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14 January 2022

Gregory Hill
Headteacher
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Parkway
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Dear Mr Hill

No formal designation inspection of Howard Junior School

Following my visit with Christine Dick, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 7 December 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 was concerned about the effectiveness of leadership and management in the school (including governance), and the safeguarding of pupils.

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 your team of senior leaders, four groups of pupils and a group of staff. An inspector held a telephone conversation with the chair of the board of trustees and had another telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. An inspector visited lessons to observe pupils at work. Both inspectors chatted informally with parents at the end of the school day.

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

The school's leadership and management, and safeguarding arrangements are effective.

Context

The school is a larger than average sized junior school for pupils aged seven to 11 years. It converted to an academy in December 2014. It is part of the Apollo Academies Trust which consists of a single school. Most pupils are white British. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, mostly social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, or speech, language and communication needs is above average. The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is below average. At its previous short inspection in October 2017, the school was judged to be good.

Main Findings

Leaders have created a vibrant and welcoming community. Classrooms and corridors are filled with impressive displays and celebrations of pupils' work. Pupils are proud of their school. They wear their school uniform and the stickers awarded for good work with pride. They are taught to look after one another and how to remain safe. They told inspectors that their school is a kind and caring place. They talked confidently about their experiences in school.

Over time, leaders' relations with a small minority of parents have become strained. This has led to a string of complaints that have absorbed too much of leaders' time, deflecting their focus away from doing what they do best; looking after pupils and providing them with an excellent environment in which to learn.

Inspectors found that the procedures for dealing with these complaints have been followed. Investigations into complaints have found no serious concerns. The most recent complaints are being investigated by the local authority and an independent agency commissioned by the trust. Leaders recognise that they have not done enough to reduce complaints by improving communication with parents and other stakeholders.

The roles and responsibilities of trustees are underdeveloped. Minutes from previous meetings show that trustees ensure that statutory duties are met but have done less to hold leaders accountable for managing complaints. New trustees, including a new chair, have recently been appointed. They are inexperienced but provide the school with an ideal opportunity to stabilise the school's governance. Leaders acknowledge that further training will be needed to enable trustees to carry out their new roles and responsibilities fully.

Safeguarding arrangements are effective. The designated leader is well organised, knows pupils well and systematically manages the procedures to protect them. All staff are trained in spotting concerns and how to report them using the school's electronic recording system. All the necessary checks made when appointing new staff are recorded appropriately on the school's single central record.

Pupils enthused about the range of special days arranged for them, and how teachers make learning fun. In lessons, they share good working relations with staff and each other. Teachers are skilful in capturing and keeping pupils engaged in learning. Pupils are well motivated to learn and read for pleasure. Special library spaces with artefacts, sensory lighting and characters from the books pupils are encouraged to read all help to promote a love of reading.

Outdoors, at breaks and lunchtimes, pupils behave well. Pupils are pleasant, sociable and happy in school. They play well together and enjoy the different spaces and equipment for sports and play, including a wonderful wooden pirate ship. The outdoor library is a popular place for social reading and quiet reflection.

Strong pastoral care ensures pupils are kept safe and are looked after well in school. Weekly counselling is provided for a small proportion of pupils with SEMH needs. The playground area is well supervised and there is always someone to go to if pupils have concerns.

Pupils are well mannered, welcoming and polite. They told inspectors that behaviour varies from really good to not so good when others talk too much or misbehave in lessons. However, when pupils are outside, pushing, shoving and fun fights mean that behaviour is not as good as it is inside. Pupils feel safe and free from bullying and know who to speak with if they are concerned. They understand the rules that are in place to promote good behaviour. They told inspectors that sanctions such as 'minutes' are applied fairly by staff. They feel it is right that those who misbehave get minutes. Pupils who have misbehaved themselves can explain why these sanctions were applied to them.

Staff say school is a great place to work and learn. They were unanimous in their praise for the school and its leaders. Staff have no concerns about pupils' safety and welfare. They feel well supported when managing behaviour. Staff feel valued and have access to wide range of training and support.

Inspectors chatted informally with parents at the end of the school day. Most parents spoken with praised the school and its staff. A few concerns were shared about the management of behaviour. Staff supervision adds to the positive ethos as pupils and parents leave through the school gates.

Additional support

The local authority has provided effective support for leaders in resolving complaints received about the school. Recent changes in the local authority's lead officer for safeguarding have slowed the investigation of the latest complaint made. However, this is now under way. Relations between school leaders and the local authority have not remained positive over time. The headteacher acknowledges that more needs to be done to foster better relations in the future.

Priorities for further improvement

- A small minority of parents have lodged complaints about the school. Some have written directly to Ofsted and the local authority, rather than following the school's complaints procedures listed on its website. This prevents leaders and trustees from taking prompt action to resolve issues at an early stage. Leaders should ensure that all parents are well informed of the procedures to follow when they have a concern. They should ensure that parents understand where they can get information about making complaints from. They should check that parents have full confidence in the actions leaders and trustees will take to manage their concerns.
- A small minority of parents are not fully aware of what staff do together to manage behaviour and ensure that pupils benefit from the good pastoral care and wonderful resources provided in school. Leaders should do more to welcome these parents into school to show them what is being done to keep their children safe and inspire them to learn.
- Membership of the trust board has changed this year. Not all of them understand their roles and responsibilities, including how complaints are managed, or how they should hold leaders fully accountable. Leaders should take action to strengthen the school's governance by providing new trustees with the training and support they need to fulfil all their duties effectively.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees of the Apollo Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector