

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



4 October 2018

Mr Anthony Dickens  
Interim Headteacher  
The Bridge School  
Sprites Lane  
Ipswich  
Suffolk  
IP8 3ND

Dear Mr Dickens

### **No formal designation inspection of The Bridge School**

Following my visit to your school on 12 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 of employment checks for staff and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. I met with you, the school's designated leader for child protection and other interim senior leaders. I held a meeting with the chair of the interim executive board (IEB) and two other members, a representative of the local authority, parents, a support worker and community nursing staff. I spoke informally with pupils.

I scrutinised a range of documentation provided by you and other leaders about behaviour and attendance, and the actions taken to maintain pupils' behaviour and welfare. I reviewed the IEB minutes and the local authority's action plan. I toured the primary and secondary school sites with your interim deputy headteacher and spoke informally to pupils when I visited the playground. I observed pupils' conduct during break and as they departed at the end of the school day.

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

safeguarding is not effective.

## **Context**

The Bridge School is much smaller than average. It serves the town of Ipswich and its surrounding areas. The school provides full-time education to pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Most pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties or a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Most pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are known to be eligible for additional funding is above the national average. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language are lower than average. No pupils attend alternative provision.

When the school was last inspected in March 2018, it was judged to be inadequate, and safeguarding was found to be ineffective.

A recruitment process is under way to appoint a permanent headteacher. Six new middle leaders have been appointed.

## **Inspection findings**

Following the previous inspection, the local authority commissioned an external review of the school's safeguarding arrangements in July 2018. The purpose of this was to test that all statutory requirements were in place. My inspection evidence supports the findings of this review that safeguarding arrangements remain ineffective.

You and your team of interim leaders have an accurate understanding of the weaknesses in safeguarding pupils and what needs to change in order to make the required improvements. Leaders have a clear grasp of their duties and responsibilities. You have gained the support of the majority of staff, who are keen to improve the school's provision. You have raised the profile of safeguarding matters in the school.

The school's culture and ethos in keeping pupils safe is improving. All adults visiting the school are suitably checked and briefed about their responsibilities with regard to safeguarding. However, while much hard work has been undertaken to make significant improvements in the areas of safeguarding, you recognise that systems and processes are not yet fully established.

You have ensured that an accurate, up-to-date list of names and relevant details of those employed by the school is maintained. Appropriate steps have been taken to ensure that suitable checks are made when recruiting staff. The interim member of

staff responsible for this aspect of work is well informed and vigilant. A lot of hard work has taken place to rectify previous weaknesses in the recording of information. However, in the files of staff appointed prior to the interim leadership, gaps in records remain. As a result, the single central record remains ineffective in providing a complete picture of staff's suitability to work with children.

The school's safeguarding policy is not compliant with current requirements. It is presently being updated. Staff have not received safeguarding training on the most recent guidance from the Department for Education. Face-to-face training is planned for later this term. Staff have recently received long-overdue training on a range of topics that will help strengthen safeguarding procedures. You have not yet ensured that there are regular checks on the impact of this training, and that staff who need it receive the additional guidance they need to embed this practice.

Your designated leader for safeguarding has worked hard to develop a systematic approach to child protection procedures and practices. Revised safeguarding arrangements ensure that information is recorded systematically, and referrals are carried out in a timely way. Newly introduced systems for recording safeguarding incidents have increased the accountability of staff. Actions are followed up. Procedures for raising concerns about child protection are improving but are not yet firmly established across the school. Concerns and incidents, and the subsequent actions taken by leaders, are recorded chronologically, but a few gaps in files remain. Risk assessments are too generic and lack sufficient detail about the needs of pupils. You have improved how you work with other stakeholders around children who are missing from education. Pupils are well monitored and supported.

Pupils' understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives, including how to keep safe when using mobile phones, social media and the internet, is variable because of the school's inconsistent approach to promoting these aspects of pupils' development. Pupils in all year groups do not access a broad range of information to stay safe. To improve this, you plan to implement a revised curriculum that teaches pupils about how to keep themselves safe in a way that is appropriate to their needs and development. Pupils' EHC plans are not always specific enough to allow pupils to make effective progress in lessons.

You and your team have revised the school's approach to managing pupils' behaviour. Staff appreciate the helpful training provided on behaviour management. New procedures have been introduced through recent staff training but these are not yet embedded across the school. You do not have a robust system in place for analysing the types, rates and patterns of behaviour across the school. As a result, you are not able to identify easily if the current system is leading to improvements in pupils' behaviour over time. You recognise that further work is needed to allow your leaders and the IEB to fully evaluate the impact of these new procedures.

Attendance is below average. The safeguarding of some of the school's most vulnerable pupils cannot always be guaranteed because they are persistently

absent. You acknowledge that further work is required to ensure that all pupils attend school regularly. You have raised the school's expectations this year to get more pupils back into school. You contact parents quickly if their children do not arrive at school and collate up-to-date attendance information, which you analyse closely. Information about any prolonged absence is now passed to the local authority.

Arrangements to welcome pupils into school and to aid their departure from school are systematic and safe. Pupils are kept safe on site. Gates are locked and access to the main doors is controlled by staff. The primary school is in a safe and secure building. Plans are in place to redevelop the secondary school site, which is outdated. During the inspection, no low-level disruption was observed. I found the atmosphere around both school sites to be calm and pupils interacted well with their peers and staff. At breaktimes, pupils are appropriately supervised and behave very politely and respectfully to their peers and adults. Pupils cooperate and join in with each other's games. On the primary site, pupils enjoy vibrant playground facilities appropriate to their age, which promotes a friendly and sociable atmosphere.

The IEB ensures that it checks the work of the school regularly and holds leaders to account. The IEB has monitored your planned actions to improve the school's safeguarding arrangements and child protection processes. It shows a strong determination to iron out inconsistencies. The IEB recognises that it is not placing sufficient emphasis on seeking the views of pupils about safeguarding.

### **External support**

The communication between the local authority and the school has improved. You have drawn on effective support from the local authority to improve your safeguarding arrangements. The local authority accountability improvement board is helping to drive improvement and hold all parties to account. This support has been helpful in making the necessary improvements.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Leaders, including the IEB, must ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fully secure and effective, including the single central record of employment checks.
- Ensure that all staff use the revised procedures for raising concerns about child protection consistently.
- Ensure that the new procedures for managing behaviour and promoting attendance are monitored closely in order to check the impact they are having and to take appropriate action.
- Accelerate the work to improve the quality of EHC plans for individual pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**