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John Steward
Headteacher
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Dear Dr Steward

Urgent inspection of Percy Hedley School

Following my visit with Matthew Knox, His Majesty's Inspector, and Tudor Griffiths, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 28 and 29 September 2022, I write on behalf of His 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 urgent inspections. The inspection was carried out because His Majesty's Chief Inspector wished to determine the effectiveness of the oversight of leadership and management in the school (including governance) and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the school as concerns had been raised with Ofsted.

We do not give graded judgements on urgent 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 graded inspection, which will be carried out under section 5 of the Act and be brought forward. If we have serious concerns, we will deem the urgent inspection as a graded inspection immediately.

Evidence

We scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We met with the headteacher, who is also the acting chief executive officer for the trust, several members of the senior leadership team, some middle leaders and teachers, groups of pupils, some parents and carers, and members of

staff. The lead inspector held telephone conversations with the vice-chair of the governing body, the vice-chair of trustees, the governor responsible for safeguarding and the trustee responsible for safeguarding. The lead inspector also met remotely with a parent governor.

Inspectors looked at a range of documents provided by the school, including those relating to behaviour, attendance, the school's use of additional funding and a sample of minutes from meetings of the governing body. Inspectors visited lessons and scrutinised the school's plans for improvement.

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

Safeguarding is effective and leadership and management are effective

Main Findings

Leaders make sure that safeguarding is a high priority. Policies and procedures for safeguarding reflect the latest statutory guidance. They are thoroughly embedded in the culture of the school. Staff at all levels have a secure understanding of their responsibilities to keep children safe. Staff receive effective training. They know how to recognise the signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. They understand the vulnerabilities of pupils. Leaders take swift action to respond to concerns. They work closely with external agencies to get pupils the help they need. Records for safeguarding are comprehensive. Actions taken to keep pupils safe are suitably detailed. Leaders are quick to identify patterns of concern. For example, leaders have recently placed a stronger focus on e-safety through the curriculum and through focused assemblies. They also provide parents with information to support their children when using the internet at home.

Pupils are kept safe in school. Leaders ensure that pupils can express their feelings through various forms of communication. These include using signing and symbols. Staff establish trusting relationships with pupils. Pupils know there is an adult they can turn to if they feel worried. The student council work with staff to make sure that safeguarding procedures are understood by pupils. Together, they developed a pupil friendly version of the safeguarding policy. The personal, social, health and economic education is planned for and taught to the youngest pupils in the school through to students in the sixth form. Pupils can recall with confidence aspects of knowledge they have been taught. Pupils told inspectors about the importance of healthy relationships, consent and online safety. They learn to develop respect for the protected characteristics and gain an understanding of the importance of equality. There is a strong focus on preparing pupils for adulthood and further education and employment. Leaders ensure that pupils have opportunities to make informed choices about their next steps. Older pupils, including students in the sixth form, take part in work experience. Leaders carry out detailed risk assessments to ensure that these experiences are safe.

Pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons is calm and well managed. There is a warm, nurturing atmosphere. Staff are trained to sensitively and effectively help pupils to manage their own behaviour. They establish clear routines and have high expectations for pupils.

Leaders are knowledgeable and skilled. They have an accurate and holistic understanding of the school's work. They ensure that staff have the necessary expertise to provide effective care and education for pupils. Most parents are highly positive about the school. They appreciate the care that their children receive and the education teachers provide. When leaders identify areas for development, they act quickly to put appropriate improvement plans in place. For example, leaders recently implemented a new approach to improve the teaching of early reading. They trained staff to teach the new approach to phonics effectively. They make sure that the books pupils read match the sounds they know. Leaders recognise that the attendance of pupils is an ongoing priority for the school. The persistent absence of some pupils is too high. Leaders have recently introduced a new policy to improve attendance. Proposed strategies are suitably focused on reducing persistent absence and keeping pupils safe. It is too early to measure the impact of this policy.

Although leaders maintain effective oversight of most aspects of the school's work, they do not effectively evaluate the use of additional pupil premium funding. They cannot be sure that the use of this funding has the best possible impact on pupils' outcomes.

Additional support

Despite recent turbulence within the foundation, governors and trustees have a clear understanding of the school. Governors visit the school often. They check on the welfare and safety of pupils and the quality of their education. They carry out a range of activities. For example, they check that the school's safeguarding procedures are effective by talking to pupils and staff. Governors report frequently to trustees on the work of the school.

Leaders have established good links with two local authorities. They work closely with these local authorities to seek advice, guidance and training for staff and governors. They have recently commissioned a school improvement partner from one local authority to provide impartial advice. Leaders commission external safeguarding audits to ensure their procedures are secure.

Trustees are working to further improve the effectiveness of governance by recruiting new trustees and governors with relevant experience and expertise.

Priorities for further improvement

- Policies and procedures are generally monitored and evaluated well. However, leaders' oversight of the impact of additional funding lacks the necessary precision. This means that leaders do not know whether the spending of these funds is leading to improved

outcomes for pupils. Leaders should monitor closely the use and impact of any additional funding to ensure that pupils achieve the best possible outcomes.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the acting chief executive officer of the Percy Hedley Foundation trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for North Tyneside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Stephanie Innes-Taylor
His Majesty's Inspector