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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Rachel Rai
Principal
Whitefield Schools
Macdonald Road
Walthamstow
London
E17 4AZ

Dear Ms Rai

No formal designation inspection of Whitefield Schools

Following my visit with Andrew Wright, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Francis Gonzalez and Teresa Neary, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 24 and 25 May 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 us 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.

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 and other senior leaders. We also met with groups of staff, groups of pupils, two trustees, the chief executive officer, a national leader in education who works with the school, and a representative of the local authority. We spoke to some parents and carers at the start of the school day. We visited lessons and observed pupils at other times of day. We scrutinised a range of

documentation relating to staff training, and pupils' behaviour and attendance. We also considered 96 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Whitefield Schools is a very large special school with over 350 pupils on roll. The school consists of several departments. Margaret Brearley School caters for the needs of those aged three to 19 who have severe learning difficulties, or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Peter Turner School and Niels Chapman School cater for pupils with autism spectrum disorder. Peter Turner School caters for pupils aged three to 11, and Niels Chapman School for those aged 11 to 19. The sixth-form provision is shared with pupils from the other special school in Whitefield Academy Trust.

Over the last couple of years there has been a considerable turnover of staff at every level. You took up your post in October 2021. While key leadership positions are now filled with substantive postholders, the school continues to have a high proportion of classroom staff on temporary contracts, employed through agencies.

During the summer term 2021, trust leaders discovered evidence of a non-recent safeguarding matter of alleged child neglect at Whitefield Schools. Inspectors were aware during this inspection of a police investigation into this matter. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate allegations of this kind, actions taken by leaders in response to the discovery of this evidence were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.

Main findings

Leaders have established a positive safeguarding culture in the school. Openness and transparency are key features of the school's ethos. Staff use clear systems to report any concerns that they have about a pupil. Leaders have extended the number of trained designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) to ensure that there is sufficient capacity for this work. They have recognised the link between safeguarding and behaviour, and plan to train the two new positive behaviour leads as DSLs to add further capacity before the start of the next academic year.

Agency and supply staff are provided with relevant safeguarding information when they arrive at the school, and they also receive all the safeguarding updates and weekly staff bulletins. However, a few temporary staff who spoke with inspectors were less clear about the procedures and their access to training. A few permanent staff are of the view that agency staff are not adequately trained. This is not the case, but it leads to a lack of confidence for these individuals.

Staff act on safeguarding concerns swiftly, and referrals to external agencies, such as social care teams, are discussed regularly. Safeguarding leaders meet frequently to discuss cases and actions to take. You oversee the decisions on closing or escalating cases, ensuring that there is consistency in decision-making.

Leaders work closely with external partners such as the local authority. They report relevant matters to the local authority designated officer.

You have introduced an innovative system for staff to raise any low-level concerns about staff practice in a safe way. This reporting system is used by staff in all roles. It provides an opportunity for leaders to give swift and pertinent advice, and support to those whose practice could be improved if required.

Leaders have established clear routines for the complex transition at the start and end of the day, and for the fire-evacuation process. Staff have clear roles and responsibilities at these times and calmly complete their allotted tasks.

Pre-employment checks on staff are completed and recorded appropriately. Relevant staff receive training in health and safety matters, such as management of medicines and first aid.

You have worked closely with the chief executive officer to stabilise the school during this period of considerable staff turbulence. You have prioritised the right things. Leaders have commissioned a range of external partners to support specific aspects of the school, such as safeguarding. You have seen success from this work despite the significant challenges related to staffing.

Staff demonstrate a growing confidence in the current leadership. Those responding to the staff survey were largely positive, though some correctly identified work that still needs to be done. Others reflected a view that demonstrates a reluctance to fully accept the changes that leaders have introduced. Not everyone is on board yet.

Leaders are working hard to embed a culture where all staff recognise and understand pupils' behaviour as a form of communication. That said, they also understand the impact that incidents of challenging behaviour have on both the pupil and staff involved. Staff use an online system for recording and reporting any incidents, including those that require restrictive physical intervention. This is reviewed systematically and frequently. Leaders analyse the information carefully to spot any trends. Overall, the use of restrictive physical intervention has decreased over time and in the current academic year just under 3% of all incidents recorded involved restrictive physical intervention.

The positive behaviour leads, who have been in post since January 2022, ensure that any staff and pupils involved in incidents of restrictive physical intervention are fully debriefed, usually within 24 hours of the incident. This helps staff to feel supported and valued, and pupils to understand the impact of their actions. In introducing this work, leaders have

identified that the communication methods for debriefing pupils need some refinement, as some pupils cannot access the format used or even relate the debriefing to the incident.

Positive relationships between pupils and staff throughout the school contribute to pupils' well-being. For example, the management of transition from bus to class at the start of the day enables the day to get off to a good start. Targeted support for those pupils who are often absent from school is helping to improve their behaviour. This has involved close working with transport teams and families.

Behaviour in lessons is generally calm, particularly in the early years, in Margaret Brearley School and in the sixth form. Older pupils associate with each other respectfully. Pupils engage with their learning in these parts of the school and are settled in lessons. However, in Peter Turner School and Niels Chapman School, pupils do not consistently have a suitable and available means of communicating their worries, wants and needs. Sometimes they resort to communicating through inappropriate behaviour. While inspectors saw some use of communication systems such as symbols and signing, this was sporadic.

The content and delivery of the curriculum does not routinely contribute well to the promotion of good behaviour in some parts of the school. Sometimes pupils become disengaged from lesson activities and dysregulated because they are not motivated to join the activity. Sometimes pupils wait a long time for something to happen in class and wander off. This can result in inappropriate behaviour such as attempting to climb shelves. The school improvement priorities do not give sufficient emphasis to some aspects of the curriculum that enable pupils to keep themselves safe. For example, they lack clear, specific objectives around the development of communication strategies or the implementation of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, including relationships and sex education.

Additional support

The local authority safeguarding team has worked closely with school leaders to check safeguarding matters in the school. Leaders have invited the local authority and an external company into the school to undertake comprehensive reviews of safeguarding practice. Leaders act on any recommendations given.

Recent changes to the board of trustees have strengthened the oversight of safeguarding. Trustees are aware of the amount of work that needs to be done. The chair of trustees and the chair of the safeguarding committee check that leaders are on track to fulfil the recommendations from any safeguarding reviews.

Leaders are working with a national leader in education to strengthen practice in each department of the school. This work is helping leaders to make improvements in some aspects of the school's work, such as the promotion of positive behaviour through providing appropriate learning environments.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that staff employed on a temporary basis are confident in their knowledge of safeguarding processes and access to training and advice. Also, dispel the misconception held by a few that temporary staff do not receive suitable training.
- Ensure that pupils in all parts of the school can access and use communication methods to indicate their wants, needs and choices. Ensure that pupils can communicate any worries or concerns in a way that is understood by the staff working with them.
- Ensure that classroom environments and activities routinely promote positive behaviour, and reduce the amount of time that pupils spend waiting in lessons.
- Prioritise aspects of the PSHE education programme that develop pupils' awareness of personal safety and provide them with strategies to keep themselves safe.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Whitefield Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for London Borough of Waltham Forest. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Gaynor Roberts
Her Majesty's Inspector