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Ms Katrina Warren
The Pinetree School
Staniforth Road
Thetford
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IP24 3LH

Dear Ms Warren

No formal designation inspection of The Pinetree School

Following my visit on 12 February 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This 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 wished to determine the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the school as concerns had been raised with Ofsted about the effectiveness of leadership and management in the school.

Evidence

I scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. I held meetings with the headteacher and the assistant headteacher. I met with the headteacher, assistant headteacher, the director of school improvement, the governor/trustee, the assistant base leader, school staff and the leader for behaviour management. I also met with a group of pupils and staff and spoke with pupils throughout the day about their learning and behaviour. I also spoke on the telephone with the chief executive officer of Unity Education Trust and a representative from the local authority.

I scrutinised behaviour logs, serious incident forms, exclusion logs, headteacher's reports, local authority audits, parent surveys and attendance records. I observed pupils at the start of the day, at break and in lessons throughout the day.

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

safeguarding is effective.

Context

Since the previous inspection the school has become part of Unity Education Trust. The number of pupils on roll has increased significantly over the last six months. Pupils arrive at the school with a wide range of social, emotional and mental health needs. A high proportion have education, health and care plans. Some pupils display behaviour that is extremely challenging. Concerns were raised about the effectiveness of leaders' ability to provide support for some of the pupils at the school. This in turn raised concerns about arrangements for safeguarding pupils.

At the beginning of the day I observed pupils relaxing, playing badminton and talking with their friends. At breakfast pupils sat calmly with their peers and staff. In most lessons pupils engage and enjoy their learning. On inspection I observed pupils involved positively in cooking activities, physical education, design and technology, mathematics, science and English. Most pupils in these lessons were polite and respectful and some shared their learning. I also saw pupils struggling to manage their behaviour. Trained staff effectively supported these pupils so that some pupils were able to return to lessons and continue their learning. Those who could not were kept safe. Spaces to enable pupils to reflect on their behaviour, such as the 'willow' room, are not used effectively.

You and your assistant headteacher have made great strides in addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection, in terms of pupils' behaviour. You have ensured that staff training is a priority. The trust is providing specific training to help staff manage pupils' behaviour successfully. Every week staff work with a specialist teacher to learn how different strategies can help pupils readily access their learning. Staff highly value this training. They say that this is helping them to manage pupils' behaviour with increasing confidence. The introduction of the pupil 'credit card' to track pupils' poor and positive behaviour throughout the day is having a positive impact on pupils' motivation and learning. Pupils say that they enjoy the rewards, but they say that they also recognise that there are consequences for the negative choices they make.

Since the beginning of the school year fixed-term exclusions have reduced and attendance for most pupils has improved. More pupils are now on a full timetable and all those who are on modified timetables have increased their hours since September. You have improved your processes for recording and collating information regarding significant incidents. This has made it easier to track behaviour and provide the correct timely support for pupils.

You and your leaders are not always able to precisely measure the impact of the actions you take to improve both pupils' attendance and behaviour. You are currently developing a pupil tracking system so that leaders can check more accurately meaningful trends in pupils' behaviour and attendance. This is in its early stages.

Processes for keeping pupils safe are thorough. Attendance is followed up meticulously. All checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children are complete. There are clear expectations for the behaviour of pupils and sanctions are applied appropriately.

You and your staff are highly committed to keeping pupils safe in school. Pupils are supervised by adults at all times. Excluding pupils is a last resort. Any decision to exclude a pupil is in line with strict policy and practice.

There are positive relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils say they have seen improvements over time in the way adults deal with challenging behaviour from some pupils. They say they feel safe and that they can speak to any adult if they are worried. They say that teachers help them with their learning and plan interesting activities because they understand well how they learn best.

External support

You have asked for and received support from the local authority. The local authority has carried out an attendance and safeguarding audit and proposed recommendations. This has included advice about the recording of attendance and of serious incidences. You and your leaders have successfully addressed these areas. You and the trust are also working with national leaders of education and other schools to share best practice. The trust has commissioned an improvement board that is effectively supporting leaders until they secure a full governing body.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that leaders have effective systems in place that help them analyse the impact of their work more precisely so that they can improve pupils' behaviour and attendance further.
- Ensure that there are clear policies in place that set out to staff and pupils when and how pupils use spaces outside of the classroom, such as the 'willow' room, for reflection.
- Ensure that leaders develop and apply policies and practices that support all pupils to attend school full time.

I am copying this letter to 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

Cindy Impey
Her Majesty's Inspector