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David Wright
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Dear Mr Wright

Urgent inspection of Woodlands School

Following my visit with Caroline Parry, Alan Gray, Jim McAtear and Diana Osagie, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 18 October 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 safeguarding arrangements at the school as concerns had been raised with Ofsted about aspects of the effectiveness of leadership and management in the school, the behaviour and attitudes and the personal development of pupils at the school.

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, the chief executive officer of the trust, the designated safeguarding leader, the special educational needs coordinator, other leaders, staff, and pupils. The lead inspector held telephone conversations with the chair of governors, a leader from the local authority safeguarding team, and also some parents.

Inspectors spoke to pupils about what it is like to be a pupil at the school and how they learn to keep themselves safe. Inspectors also visited lessons, scrutinised a range of school policies and viewed other documents. They evaluated recent safeguarding audits conducted by the local authority. The lead inspector considered complaints received by Ofsted. Inspectors evaluated the school's processes to ensure the safe use of information technology. They scrutinised minutes from local governing board meetings, attendance records, behaviour incident logs, complaints received by the school, and other relevant safeguarding information. .

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Main Findings

Leaders have established a robust culture of safeguarding at Woodlands School. Pupils are kept safe and feel safe.

Staff are well trained to spot the signs of abuse or neglect. They know when and how to report concerns. Concerns are dealt with quickly and well. Leaders liaise promptly with agencies, such as social care or the police, when needed.

Safeguarding procedures are regularly reviewed by leaders and governors. They analyse trends from safeguarding cases and, where appropriate, take steps to strengthen the school's practice. For example, they have recently found high levels of concerns around mental health. In response, a range of support measures have been introduced, such as 'well-being mentors'.

Appropriate processes are followed to ensure safe recruitment of staff. Leaders and governors make sure that staff are checked on and after appointment. They are quick to ask the local authority for advice if allegations arise against members of staff. When investigations are needed, they are done thoroughly. That said, some safeguarding records, such as staff recruitment files, are not as well organised as they could be. Leaders began to deal with these issues while inspectors were on site.

Pupils who are vulnerable in any way are supported well, due to the school's strong pastoral care. For example, a safe space is provided at social times for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), if they need it. Leaders make regular checks on the safety and well-being of pupils who are in alternative provision. This also helps these pupils feel supported and safe.

In general, behaviour around the school is positive. 'The Woodlands Way' is a clear behaviour policy that helps the majority of pupils enjoy a calm learning environment. They mostly move around the site in an orderly way. However, not all staff have been

sufficiently trained to apply the behaviour policy consistently. Because of this, low-level disruption happens in some lessons.

Pupils are respectful and tolerant of each other. They say that bullying, harassment and discrimination are not common. When these do occur, pupils are confident that staff and leaders deal with it well. This helps pupils feel safe.

Leaders put the pupils' needs at the heart of their decisions about behaviour. They successfully take on pupils who have had behaviour issues at other schools. When pupils leave Woodlands, leaders make sure their transition is safe and well planned. If pupils struggle with attendance, leaders support this well. Pupils with social and emotional health needs get help understanding what causes them to get upset. This teaches them to manage their behaviour in a positive way.

Pupils learn how to keep safe through a well-considered curriculum for personal development. Leaders ensure this covers relevant wider society issues in depth, such as gender-based violence and discrimination. Pupils value this. Their knowledge builds over time in an age-appropriate way. For example, older pupils discuss with maturity what they learn about healthy sexual relationships. This helps them know what they need to successfully be safe in the wider world.

Staff say that leaders support them well and appreciate the opportunities for their professional development. They praise the help leaders give them if they face challenging times.

Additional support

Governors know the school well. They check closely on safeguarding. The trust regularly supports and challenges leaders' safeguarding work, such as when there are cases that have been referred to agencies. The school is at the point of joining a new, slightly larger, trust. Leaders are hopeful that this will develop an even better level of oversight of their work.

Leaders work regularly and well with a range of agencies, including the local authority. The local authority is positive about the safeguarding, leadership, pastoral support and behaviour processes of the school. The local authority has provided a range of support, for example through training on how to help pupils with SEND more effectively.

Priorities for further improvement

- While safeguarding is effective, leaders do not always organise safeguarding information as well as they might. This has the potential to hinder the effectiveness of actions in response to concerns. Leaders need to ensure that all safeguarding information is organised thoroughly and appropriately.

- Not all staff apply the behaviour policy consistently in lessons. This sometimes leads to low-level disruption. Leaders must ensure that staff implement the behaviour policy effectively, so that pupils across the school can consistently learn in a calm and productive atmosphere.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Takely Education Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Charlie Fordham
His Majesty's Inspector