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Mr Jonathan Arnold
Interim Principal
S. Peter's Collegiate Church of England School
Compton Park
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Dear Mr Arnold

No formal designation inspection of S. Peter's Collegiate Church of England School

Following my visit with Chris Stevens, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 24 September 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 aspects of the effectiveness of leadership and management in the school (including governance).

We do not give graded judgements on no formal designation inspections. This visit has raised serious concerns about the effectiveness of the school's work to safeguard pupils and the oversight and scrutiny of governors. Under normal circumstances, we would have immediately treated this no formal designation inspection as a full section 5 inspection. However, due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, I am recommending that the next inspection of this school is a section 5 inspection and is brought forward, once routine inspection resumes. The school's current inspection judgement remains unchanged at this time.

Evidence

During the inspection, we scrutinised the single central register and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements and met with the interim principal, the designated safeguarding lead, three governors, the diocesan director of education, and three consultants and an executive headteacher who are currently supporting the school. Several meetings took place via video link.

We spoke with many members of staff and some pupils. We scrutinised several documents, including minutes of governing body meetings, risk assessments, training records and the school's scheme of delegation.

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

safeguarding arrangements are not effective.

Context

The interim principal joined the school on 1 September 2020. Prior to that date, an acting principal had been in post for 18 months.

There have been several changes to the governing body in recent months. Revised articles of association and scheme of delegation were agreed in February 2020. Twelve governors have left the board in the last 12 months and five have joined in that time. The chair of the governing body resigned on the day before the inspection. There are currently eight governors, five of whom are recent appointments. An external consultant is currently carrying out a review of governance.

Currently, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 70 pupils, from Years 8, 12 and 13, are working at home. Additionally, seven members of staff have been instructed to self-isolate and are therefore not in school.

Main Findings

There have, in recent months, been several serious lapses in the application of safeguarding procedures that could potentially have put pupils at risk. These lapses have coincided with a period of considerable turbulence in senior leadership and governance in the school.

Although safeguarding and child-protection policies have been, and continue to be, comprehensive and appropriate, they have not always been followed correctly by a small number of staff. For example, foreign visits have taken place without appropriate risk assessments having been completed. Concerns about the conduct of members of staff have not always been dealt with and reported to appropriate agencies in a timely manner.

Leaders are aware of these weaknesses and have sought to address them. However, we cannot be confident that safeguarding arrangements are effective in the school, given the seriousness of the lapses in safeguarding and the recentness of the remedial actions taken. Leaders have provided training for staff about off-site visits and reporting any concerns they have. Members of staff who we spoke with were clear about the importance of these procedures.

Additionally, during the inspection, we found omissions in the single central register. Staff rectified these omissions before the end of the inspection. This is a further example of leaders' lack of oversight.

As well as weaknesses, there are several positive aspects within the safeguarding arrangements in the school. Staff are alert to the signs that pupils might need extra support. They pass on concerns appropriately and have confidence in leaders to deal with them. There is an effective culture of caring for and supporting vulnerable pupils. This has been particularly evident over recent months, with the school providing help for vulnerable pupils who have been learning at home. The school has effective systems to ensure that pupils are safe when using the internet. Pupils who spoke with inspectors said they are happy and feel safe in school.

Governors have not ensured that safeguarding arrangements are effective. This is one of their statutory duties. They have provided insufficient scrutiny and oversight of safeguarding arrangements for some time and have failed to hold leaders to account. This lack of oversight has contributed to the serious lapses in safeguarding in the school.

Trust members have recognised weaknesses in governance and have made changes, with a view to strengthening the school's governance. The composition of the governing body was revised in February 2020. At this time, four governors resigned. Three additional governors were appointed in May 2020. This period of turbulence also contributed to a lack of proper oversight from governors of several areas of school life, including safeguarding.

The newly constituted governing body currently has eight members and one vacancy. Governors possess appropriate expertise and are committed to the school. They have completed a skills audit and are currently undergoing a comprehensive programme of training that includes understanding their strategic role and carrying out their statutory duties.

It is too soon to judge the effectiveness of the school's revised governance arrangements.

The interim principal took up his post at the start of this term, just three weeks ago. He and senior leaders are being supported by two external consultants and an executive headteacher. He and other leaders are clear about the weaknesses identified during this inspection. They are committed to addressing these

weaknesses and are taking appropriate action. However, it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of these actions and to be confident that there is a strong culture of safeguarding pupils throughout the school.

The new leadership of the school has begun to command the confidence of staff. The school's staff form a hard-working, united and committed team. They have supported each other through the turbulence the school has experienced in recent years. Morale is good.

Staff told us that they appreciate the interim principal's commitment to openness and transparency. They are optimistic about the school's future.

External support

The Diocese of Lichfield's director of education has brokered all external support. The school is currently supported by two external consultants, each for two days per week. A third consultant is carrying out a review of governance. The executive headteacher of The King's Church of England School, Kidsgrove, also provides leadership support.

It is too soon to evaluate the impact of much of the support being provided.

Priorities for further improvement

- There have been weaknesses in governance in the school for some time. Governors have failed to carry out their statutory duties, including ensuring that safeguarding arrangements are effective. The newly constituted governing body is currently undergoing a review and a programme of training. It is vital for the future success of the school that the governors:
 - carry out their statutory duties, including ensuring that safeguarding arrangements are effective
 - have in place appropriate mechanisms to assure themselves that school policies and procedures, including for safeguarding, are consistently adhered to
 - are clear about their strategic role
 - are appropriately trained and have sufficient expertise to carry out their duties.
- The school's written safeguarding policies and procedures are appropriate and fit for purpose. The great majority of staff understand and follow the school's policies correctly. However, there have been recent serious lapses that could have resulted in harm to pupils because a small number of staff failed to follow the correct procedures. Leaders should ensure that safeguarding procedures are consistently applied by all staff.

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

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector