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16 July 2019

Vicky Neale
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Neale

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Bury St Edmunds County Upper School

Following my visit to your school on 3 July 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in January 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, which focused solely on safeguarding, meetings were held with you and your two deputy headteachers, three members of the local governing body including the chair, and three members of the board of trustees including the vice- chair and chair. We also met with middle leaders with responsibility for safeguarding, two groups of pupils and the parents of a pupil who requested to meet with us. I met with three senior officers from the local authority. I held a telephone conversation with the superintendent of Bury St Edmunds police. The school's statement of action and action plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the number of pupils on roll and staffing have remained largely unchanged. Two new governors have joined the local governing body. In April 2019, trustees received a Minded to Terminate letter from the Regional Schools Commissioner informing them of the need for rapid and sustained improvement on the concerns raised in the previous Ofsted inspection.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The local authority, police and the Suffolk safeguarding children's board are not fully confident with the actions taken so far by you and other leaders to resolve the weaknesses in the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils. The stance taken by you, governors and trustees in doubting the findings of the previous inspection, rather than accepting them, has slowed the school's improvement. Safeguarding is still not as effective as all other aspects of the school's work. This is because leaders have focused too much time on challenging the outcomes of the inspection. They have been preoccupied with commissioning their own reviews of safeguarding and the school site, thereby delaying urgent, essential improvement work in strengthening procedures to safeguard pupils.

Plans to resolve the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection have been implemented only recently. The initial statement of action was judged to be not fit for purpose. Current plans are suitably prioritised but do not include sufficient detail of the impact of the actions taken by you and other leaders to improve safeguarding. These plans are not being used well enough to monitor and evaluate the rate of improvement being made.

A recent external review of governance acknowledges the effective work of the local governing body. The review recommends that the trust board also monitors the actions for improvement listed in the schools plans for improving safeguarding. A review of the trust board has also taken place recently. The findings will be published shortly.

You have taken decisive action to improve pupils' safety on site. There is new fencing at the front of the school. Further fencing planned for installation later this term will secure the wider perimeter. Even so, some parts of the school are supervised well enough. Staff are not fully vigilant about ensuring that doors to learning areas are closed during lessons and breaktimes.

Systems and procedures for safeguarding pupils have also improved. Electronic registration, implemented this term, provides leaders with a clearer overview of pupils' daily attendance. The introduction of electronic procedures to log all information about pupils' safety, behaviour and welfare is under way and should be firmly in place at the start of next term. This will enable your leaders of safeguarding to record information systematically, make routine checks and share important information with external partners to keep pupils safe.

Improvements have been made to raising pupils' awareness about knife crime, gangs and the dangers of substance misuse. Since the last inspection a theatre company has been welcomed into school to inform pupils and governors of the risks attached to county lines (child criminal exploitation). A follow-up meeting for parents about this is planned for later this term. Additional training has taken place for staff and governors to keep them informed. A new governor with previous

experience of overseeing safeguarding has been appointed to strengthen the work of the local governing body.

Your team of leaders responsible for safeguarding work together to manage the school's safeguarding arrangements. Not all of them demonstrate a full understanding of the school's processes and procedures, or the recent actions taken to protect vulnerable pupils. They do understand that all referrals must go through the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). This procedure is followed but the quality of the information recorded in these referrals varies widely. At times there is insufficient information in some of these referrals to inform fully the response taken by the MASH.

You have surveyed staff to check that they all understand the procedures to follow if they need to raise a concern about pupils' safety and welfare. 'Yellow forms' are collated and reviewed appropriately by safeguarding leaders. However, not all of the information on these forms is completed fully. There are gaps where information should be recorded to show what actions leaders have taken. In some instances, the transfer of information from these forms to a central record is not carried out systematically, so some important information is missing. Currently, this procedure is not sufficiently robust to ensure that all concerns raised are logged effectively and acted upon.

The management of safeguarding is improving but at this stage not all procedures are carried out consistently and systematically. Evidence shows that recently, staff have not always responded promptly when a serious concern is raised. Leaders responsible for safeguarding now acknowledge that if they are unclear or are in doubt, they need to get procedures under way immediately. Leaders are not always sufficiently curious when a new concern is raised or when they consider that no further action is necessary. They do not record in detail the actions taken within school by safeguarding leaders and pastoral staff to show that the school is doing everything possible to protect pupils. Furthermore, not all of the actions taken in school to safeguard pupils are shared with external partners to ensure that those providing early help have a full picture of the work being done with the most vulnerable pupils and their families.

Your leaders maintain detailed records of pupils who leave or join the school midway through the year, and of those who are educated at home. However, leaders are not sufficiently rigorous in ensuring that once these arrangements are made, checks are carried out to test that the arrangements are suitable and are working.

Leaders are not fully aware of concerns raised by the local authority about individual pupils. This is partly because information held by the local authority is not shared well enough with you, but also because school leaders do not liaise regularly with them and other support agencies. Recent action to restore collaborative working with the local authority has not worked and relations have broken down.

Information about vulnerable pupils and the actions taken to protect them are not shared well enough by both parties. You, governors and trustees and the local authority acknowledge that this issue must be resolved promptly to enable you to secure fully effective safeguarding arrangements that adhere to, without exception, the Department for Education's legal requirements.

Staff who shared their views with inspectors praised the recent improvements made, including new perimeter fencing and identity lanyards for staff and sixth-form students. They feel that pupils are now safer than they were but also that there is more to do. They were keen to tell inspectors that, in their view, pupils get a great quality of education and that they have no day-to-day concerns about safeguarding.

Pupils are also positive about the recent improvements. They commented favourably on the new fencing, more surveillance cameras and posters displayed around school to remind them about which staff to approach if they have concerns. They told inspectors that they feel secure. They are familiar with the arrangements for signing out when leaving the premises and feel that these procedures are robustly applied.

Several parents corresponded with inspectors on the day of inspection. All of them were very positive about their children's safety and the quality of education provided for them. However, not all parents are entirely confident in the school's procedures to keep their children safe.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's action plan is not fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body, the chair of the board of trustees of the academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector