be done to track the different groups. As designated safeguarding lead, you ensure that prompt and personalised support is put in place so that potentially vulnerable pupils are kept safe and supported well. The school works effectively with experts from beyond the school in order to provide useful and timely additional support to pupils and their families where required.

Pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe through a very well-planned approach to personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. Leaders have recently enriched their planning for the PSHE curriculum. Pupils' PSHE books show that they have great pride in their work and a well-developed awareness of local,

national and some international issues. This reinvigorated teaching of PSHE throughout the school ensures that pupils' needs are considered carefully. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is promoted well through regular assemblies and embedded within PSHE, religious education lessons and the wider curriculum. In addition, pupils are taught to keep themselves safe and to consider the safety of others through their engagement in a range of clubs and extra-curricular activities. The school offers a range of sporting clubs, trips, visits and activities, which are highly valued by pupils. Leaders ensure that detailed risk assessments are carried out for each of these activities. As a result of your well-organised and rich curriculum, pupils have a strong understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when online. They are well prepared for their next stages of education and for life in modern Britain.

External support

The school belongs to local networks, enabling leaders to access and share best practice. School leaders and governors make good use of experts from beyond the school to ensure that staff training is of high quality and to gain access to legal advice. Leaders and governors work closely with colleagues from the local authority. As designated safeguarding lead, you regularly attend multi-agency meetings, ensure regular communication and make sure that detailed records are kept. Leaders have challenged external agencies when necessary, to ensure that they receive timely responses to any questions or information required.

Leaders and governors cooperated fully and worked closely with external consultants and the local authority during the recent reviews of safeguarding and governance. The local authority has helpfully supported the school with new model policies and staff training. These policies have been adopted and implemented effectively, but leaders are aware that more needs to be done to make these policies better matched to the school context.

The level of challenge provided to the school from the local authority was suitably robust and thorough when safeguarding shortcomings were identified last term. Its latest reviews confirm that safeguarding systems at the school are effective. However, communication between the local authority, leaders and governors has not always been as effective as it might have been, for example over how safeguarding issues are classified and should be responded to.

Priorities for further improvement

Leaders and those responsible for governance should develop a more confident and secure embedding of the school's revised safeguarding procedures by:

- monitoring the impact of staff training relating to safeguarding and well-being
- ensuring that a more analytical and systematic approach to safeguarding

informs school improvement plans

- making sure that all recently adopted policies are better contextualised to the school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Chichester, 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

Matthew Newberry

Her Majesty's Inspector