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Teresa Glynn
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Dear Mrs Glynn

No formal designation inspection of St Elizabeth's School

Following my visit with Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 23 November 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 the effectiveness of leadership and management in 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 scrutinised the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We met with you and the chief executive officer for St Elizabeth's Centre, the organisation that the school is part of. We also met with the school's staff, representatives from the centre's behaviour and nursing teams and the centre's director of adult services. We visited all the classes in

the school and spoke with pupils in their classrooms. We looked at a range of documents, including policies, care plans and risk assessments.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

St Elizabeth's is a non-maintained special school for pupils with severe, complex or profound learning disabilities. Some pupils also have physical disabilities or sensory impairments. Many pupils have epilepsy. Most pupils who attend the school live in the on-site children's home.

The school is part of St Elizabeth's Centre, a large charitable organisation. The centre occupies a very large campus and includes the school, a convent, a children's home, adult residential provision, a college for adults with learning disabilities and a health care centre. There are difficulties in recruiting and retaining care staff, as many providers are currently finding throughout the country.

Main Findings

St Elizabeth's Centre's senior leaders and the governing body have ensured that the school has strong leadership while the substantive headteacher is on an extended period of leave. You have a wealth of senior leadership experience, which means that you were able to 'hit the ground running' when you took up the acting headteacher role. Together with the assistant headteacher, you have ensured the school's stability.

Centre leaders have ensured that there are processes in place to investigate incidents when they occur. These processes are detailed and thorough. Leaders accept fully that mistakes happen and sometimes things go wrong. They use the outcomes of investigations to identify ways to improve the service.

Since taking up your role as the school's designated safeguarding lead, you have strengthened the processes for how staff report any concerns they may have. Staff receive regular safeguarding training, and this helps them to recognise possible signs of abuse or neglect. Records show that staff report their concerns promptly, and appropriate action is taken in response to them.

Staff receive a wide range of other training, such as about medical and personal aspects of pupils' care. Staff also receive training in restraint and physical handling, for occasions when pupils' behaviour becomes challenging. The training emphasises that any 'hands on' approaches must be a last resort and used at the minimum level possible to ensure pupils' safety.

We looked at the processes for ensuring that pupils' needs are met, particularly their personal and care needs. We found that these processes are well developed. Each pupil has a care plan which covers all aspects of their life in school. Individualised risk assessments are also carried out for each pupil, covering a very wide range of situations and activities. These plans and assessments are shared appropriately with the staff that work with individual pupils.

Many pupils also have a behaviour support plan. These are detailed documents, written by the behaviour team in order to meet pupils' specific needs. The documents identify what the behaviours are and what triggers them. The plans also provide strategies for making undesirable behaviours less likely. The support plans give precise instructions for the approach to take if a pupil's behaviour reaches crisis point. These documents are revised regularly and very frequently where this is necessary.

Policies cover a wide range of areas. They are thorough and appropriate, and they are kept up to date. There are two exceptions to this. First, the safeguarding policy, which you are currently reviewing with the assistant headteacher, the safeguarding governor and the chief executive officer. Second, the risk assessment policy, which is generic to the site and does not fully reflect the school. That is, the policy does not include the need for risk assessments to be carried out for individual pupils in a range of situations. These individual risk assessments are done, by custom and practice, but this is not reflected in the policy.

We spent time in classrooms and around the school. We found a calm and positive atmosphere throughout. Classrooms were well staffed, with most pupils having individual support. Pupils appeared to be happy and to be enjoying their time at school. The strong relationships between staff and pupils were clearly apparent.

Staff are very positive about the school. They enjoy working at St Elizabeth's and care deeply about the pupils who attend the school. They understand the particular safeguarding risks for a school such as this, and take their responsibilities in protecting pupils very seriously.

Currently, the school's education staffing is 'topped up' by care staff from the on-site children's home. Leaders are working on ways to change this model so that a greater proportion of school staff are from education rather than care.

Additional support

The school is well supported by the centre's leaders and the therapy and nursing teams. For example, you work closely with the chief executive officer on the strategic leadership of the school. The behaviour support team works very closely with staff. Members of the team work proactively with staff on ways to reduce the likelihood of less desirable behaviours. They also provide swift support when crises happen. This support can be 'hands on' work with pupils, coaching and training staff or putting support plans together.

Priorities for further improvement

- The school is currently reliant on care staff, from the on-site children's home, to ensure that staff to pupil ratios are suitable. This leads to a small amount of inconsistency. Leaders should continue their efforts to secure and retain school staff.
- The risk assessment policy is not specific to the school. This means that the approach to risk assessment for individual pupils that the school carries out is not reflected in the policy. Leaders should ensure that policy matches practice in this area.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer or equivalent of St Elizabeth's Centre, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector