

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Jo Trevenna
Northampton International Academy
Barrack Road
Northampton
Northamptonshire
NN1 1AA

Dear Dr Trevenna

No formal designation inspection of Northampton International Academy

Following my visit with Chris Davies, Deirdre Duignan and Peter Stonier, Her Majesty's Inspectors, to your school on 4 December 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 (2) 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.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. They reviewed other documents relating to staff recruitment. Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer and the lead academy improvement partner from the East Midlands Academy Trust. Inspectors met with many members of staff and with groups of pupils from the primary and secondary phases. They also spoke to a number of pupils informally around school. An inspector spoke with parents at the start of the school day.

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

Safeguarding is not effective.

Context

The headteacher joined the school in July 2020. The previous headteacher left the school in January 2020. Between January 2020 and July 2020 one of the current deputy headteachers was acting headteacher, supported by an executive headteacher from the trust. A second deputy headteacher took up her post in September 2020. At the time of the inspection, some staff from the safeguarding and pastoral team were absent from school due to non-Covid-19-related issues. Some staff and pupils were absent from school due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Main Findings

Leaders and those responsible for governance have not ensured that safeguarding arrangements are effective. Leaders do not communicate well with each other, or with staff, about safeguarding concerns. They have not kept sufficient oversight of concerns and so have not identified all the risks that pupils are vulnerable to. Because of this some issues have escalated. In recent weeks, some of the most vulnerable pupils have been put at serious risk.

The school's safeguarding policy is comprehensive and follows the latest government guidance. However, the policy is not always implemented well. Not all staff understand its contents, and some key staff, including those with responsibility for safeguarding, have not followed the policy. This has led to serious failings in safeguarding arrangements.

Some senior leaders have too many responsibilities to enable them to carry out their safeguarding duties effectively. The absence of other staff has led to an increase in workload for some leaders. Some, including those with safeguarding responsibilities, told inspectors that they were struggling to get on top of the caseload. They are not able to identify the most pressing cases because they do not have all the information they need. The trust has recently identified the need to provide additional capacity to the leadership team. For example, it has recently appointed an additional special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). However, the trust was slow to identify the need for this extra support.

A lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities, combined with poor communication between safeguarding leaders and staff, has led to confusion. Safeguarding arrangements are overly complicated. It is not always clear who is responsible for an action or why. Sometimes, deputy Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL) have not informed the DSL of the action they are taking. In addition, deputy DSLs have closed individual safeguarding cases without a clear rationale and without informing the DSL or staff who have raised the concerns. Weak systems of reporting and recording concerns and poor information-sharing mean that the DSL does not have sufficient oversight of safeguarding cases. Leaders have started to streamline the processes and procedures for the roles and responsibilities of the DSLs with a pastoral staffing structure.

The school uses an electronic system for recording and reporting safeguarding concerns. This system is not used well by all leaders and staff. Not all safeguarding concerns have been brought to the attention of relevant staff. Leaders have recently recognised this, but there is now a backlog of concerns to follow up, which is adding to leaders' workload and reducing their capacity to identify the most serious concerns. In addition, not all staff feel confident in using the system.

Safeguarding records do not always contain the necessary detail. Those seen by inspectors were poor. They do not show what action has been taken in response to safeguarding concerns. This means that the necessary information is not available to support pupils should it be needed in the future. Some pupils have not received the help they need, for example to improve their attendance and keep themselves safe.

Arrangements to monitor the most vulnerable pupils are ineffective. When a pupil has been identified as being at imminent risk, staff, including leaders, have been too slow to take action. This has led to potentially serious consequences. Risk assessments for the most vulnerable pupils are poor. They lack detail and do not provide the necessary guidance to support pupils or help staff manage risks to themselves or pupils. Risk assessments are not reviewed or amended regularly or shared with staff. This means that staff do not know how they should be supporting pupils. This has led to repeated safeguarding incidents for some pupils. In some cases, risk assessments have not been written at all.

Pupils' daily attendance is monitored by the school's attendance officer. However, leaders have not supported the attendance officer by ensuring that pastoral staff take responsibility for monitoring pupils' attendance and escalating any concerns. Absences, including of pupils who are frequently absent, are not always followed up. Leaders and staff have not always recognised the link between attendance and safeguarding. Some staff raised concerns about the accuracy of registers. Not all staff were clear about the system for reporting that a child was missing from a lesson.

Systems are in place to report pupils who leave the school's roll to the local authority. Leaders have ensured that pupils are enrolled at another school before they are removed from the school's roll. However, arrangements to transfer safeguarding information are not followed. Leaders have not ensured that serious safeguarding concerns have been shared with pupils' new schools, potentially exposing pupils to serious risk.

Leaders have followed statutory guidance when appointing staff. All the necessary checks are completed when recruiting new staff and these are appropriately recorded on the school's single central record.

Leaders have not always taken appropriate action when allegations have been made about a member of staff's conduct. In some cases, leaders have ensured that allegations are fully investigated. However, leaders have not taken appropriate action while investigations are ongoing, for example by putting risk assessments in place or monitoring staff adequately. Leaders have not always informed the appropriate authorities quickly enough when they have identified concerns. In some cases, leaders have not carried out any investigations or notified the appropriate authorities.

Many staff have lost confidence in leaders' capacity to safeguard pupils. They are concerned that some pupils may 'slip through the net'. Several staff, including some with pastoral responsibilities, told inspectors that they have not had the necessary safeguarding training to be effective in their roles. A poor culture of safeguarding means that not all staff know how to escalate their concerns or check on the actions that have been put in place to protect pupils.

The trust has carried out routine reviews of the school's safeguarding arrangements, but these have not identified the considerable shortcomings. Some concerns had not been recognised by trust leaders until inspectors brought them to their attention during the inspection. The trust is beginning to support the school by adding leadership capacity. For example, it has appointed a temporary trust SENCo and two temporary deputy DSLs to support the management of individual cases. The trust has also provided officers to investigate some of the allegations against staff.

Priorities for further improvement

- Leaders should urgently address the weaknesses in safeguarding arrangements by ensuring that:
 - the DSL and all those with safeguarding responsibilities have the time, resources and support necessary to fulfil their duties effectively
 - there is improved communication between staff and leaders with pastoral responsibilities so that leaders and staff share and act on information about pupils' attendance and welfare
 - the DSL has oversight of all safeguarding concerns in the school
 - there is clarity over the role and responsibilities of the deputy DSLs
 - all staff understand and carry out their responsibilities to safeguard pupils, in line with the latest government guidance and implementing the school's safeguarding policy
 - safeguarding records contain the necessary detail
 - staff understand how to use the school's system of recording and reporting concerns and know how to escalate their concerns when need be

- risk assessments for vulnerable pupils are sufficiently detailed, regularly reviewed and amended accordingly, and are shared with staff who need them
- all staff are kept appropriately informed about vulnerable pupils and how to support them adequately
- protocols are in place to ensure that swift action is taken to safeguard pupils when imminent risks are identified
- appropriate and prompt action is taken when allegations are made against staff, including informing the appropriate authorities and monitoring staff while investigations are ongoing
- attendance registers are accurate and absent pupils are checked on quickly
- safeguarding concerns are passed on to a pupil's new school promptly, when a pupil leaves the school's roll.

Under normal circumstances, we would treat this inspection as an inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005, due to the serious concerns identified. However, because routine inspections are suspended, we will prioritise the school for a section 5 inspection when routine inspections resume.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the East Midlands Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector