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Mrs Joanne Maw
Principal
Grindon Hall Christian School
Nookside
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
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Dear Mrs Maw

No formal designation inspection of Grindon Hall Christian School

Following my visit with Carl Sugden and Dominic Brown, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 1 May 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 was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and the effectiveness of leadership and management in the school (including governance) in relation to the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements and met with the principal, groups of pupils, the chair of the academy management committee (AMC) and Bright Tribe Trust's regional executive headteacher. A telephone discussion was held with a trustee and the chief executive officer (CEO) from Bright Tribe Trust.

Inspectors scrutinised a range of education, health and care plans and SEN support plans, evaluated the provision for these pupils in lessons, looked at their workbooks and talked with some of their parents and carers.

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

- safeguarding is effective
- leaders' provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is improving but is inconsistent across this all-through school.

Context

Grindon Hall Christian School became a sponsored academy and part of the Bright Tribe multi-academy trust on 1 April 2017. The current coordinator for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities (SENCo) joined the school in March of the same year. A new principal took up post on 1 September 2017. Following Bright Tribe's decision to withdraw from schools in the north, due diligence processes are being carried out in respect of a new sponsor. The AMC replaced the local governing body (the drive team) recently and has held one formal committee meeting. The trustees of the Bright Tribe multi-academy trust remain the accountable body for the school until a new sponsor takes over.

Inspection Findings

Leaders ensure that the school's arrangements to safeguard pupils are effective. Recruitment procedures are effective, and the school's record of checks to ensure the suitability of adults to work with children is fully compliant with requirements. The principal liaises with the local authority's designated officer for child protection appropriately. Staff understand and act in accordance with the school's whistleblowing procedures.

Staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding and child protection. All have read the Department for Education's most recent statutory guidance. Staff have recently completed the 'Prevent' duty training to safeguard pupils, people and communities from terrorism, 'Stonewall' training to safeguard lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights and suicide prevention training. Leaders have ensured that the school's mental health champion and two mental health first aiders are well equipped to carry out their roles effectively. There is a strong safeguarding culture throughout the school.

The highly skilled designated safeguarding leader follows up disclosures made by pupils tenaciously. Consequently, vulnerable pupils access support from a wide range of external agencies. However, the school's record-keeping systems and procedures are cumbersome, lead to information being duplicated and do not lend themselves to easy analysis and evaluation by leaders.

The school's provision for personal, social and health education is developing. This, together with improvements in pupils' behaviour since the new principal's arrival, has resulted in fewer pupils being excluded for a fixed period of time.

Pupils enjoy attending Grindon Hall Christian School and told the inspectors that they feel safe and secure at school. Their understanding of the heinous nature of sexting has been enhanced through assemblies led by Northumbria Police.

The provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is much improved since the new SENCo took up post in March 2017. Parents and carers whose children have recently been admitted to the school cannot sing the SENCo's praises loudly enough. Their children are thriving. However, parents of pupils who have attended the school over a number of years are disappointed with the timeliness of the identification of their children's needs. Quite rightly, they believe that their children's needs have not been met well during their time at the school.

Leaders have provided staff training on the identification of and support for pupils who have autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and specific learning difficulties. In addition, staff have attended training to help them to provide effectively for pupils' mental health. The SENCo has ensured that all staff have a working knowledge of the government's SEN and disabilities code of practice: 0 to 25 years.

Despite the SENCo's efforts, staff are still not confident to review the support plans for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. On too many occasions, support plans are paper, but not working, documents. Pupils' targets are not sharply focused and are not reviewed with sufficient regularity by teachers. This shortcoming requires immediate attention. Inspectors noted the dearth of resources to help teachers meet the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. This too, requires immediate attention. Teachers should not have to borrow resources from their friends' schools.

Overall, pupils' attendance is above the national average year on year. However, the current attendance of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is well below the national average. A quarter of the pupils with SEN and/or disabilities currently have attendance of less than 90%. This is not acceptable. These pupils are missing too much school and are not making the progress of which they are capable.

Bright Tribe's recently appointed CEO acknowledges that the trust's knowledge of the attainment and progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is limited. The CEO is also disappointed that shortcomings in the provision for pupils with SEN and/or disabilities were brought to the trust's attention by Ofsted and not through their own quality assurance procedures. The CEO understands that a rapid response is required to ensure that the needs of all pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are met well. During the inspection, the CEO committed to brokering immediate support for the SENCo and ensuring the necessary resources are provided.

External support

A recent and successful emergency school improvement fund bid to the Department of Education has resulted in a consultant primary headteacher working in the school for one term from 23 April 2018. This very recent appointment has already led to a redistribution of duties. For example, the vice-principal, who is the designated safeguarding leader and a secondary specialist, no longer oversees the early years and key stages 1 and 2. After only one week in school, the consultant primary headteacher has already evaluated the provision and identified priorities for urgent development.

Priorities for further improvement

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the systems and procedures to record and report safeguarding concerns and incidents are streamlined, to avoid duplication
- all staff review SEN support plans with pupils and parents appropriately and at least termly
- Bright Tribe multi-academy trust brokers immediate support for the SENCo and ensures that the school has sufficient resources to deliver high-quality provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities
- pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities attend school more regularly.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the CEO of Bright Tribe multi-academy trust, the chair of the AMC, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sunderland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Belita Scott

Her Majesty's Inspector