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David Pearce
Headteacher
Brandles School
Weston Way
Baldock
Hertfordshire
SG7 6EY

Dear Mr Pearce

No formal designation inspection of Brandles School

Following my visit to your school on 11 September 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

I scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. I met with you, your leadership team, staff, pupils, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and a local school headteacher. I also spoke to a representative of the local authority by telephone.

I looked at a range of documentation provided by leaders, including your records linked to attendance and behaviour. I visited lessons to observe pupils' behaviour, and observed their conduct on arrival, and during lunchtime.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Brandles is a secondary school that caters specifically for boys with social, emotional and mental health needs. There are 46 pupils currently on roll, all of whom have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, and all have an education, health and care plan. Most pupils enter with a history of disrupted education, poor attendance and low attainment. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding is above the national average. At the time of the inspection, five pupils were on part-time timetables, but three of these are due to move to full-time timetables in the next two weeks. The headteacher, who started at the school in October 2016, conveyed some of the difficulties the school has experienced in recruiting and retaining staff. When the school was last inspected in February 2018, it was judged to be inadequate, and safeguarding found to be ineffective. Since then, there have been significant changes to the local governing body.

Leaders, governors and staff can talk confidently about their safeguarding responsibilities and what they do to keep pupils safe. The new designated safeguarding leader has overseen the introduction of a new online system for recording concerns. Staff have received training on this system, alongside additional child protection training, since the last inspection. The single central record is generally well maintained, showing that statutory safeguarding checks on adults working at the school are undertaken and recorded. I noticed a couple of administrative errors that you rectified before the end of the inspection. You review your safeguarding processes regularly with staff, the designated safeguarding leader and governors, and have commissioned external safeguarding audits to provide you with impartial feedback on the effectiveness of your new systems.

During the visit, I looked at your new system for recording safeguarding concerns. I sampled some safeguarding case files to see how you are using this information to help keep pupils safe. Your processes are rigorous, and the new online system shows that staff increasingly display safeguarding curiosity that mitigates risks to pupils' safety. Your safeguarding files are detailed and comprehensive. Staff actions are thorough, and you can show that you now prompt other agencies when you feel their responses are not swift enough. Your improved processes allow you to collate information and make referrals efficiently so that you can protect the school's most vulnerable pupils more effectively. These actions to safeguard pupils are carried out without delay, and records detail any subsequent checks that staff make on pupils' welfare.

The processes for checking on pupils who are absent are systematic and thorough. First day calling, emails and home visits inform you of where pupils are and that they are safe. You have reviewed how you deal with pupils who go missing from education, and your records show that referrals are made in line with statutory guidance. Long-term absentees receive a phone call every two days, with a home visit to check on their welfare every ninth day. You are using part-time timetables far less than previously, and more pupils now receive full-time education. You have

formed stronger partnerships with other agencies, especially the police and the counter terrorism unit, allowing you to collate information from different sources to enhance the overall picture regarding pupils' safety.

Your new pastoral system focuses on rewarding pupils who behave well. Pupils are keen to do well because they enjoy these rewards. One Year 7 pupil told me that he 'loved coming to school', and that his record so far was 27 positive behaviour points in a day. Alongside this, you have reviewed your curriculum so that pupils study a more appropriate range of subjects that equip them better for the future. Pupils say that behaviour has improved in most classes and that they can see the difference that the new systems have made. This was exemplified wonderfully by one pupil when he told another pupil that he needed to think about how he should behave as this will affect his chances of getting a job later in life. Your records substantiate these findings; there has been a significant reduction in the number of negative behaviour incidents, restricted physical interventions and fixed-term exclusions. However, you acknowledge that this is a work in progress as there are still inconsistencies in how some staff apply the behaviour management policy.

In lessons where practice is most effective, pupils are settled, listening to their teachers, concentrating on what they are doing and working hard. This was particularly evident in art, science and physical education. In these lessons, pupils tackle difficult concepts, like studying pathogens, and behave well. Where practice is less effective, pupils do not behave as well or work as hard as they could. Pupils' attitudes do not jeopardise other pupils' safety, but they can disrupt the learning of others because staff in these lessons do not challenge behaviour well enough.

Inspection evidence shows that there has been a decrease in the number of reported incidents of bullying. Pupils confirmed that they feel that staff are more adept at dealing with issues quickly and effectively when bullying does occur. Although incidents have reduced, you acknowledge that there is still more work to do on peer relationships. Some pupils are still not very tolerant or respectful of each other, and there were nine incidents of racist bullying last term. Your proposed anti-bullying and racism contract should ensure that pupils are fully aware of what is expected of them. You hope that the accompanying three-strike rule will further reduce the number of reported incidents of bullying over time.

You know the importance of improving pupils' attendance. Part of your strategy involves ensuring that the curriculum meets pupils' needs better and subsequently improving pupils' behaviour. You explained that some of the contextual issues you face linked to transport, pupils' circumstances changing and pupils arriving at the school with longstanding histories of poor attendance. Form tutors now play an increasingly important role in chasing up attendance issues, and your new behaviour system rewards good attendance. However, overall attendance is still well below the national average and persistent absence is too high. You say that attendance is not where you want it to be and are very much aware that this needs to be an area for continued focus. You realise that you need to look more closely at

your school information so that you can spot the reasons behind any dips in attendance in order to help you to secure sustained improvements in the future.

There have been changes to the governing body. There is a new chair and acting vice-chair. All governors are now linked to areas of the school's provision, are well informed and bring a range of valuable experience and essential skills to their roles. Governors are fully involved in the new safeguarding processes and check regularly to ensure that incidents are dealt with quickly and appropriately. Safeguarding is now a standing item on the agenda for all full governing body meetings. Regular reports, which governors question at length, enable them to accurately track improvements over time. Governors and leaders have acted effectively in response to the concerns raised in the previous inspection report. Your records show that there are 'green shoots' in terms of improving trends in behaviour and attendance, and the increased effectiveness of safeguarding processes means that your vulnerable pupils have the proper support in place to keep them safe.

External support

The school has benefited from the support of school improvement advisers provided by the local authority and leaders of a local primary special school. Both have provided valuable support to staff and worked closely with the school to help secure improvements.

Priorities for further improvement

- Use the information gained from regular monitoring to analyse the reasons behind any dips in attendance or fluctuations in pupils' behaviour to ensure continued improvements in both areas, and to illustrate the impact of leaders' actions in securing improvements.

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

Yours sincerely

John Randall
Her Majesty's Inspector