

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



7 June 2018

Mr Tim Bennett
Headteacher
Windlestone School
Chilton
Ferryhill
County Durham
DL17 0HP

Dear Mr Bennett

No formal designation inspection of Windlestone School

Following my visit with Berni Moorcroft, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 06 June 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, aspects of the effectiveness of leadership and management in the school, and the behaviour and welfare of pupils.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. They met with the headteacher, a group of pupils, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. A brief conversation was also held with a parent.

Further evidence was gathered through scrutiny of reports from the local authority safeguarding lead and the school's education development partner (EDP). Documents including pupils' attendance records and online records kept by the school on pupils' behaviour and safeguarding were also scrutinised.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Currently the school has 70 pupils on roll, all of whom are White British and speak English as their first language. The school provides for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. A much higher than average proportion of disadvantaged pupils or children looked after attend the school. The school runs an extended school day: it is open to pupils four days per week until 7.30pm. School also runs a residential provision for up to 20 pupils.

The local authority commissions the school to run the Personalised Alternative Curriculum Centre (PACC). The centre is based in Durham approximately eight miles from the main school.

Since the previous inspection a new assistant headteacher has been appointed. A further senior leader has been appointed to manage the Durham PAC centre. The governing body has also undergone significant change. Twelve governors are now in post, broadening and strengthening the levels of expertise within the governing body.

Inspection findings

Since the last inspection the leadership team has made progress towards improving pupils' behaviour overall. The number of pupils excluded from school has dropped by more than 50%. Records show the frequency of physical restraint has also dropped significantly. At the time of the inspection the atmosphere within the school was calm. Pupils, overall, demonstrated positive attitudes to learning. However, while most pupils behaved well in the corridors and at lunch time, there were a small number of incidents of difficult behaviour observed during the inspection. Staff dealt with them effectively and ensured learning continued uninterrupted.

The school's leadership team revised the behaviour management policy at the start of the year. Leaders are aware that the policy is not always applied consistently and are clear that this is an area for improvement. Staff spoken to also voiced their frustrations at these inconsistencies. Staff and leaders understand the needs of pupils well and are often able to diffuse potentially difficult situations. Pupils spoken to appreciate their strong relationships with staff and the support they receive. This, several commented, had helped them to 'sort out my head' and 'deal with my anger issues' and had improved their behaviour over time. Incidents of difficult behaviour are carefully logged in both the school's bound book and electronically. Currently, analysis of these incidents is not as precise and thorough as it should be due to the long term absence of key leaders in this area.

Since the previous inspection, pupils' attendance has dipped despite a wide range of new approaches put in place to bring about improvement. Overall attendance at the school is similar to that of other special schools. However, the inclusion of pupils

who attend the PAC centre reduces attendance overall. As many pupils at the centre remain registered with their mainstream secondary school, it is not always within the remit of leaders to improve the attendance of this group. However, leaders are aware that they need to take a more strategic approach to improving pupils' attendance at a faster pace.

Safeguarding policies and procedures within the school are effective. The safeguarding officer is experienced and knowledgeable and understands the needs of the local community well. Her tenacious approach to solving problems ensures pupils and their families are well supported. Documentation in child protection files is effectively logged in chronological order and is stored securely. The safeguarding officer regularly attends multi-agency meetings and works closely with a range of external partners including the police and social care first contact service. As a result helpful information is shared between services, increasing the safety of and support for vulnerable pupils.

Staff spoken to during the inspection have a clear understanding of what to do should a safeguarding incident occur. Regular updates from the safeguarding officer, as well as annual training, ensure staff are kept well informed about current safeguarding policies and practice.

Pupils say they feel safe and well cared for in school. Those spoken to were clear about how to keep safe, for example when using the internet. They praised the way school leaders and staff help them to make the right decisions in times of crisis. However, a small number continue to undertake risky behaviour. Some still smoke despite the school's change in policy and the availability of medical help. Leaders are aware of this and continue to work on a resolution.

The recent appointment of new senior leaders has helped strengthen the leadership team. However, leaders are aware that they need to take a more strategic and unified approach to accelerating improvement across the school.

The governing body and senior leaders have a clear understanding of their responsibilities to ensure staff recruitment is undertaken safely. As a result, all required recruitment checks are carried out when new staff are appointed. The school business manager ensures the single central register is regularly updated. The safeguarding governor also carries out independent safeguarding checks and reports back to the governing body on a regular basis.

External support

The local authority is currently offering support and guidance to the school's leadership team. A school safeguarding partner visits regularly and at times makes unannounced visits to the school. During these visits she monitors a variety of different areas of safeguarding, particularly the school's use of physical restraint. The visits she makes are welcomed by senior leaders, who feel these help to ensure

safeguarding practices remain secure.

Since the school was graded as requiring improvement at its last Ofsted inspection, the local authority EDP visits regularly. The EDP has recently commissioned a review of leadership and management, teaching and learning and safeguarding by an external partner. Helpfully, the EDP is also working closely with the leadership team in order to develop a more strategic approach to school improvement.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to develop a more cohesive and strategic leadership team in order to bring about sustainable improvement at a faster pace.
- Develop effective strategies to increase pupils' attendance.
- Ensure that the behaviour management strategy is consistently applied across 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 Durham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Marian Thomas

Her Majesty's Inspector