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Mr K Bates
Headteacher
Eaton Hall Specialist Academy
Pettus Road
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Dear Mr Bates

No formal designation inspection of Eaton Hall Specialist Academy

Following my visit with Jenny Carpenter, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 25–26 June 2019, 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 of pupils at the school.

This inspection was unannounced and conducted as a result of a complaint to Ofsted. In accordance with Ofsted's procedures, the school was not given details of the complaint but was notified in writing (June 2019) of the issues raised. The complaint raised concerns about whether pupils' behaviour was well managed, including the appropriate use of restraint, and the effectiveness of the leadership team in relation to safeguarding the welfare of pupils and staff.

Evidence

Inspectors checked the single central record of employment checks and met with the designated safeguarding lead to scrutinise other documents relating to the safeguarding of pupils and child protection arrangements. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the assistant heads of the primary and secondary phases, the head of care, a group of teaching staff, a group of teaching assistants, two groups of pupils, and the chair of the governing body, who is also the chair of trustees. Inspectors visited all classes to see pupils in lessons and to talk to them about their experiences. We also spoke to parents, both in person and on the telephone. Further telephone calls were made to representatives from the Norfolk local authority and the alternative provision used by pupils at the school.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

There are 54 pupils on roll. All pupils are boys and are currently aged between 8 and 16 years, and all have an education, health and care plan (EHCP). Most pupils are White British. The school's proportion of disadvantaged pupils is significantly above average. The school caters for a wide range of boys with complex social, emotional and mental health needs. Staff work closely with clinicians, educational psychologists, therapists and EHCP coordinators to make sure that the provision addresses pupils' underlying issues. The school was judged as outstanding when most recently inspected in March 2018. It is part of the Rightforsuccess Academy Trust.

Leaders give safeguarding a very high profile to make sure that staff can respond appropriately to meet pupils' high level and complex needs. All pre-employment checks are carried out on staff, records are well organised and continually reviewed and updated. Staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities and highlight any concerns they have so that pupils, many of whom are vulnerable, are protected. The large and highly-trained team of designated safeguarding staff monitor safeguarding practice in the school closely and effectively. Pupils say that they feel safe and have a person that they can talk to if they are worried. Records of reports, interventions and work with stakeholders are thorough. The designated safeguarding leader's regular reports keep the governing body well informed.

The local authority acknowledge that they place pupils with the most significant and complex needs at the school. This is because of your strong track record of very few placement breakdowns and a high proportion of successful outcomes. However, as a result, you acknowledge that this has been a particularly challenging year. You talk openly about the small group of boys who have presented extremely challenging behaviours, including extended outbursts, physical aggression and high levels of defiance. This has led to a rise in behavioural incidents, including the use of restraint, and an increase in the number of internal and fixed-term exclusions in the autumn and spring terms.

Your personalised approach to behaviour depends on pupils' circumstances and needs. Staff employ a wide repertoire of effective behaviour management strategies. These focus on establishing boundaries through positive reinforcement, building productive relationships and securing pupils' trust. Inspectors noted during the inspection that pupils' behaviour is dealt with calmly and efficiently so that any disruption to learning is kept to a minimum. Staff use their training on de-escalation techniques effectively so that the use of restraint is used only in the most extreme cases. Records show that most pupils never require restraint. Pupils universally feel that the use of restraint is justified. As one pupil said, 'When we up the ante and

become aggressive, staff take hold.' Your analysis unequivocally shows that the incidences of restraint greatly reduce over time. Internal exclusions are higher than previously, owing to the change in dynamics caused by a different intake. You find that internal exclusions are successful in helping pupils to modify their behaviour patterns as they form part of the reparation process. Encouragingly, pupils with complex needs are now able to regulate their challenging behaviours better, stay in class more often and learn more successfully.

Your daily tracking and analysis of behaviour is systematic, precise and comprehensive. Leaders and governors monitor the use of behaviour management, including restraint, internal exclusions and fixed-term exclusions, very closely. You know that a small number of pupils, often those experiencing challenges in their personal circumstances, account for most interventions. These boys, many of whom arrive with a history of physical aggression, are experiencing new routines and are pushing the boundaries against a higher level of academic expectation. This explains why about 80% of restraints occur in the primary phase. However, you are continually looking at ways to shift the balance towards de-escalation still further through additional staff training and pupils' harm reduction plans. These plans are based on their social, emotional and academic needs. We discussed whether the increase in the complexity of pupils' presented behaviours has led to any curriculum adjustments. You confirm that this is a work in progress, especially as this group of pupils often start at the school with particularly weak literacy skills.

Parents spoken to during the inspection say that they support the school and its strategies to manage behaviour. They say that communication from staff is excellent and that they understand the purpose and reasons behind any actions taken. One parent, talking about his child, said: 'When he came here, his behaviour was awful. He swore, spat, kicked, and pulled lanyards off staff. He missed out on activities after school because of his behaviour. He does not have any restraints any more as he knows that one restraint means he misses activities. His behaviour at school is now perfect and his education is improving rapidly.' All parents spoken to believe that the school's behaviour strategies are proportionate and are bringing about improvements in behaviour and learning for their children. They feel that the judicious use of sanctions certainly helps pupils to learn that their actions have consequences and parents see corresponding improvements in home life.

Staff in the school feel well supported, well trained and well equipped with the skills to do a difficult job well. They are very motivated to work in this type of learning environment because they believe that they can make a difference to the lives of the pupils. A strength of the school's provision is the holistic approach that school leaders take to meeting the emotional and learning needs of the pupils. As a result, support and intervention programmes are tailored to the needs of individual pupils.

Most pupils behave very well and are keen to learn. When issues do occur, staff try to return pupils to learning as quickly, calmly and considerately as possible. Some do struggle at times, but as they become more familiar with the setting and learn

what staff expect of them, they appreciate the support available to them. Inspectors found that behavioural interventions, including restraint, are used proportionately and only when in the best interests of the pupil. As a result, pupils' academic progress increases, and the number of interventions required, including restraint, drops significantly over time.

External support

The school works closely with the local authority but does not have any external partners.

Priorities for further improvement

- Leaders should tailor their curriculum to meet pupils' needs more precisely, particularly those with weak literacy skills.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Randall
Her Majesty's Inspector