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Neil Toplass
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Toplass

No formal designation inspection of Shenstone Lodge School

Following my visit with Wayne Simner, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 6 and 7 October 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and the time you took to discuss your school.

This inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for no formal designation (NFD) inspections. 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), and behaviour and attitudes of pupils at the school.

We do not give graded judgements on NFD inspections. However, if we find some evidence that overall standards may be declining, but where no serious concerns have been identified, then the next inspection will normally be a section 5 inspection and will be brought forward. If we have serious concerns, we will deem the NFD inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

Evidence

We met with the executive headteacher, the head of school, and other senior leaders, including those responsible for safeguarding. We also met with groups of pupils, a member of the local advisory board and a representative of the multi-academy trust (MAT).

We visited classrooms at the Shenstone Lodge school site and the Brades Lodge school site. We spoke with the staff about their safeguarding training and their understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities during these walks. We also checked their understanding of policies and procedures relating to behaviour management.

Various school documents were scrutinised and evaluated, including a range of policies, improvement plans, risk assessments and the minutes of meetings of the local advisory board. We reviewed the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. Information about pupils' behaviour, attendance and welfare were also analysed.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

There are currently 95 pupils on roll at the school with social, emotional and mental health needs. In most cases, pupils also have a range of additional needs. These include speech, language and communication needs and autistic spectrum disorders. The school's primary provision is at the Shenstone Lodge site. The school's secondary provision is at the Brades Lodge site in Tividale. Both sites were visited as part of this inspection.

The school runs a residential provision for a small number of pupils at the Shenstone Lodge site. The residential provision provides care for pupils Monday to Thursday and offers some extended evenings for day pupils. The residential part of the school was not included in the scope of this inspection.

The school uses three unregistered alternative providers for a few secondary-aged pupils to provide vocational work opportunities.

Main Findings

Safeguarding is effective. However, some aspects need to improve further. In particular, the incidence of restrictive physical intervention (RPI) is too high.

The COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic intensified many of the pupils' social and emotional needs. Since more pupils have been back at school full time, increasing levels of anxiety and challenging behaviour have been apparent. In response to this need, there has been an increase in the incidents of RPI, particularly in the primary part of the school. Leaders know that there are cases where staff could avoid using RPI if the right actions or support to prevent the issue happen sooner. Before the pandemic, the incidence of RPI had reduced significantly. Leaders are committed to

lowering this number again. Most staff are well trained to use RPI. Experienced staff supervise those who are new to RPI or who have not yet completed the training.

Records of RPI show it is recorded thoroughly, reviewed, and staff are debriefed to reduce the need for its use in the future. If staff or pupils involved are concerned about the use of RPI, there are well-publicised systems to report these concerns. Leaders take any concerns seriously and act when needed. Leaders, supported by the local advisory board members, have acknowledged and are addressing concerns that have arisen recently. However, leaders' written evaluations of their progress or plans for future development do not accurately reflect these actions.

Leaders have established a strong safeguarding culture across both sites of the school. The staff know, understand, and demonstrate their knowledge of keeping pupils safe. Safeguarding training is regular and thorough. Staff spoken with articulate a clear understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and the individual safeguarding challenges the pupils face away from school. When concerns arise, staff act swiftly to share concerns with safeguarding leaders, who act to ensure pupils are safe. However, while practice is strong, the written policy is out of date, does not consider the latest statutory guidance and is not bespoke to the safeguarding needs of the pupils at the school. Leaders are aware of this and are currently updating it.

Pupils are positive about the school, and most feel they are safe. They can name trusted adults they will go to for help when they feel scared or worried. Pupils know that they struggle to manage their behaviour at times and speak freely about this. They have a clear awareness of the consequences of their behaviour in terms of rewards and sanctions. Pupils feel that RPI is only used as a last resort and understand why it is used. Older pupils understand the definition of bullying and the different types of bullying. Pupils say that leaders, staff, and peers will not tolerate bullying and that any incidents are dealt with quickly.

Recently, leaders have started to adopt a more therapeutic approach to behaviour management. This positive development aims to reduce the incidence of challenging behaviour by meeting pupils' needs more effectively, in turn reducing the need for RPI. Leaders are currently working hard to ensure that all staff have the skills to meet this aim. There is a comprehensive plan for therapeutic interventions, which some children currently access, such as Lego therapy, drawing and talking therapy, and sand therapy. Leaders have also recently implemented an online system to precisely diagnose why pupils struggle to manage their behaviour so that the selected intervention closely matches the pupil's individual needs. However, the behaviour policy does not reflect this approach and not enough staff understand what it is aiming to achieve, so its use and impact are inconsistent.

Too many pupils are not attending school often enough. Before the pandemic, the number of pupils persistently not attending was declining quickly. However, since the return from lockdown, these figures have risen again. There are a number of different reasons for pupils' absence. Difficulties with arranging school transport have an impact

on the attendance figures. Leaders reported that while the school was open and ready to meet pupils' needs at the start of the term, the local authority transport was not available. The school has a range of incentives to encourage attendance and measures to try and tackle persistent absence. There are some slight improvements over the last few weeks, but leaders agree that there is more to do.

Additional support

The MAT provides a broad range of challenge and support for the school. Types of support include termly visits from a school improvement partner and a wide range of network groups. These groups support colleagues across the MAT in developing their practice around safeguarding, behaviour management and reducing the need for RPI. There is also a peer review programme, which means leaders from the school can work closely with other schools in the MAT to moderate and challenge each other's understanding of the quality of provision. MAT leaders have a clear understanding of the challenges faced at Shenstone Lodge and are working with school leaders to address these challenges.

Leaders work closely with officers from the Staffordshire Council health & safety team, who have reviewed risk assessment arrangements in the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- The incidence of RPI in primary is too high. At the moment, too many challenging behaviour cases have resulted in restrictive physical intervention, as actions to prevent escalation have not happened early enough. Leaders need to continue to reduce the incidence of RPI by ensuring that all staff have the necessary knowledge and skills to act earlier, to avoid escalations in challenging behaviour.
- Too many pupils often do not attend school enough, which hampers their academic, social, and emotional progress. Leaders need to continue to reduce the incidence of persistent absence, so more pupils are attending for more time.
- Current systems and procedures are not clearly articulated in written documentation. Leaders need to refine current written policies, plans and processes so everyone is clear about the school's current and revised practices, expectations, and areas for development. This will, in turn, affect how well the local advisory board and the MAT can hold leaders to account.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Manor Hall Academy Trust multi-academy trust, the regional schools' commissioner and the director of children's services for Sandwell. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Pollitt
Her Majesty's Inspector