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12 April 2022

Elizabeth Rymer
Headteacher
Whitefield School
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Dear Mrs Rymer

No formal designation inspection of Whitefield School

Following my visit with Bruce Goddard, Alison Moore and Sue Maguire, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 22 and 23 February 2022, 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).

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 the headteacher, senior leaders, teachers, groups of pupils, parents and carers, the chair of the governing body and of the staffing committee, and representatives of the local authority.

We also reviewed documents related to the curriculum, including those for the relationships, sex, and health education (RSHE) programme. Inspectors reviewed

governors' minutes, attendance and behaviour records and information about pupils' subject choices in Year 9.

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

Safeguarding is effective

Context

The number of pupils on the school's roll is 765. Just over two thirds of pupils speak English as an additional language. Approximately one in two pupils are entitled to free school meals. There are around one in six pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A small proportion of these pupils have an education, health and care plan. The level of mobility of pupils is high. There is little turnover of staff. The school has a resource base for 28 pupils with autistic spectrum condition.

Main Findings

During the inspection, we focused on how effectively leaders and managers ensure that safeguarding and child protection arrangements keep pupils safe. We looked at pupils' behaviour and the RSHE curriculum to see how effectively pupils are taught to keep themselves safe and healthy. We also looked at aspects of the curriculum, such as English, mathematics and creative subjects, to see whether it is suitably broad and ambitious, and meets pupils' needs.

Safeguarding is a high priority for all staff. Leaders' and governors' work to keep pupils safe is effective. For example, leaders have created a strong culture where pupils feel safe and have confidence in their teachers. Professional relationships are especially strong, and pupils said that their teachers support them exceptionally well.

Leaders have taken suitable steps to review and strengthen safeguarding arrangements. Policies have been updated and staff are well trained to spot the signs that a pupil may be experiencing difficulties. Staff know how to use the online reporting system to refer any concerns to the designated safeguarding lead and her team. Referrals are regularly checked so that concerns are acted upon swiftly. Safeguarding staff work closely with the local authority to make appropriate decisions about how best to respond to pupils' needs. The school's resident counsellor is also on hand to step in and support pupils and their families. This helps leaders to ensure that pupils receive help when it is needed, especially for their mental health.

Many pupils are vulnerable, whether as recent arrivals to the United Kingdom or because they have specific learning needs. Leaders have pioneered work to help refugee children settle into school life. They are partners in a project which focuses specifically on supporting and meeting the needs of children looked after. This initiative is funded by a charity and run jointly with the local authority and St Mary's University. It enables the school to provide an extra layer of support to keep vulnerable pupils safe. Pupils with

SEND are supported well. This is because the arrangements to identify and understand pupils' learning needs, and provide appropriate help, including through the resource base for pupils with autistic spectrum condition, are secure.

Leaders and governors have ensured that the checks made on the suitability of staff are precise and thorough. All the required checks are made before new staff can start their employment, including two independent references. Leaders and governors have the appropriate training on how to recruit staff safely. In addition, the governing body has put in place suitable arrangements to hold leaders to account for implementing the school's policy effectively.

As part of the inspection, we looked at the behaviour of pupils in and out of lessons. Overwhelmingly, they behave well. In the playground, unruly behaviour is unusual, and pupils line up to come in for lessons sensibly. Similarly, lessons are rarely disturbed by silly behaviour. Occasionally, however, pupils' behaviour in lessons is less strong and this reduces learning a little. Nevertheless, the school's procedures ensure that pupils are kept safe. Bullying is rare. Pupils said that bullying is just not part of the school's culture. They are confident that staff will resolve any concerns should they arise.

A third focus for the inspection was the curriculum and whether it provided a broad experience for all pupils that goes beyond the study of subjects. Leaders are justifiably proud of their curriculum. Current arrangements for the curriculum allow pupils to drop some subjects, such as art and design, drama and dance at the end of Year 8. However, the curriculum for these subjects in Years 7 and 8 is demanding and taught consistently. This enables pupils to build and consolidate their learning logically, with sufficient richness and breadth. In addition, a charity funds a project that enables every pupil to learn to play a musical instrument. Moreover, subject choices in Year 9 require pupils to follow a broad range of courses. As a result, the curriculum is suitably broad and ambitious.

Leaders put their commitment to providing pupils with a wider experience beyond the formal curriculum into practice. The RSHE curriculum, including assemblies, is extensive and covers pupils' safety, relationships and British values, as well as raising issues such as racism, homophobia and sexual abuse. Pupils welcome the sensitive way that teachers deal with these subjects. In addition, a range of extra activities, such as the chess club and the 'Debate Mate' programme, are well attended by pupils. Together, these ensure that pupils receive a broad curriculum that meets their needs well.

The same is true in the sixth form. Students are given experiences that go beyond the academic and technical. For example, some students are trained as 'mental health first aiders' and support other pupils under the supervision of an expert member of staff. In addition, the RSHE programme continues in the sixth form to broaden students' experiences.

Additional support

The school is supported effectively by the local authority to help pupils with SEND and those who are vulnerable. For example, leaders and staff work closely with outside agencies including speech and language, education psychologists, mental health services, social care and occupational therapists.

Priorities for further improvement

- Leaders should ensure that the school's behaviour policy is implemented effectively by all staff so that the occasional disruption to lessons is minimised further.

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

Yours sincerely

Brian Oppenheim
Her Majesty's Inspector