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8 November 2021

Hazel Simmons
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Dear Mrs Simmons

No formal designation inspection of The Bridge School

Following my visit with Fiona Webb, Her Majesty's Inspector to your school on 19 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 at the school as concerns had been raised with Ofsted about the school's safeguarding arrangements.

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 scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We met with you, senior and middle leaders, and two representatives of the Unity Schools Partnership multi-academy trust. We held a telephone conversation with the chair of the governing body. The chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust attended part of the final feedback meeting.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

The school is a smaller than average sized community special school for pupils aged four to 16 years of age. The majority of pupils are white British. The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is above average. All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities, mostly profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties or a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders. All of them have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). The school is one building, divided into primary and secondary areas.

The school converted to an academy in June 2019. When its predecessor school, The Bridge School was last inspected in March 2018, all aspects of the school's work were found to be inadequate, and the school was judged to require special measures. An Ofsted NFD inspection of the school's safeguarding arrangements in October 2018 judged that safeguarding remained inadequate. In February 2019, an Ofsted monitoring inspection found that leaders and managers were taking effective action towards the removal of special measures. Inadequacies in safeguarding, noted at the time of the last full inspection, had been eliminated.

Main Findings

The school deals with pupils who have a wide range of complex learning and behavioural needs, which makes them vulnerable. Consequently, safeguarding their pupils is a top priority for school leaders. Since your appointment, you have worked with the trust and the school's newly formed governing body to continue to develop a strong culture of safeguarding. Progress has been made in implementing new arrangements to keep pupils safe. Revised policy and procedures for staff to follow are in place. A team of designated leaders of safeguarding oversee the effective use of these new arrangements. They are suitably trained in safer recruitment and providing safeguarding training for others.

Annual staff training in safeguarding, including 'Prevent' training, has taken place. All staff understand their roles and responsibilities. They are given additional training to manage pupils' complex personal needs, such as supervising their eating and drinking and administering basic medication to keep pupils safe and well. A large proportion of staff are trained in first aid. All staff are trained to manage challenging behaviours. The school does not use a 'bound book'. Incidents of physical intervention to manage pupils' behaviour are recorded electronically. Scrutiny of these records during the inspection confirmed that these interventions are used appropriately.

Weekly meetings enable staff to share safeguarding concerns and agree what further actions are needed. Staff have been trained to record their concerns electronically. Those spoken with could explain clearly what they do if they have a concern about a pupil, and

how to log this concern on the system. Scrutiny of these records confirmed that, in general, staff follow the procedures effectively. Incidents and concerns are recorded and followed up.

However, these procedures are new and are not fully established. Some staff have a better understanding of them than others, and some need more time during the day to log concerns and follow them up. Not all staff check what actions have been taken to resolve the concerns they have raised. They do not check the welfare of vulnerable pupils when they return to school following absence and record this information systematically. At times, staff follow up concerns by telephone or by texting parents and carers. There is no coherent way of transferring this information into the school's electronic records. You acknowledge that more needs to be done to ensure that procedures are used consistently.

Links with the local authority and other agencies who support the most vulnerable pupils are well established. At times, actions to follow up concerns about pupils missing from education are too slow. Leaders act promptly, but they do not challenge the local authority to respond more quickly than they currently do. Referrals to the local authority relating to adults working with children are managed effectively. Records show that not all referrals relate to the school's staff. Incidents and concerns raised during the transportation of pupils to and from school are also made to ensure that all adults understand their duty of care and do all they can to keep pupils safe.

All necessary checks are made when appointing adults to work with children. The school's single central record is suitably detailed and complete. It is checked regularly by you and by the trust. An updated safeguarding and child protection policy is in place. This includes new guidance for staff to follow when transferring information about pupils when they leave school. The guidance identifies the personal documents to be shared, including safeguarding matters, the procedures to follow and the timelines for completing the transfer of information. This year, you have prioritised completing early reviews of the EHC plans of Year 11 pupils, so that plans can be made to prepare them for the next stage of education and for adulthood. This includes visits to further education and training providers.

Most pupils attend regularly and behave well. This enables staff to keep a close eye on them and monitor their health and well-being. During the inspection the school was orderly, calm and safe. Incidents of challenging behaviour were dealt with quietly and sensitively, without fuss. Pupils are taught how to remain safe in school and when working online. Mobile phones are not allowed in school. Staff liaise with parents and carers to ensure that pupils remain safe when using their learning devices at home. Older pupils are taught how to behave appropriately in the local community. The personal, social and health education curriculum, and lessons in sex and relationships education, helps to prepare pupils for the adult world.

Additional support

An external review of the school's safeguarding arrangements was commissioned by the trust earlier this year. This has helped you to understand what the school does well and what needs improving further. Trust leaders visit the school regularly to oversee how effectively improvements are being made. They do not scrutinise closely the school's electronic records to gauge how rigorously safeguarding concerns are logged and followed up.

Priorities for further improvement

- Trust leaders already make weekly monitoring visits to the school but do not scrutinise the electronic recording of safeguarding concerns and the actions taken to resolve them. Trust leaders should spend time interrogating this information, alongside leaders, to check thoroughly that the system is used consistently by all staff.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of the Unity Schools Partnership multi academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector