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Neil Birch
Executive Headteacher
The Beacon Folkestone
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Dear Mr Birch

No formal designation inspection of The Beacon Folkestone

Following my visit with Catherine Old, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 11 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. The inspection was conducted with 15 minutes' notice to the school.

Evidence

We scrutinised the single central record (SCR) and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We held discussions with the executive headteacher, headteacher and other senior leaders including the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). We talked informally to pupils around the school and more formally to the student council as a group. We met with staff in groups and individually. We met with the chair of the governing body and one of the safeguarding governors and spoke with the other safeguarding governor by telephone. We also spoke with the local authority representative who supports the school and to a small group of parents and carers at the end of the school day.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

The school opened in September 2016, amalgamating two predecessor schools to make one special school for 372 pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils are aged 3 to 19. They have profound, severe and complex needs (PSCN). The school works closely with other Kent special schools and the executive headteacher is the lead professional of the Kent Special Educational Needs Trust (KSENT). At the last section 5 inspection, in February 2019, the school was judged to be outstanding.

Inspectors were aware during this inspection of a serious incident involving a child who used to attend this school that had occurred since the previous inspection. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the incident were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.

Inspection findings

Leaders have created a warm, nurturing environment throughout the school. Pupils are happy and feel safe. They speak with enthusiasm about how staff listen to them. They like the way that staff take account of their views and needs. Parents are also very positive about the school. They told us of the difference that staff make for them and their children. However, this comfortable, supportive environment is not a complacent one. Staff share leaders' ambitions for pupils. The whole school team work with determination to achieve the best for all.

Staff build strong relationships with pupils. Leaders ensure that staff know and understand pupils' needs and have the required specialist training. This work starts before pupils join the school. For example, staff visit pupils in their homes or previous schools and nurseries, and they attend meetings with external agencies and families.

Staff support pupils to achieve for themselves. They help pupils to develop independence and not be overly reliant on adults. Pupils rise to the challenges staff give them. Pupils are, rightly, proud of their achievements.

Staff teach pupils to identify potential risks so that they can keep themselves safe. For example, pupils learn about healthy and unhealthy relationships and consent. When at home, many spend time online. Staff support pupils and their parents to manage this world as safely as possible.

Leaders have established a culture of safeguarding through the school but there are refinements that will sharpen their practice. Leaders ensure that training for staff is comprehensive and that no-one works with pupils until they have completed their safeguarding training. Staff repeat leaders' mantra that 'safeguarding is everyone's business'. They know what to look for and the actions to take. However, some are

less sure about official safeguarding terminology. Terms such as 'peer on peer abuse' are used in official publications such as 'Keeping children safe in education' (2019). While this does not undermine their safeguarding practice, it does suggest a lack of precision and attention to detail.

Staff say that safeguarding is their top priority. They use their detailed knowledge of pupils to recognise when something might be wrong. They make safeguarding referrals appropriately. They recognise that their slight 'niggle' about a pupil could be the missing part of the jigsaw that will allow leaders to work out the bigger picture. Staff report an open-door culture and say that they are always listened to by leaders and DSLs. They feel they are supported well with any worry. Case studies scrutinised during inspection indicate that staff follow safeguarding processes appropriately.

Worries about pupils are referred to a group of trained DSLs. This group includes a specialist multi-agency support team (MAST). Members of MAST bring a wide range of expertise to the school. They assess and help to create the 'jigsaw' about pupils. They believe that face-to-face communication promotes rapid responses and deep understanding of situations. The strength of this is seen in the team's knowledge of pupils and pupils' needs. However, the recording of their work is not consistent because they have multiple, complex systems with information held in different ways. The members of the team verbally demonstrate impressive knowledge of pupils and cases. They provide evidence quickly when challenged. However, this approach to administration potentially reduces the effectiveness of their work. It also makes it harder to identify trends over time.

Leaders have recently increased the number of DSLs. This was in response to the increasing complexity of safeguarding work with children in the early years. Many of these children attend external nurseries for most of each week. There are now two trained DSLs in the school's early years department. They both attend the weekly MAST meetings. It is too soon to assess the impact of this change.

School staff contact each external nursery weekly, either by telephone or by visiting. Staff aim to ensure effective collaborative working for the children in their care. Records of these meetings show that safeguarding is often discussed. Staff record any concerns, along with the response of each external provider. However, safeguarding is not routinely recorded as part of every conversation. The focus is on staff expertise; Beacon staff provide high-quality SEND support for the other providers. The lack of routine consideration of safeguarding is at odds with the school's view of safeguarding being their top priority.

Leaders ensure that referrals of concerns about pupils are made appropriately. The MAST team work hard to follow everything up swiftly. There is a culture of challenge and determination, especially in their work with external agencies. A sample of pupils' files show that they follow up referrals tenaciously. Leaders also make

appropriate referrals about any adult who might cause a concern. Case files indicate that they follow correct procedures and follow guidance carefully.

Governors are knowledgeable about the school and their governance duties. They hold leaders to account and challenge them well. They have undertaken appropriate training and regularly discuss safeguarding. The recent addition of a governor with current expertise in safeguarding has strengthened their scrutiny in this regard. However, governors are not rigorous enough in the management of these duties. They did not act with urgency when they spotted an administrative error on the SCR. They did not insist that this was corrected immediately. This minor administrative error was rectified during the inspection. When inspectors checked the SCR, all aspects, including those relating to employment and suitability checks for adults at the school, were completed and recorded according to requirements.

External support

The local authority advisor has no concerns about the culture of safeguarding at the school but has not been directly involved in scrutinising this aspect of leaders' work.

Leaders work closely with other Kent special schools and, prior to inspection, had commissioned a review of safeguarding from members of this group. It was due to take place shortly after our inspection.

Priorities for further improvement

- Review the systems for recording concerns about pupils and the work related to these concerns. Ensure consistency and clarity in record-keeping so that the potential for gaps is minimised and trends can be easily spotted.
- Ensure that communication with external providers, such as nurseries where children are jointly registered, includes routine consideration of safeguarding issues.
- Increase the rigour of administrative processes so there is precision and attention to detail at all times. Ensure that standard terminology is used and that required administration is completed immediately.

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

Yours sincerely

Lucy English
Her Majesty's Inspector