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Kate Davies
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Dear Ms Davies

Urgent inspection of Ash Lea School

Following my visit with Rachel Tordoff, His Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 3 July 2023, 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 and was concerned about leadership and management and pupils' well-being 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 met with you and other senior leaders. I met with the chair and some other members of the governing body. We visited lessons, spoke with pupils and members of the teaching and support staff teams. We observed pupils during social times and on arrival at school.

We reviewed a wide range of documents. These included school policies, risk assessments, pupils' personal behaviour plans, records relating to staff training, behaviour incidents, physical intervention and the administration of medicines and essential health

procedures. I scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership and management of the school is effective. Leaders and staff take positive actions to support pupils' well-being.

Main Findings

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders prioritise safeguarding. They ensure that well-trained staff remain vigilant to any potential concerns. Staff praise the regular safeguarding training and updates they receive. They say that the school's 'supportive culture' ensures that pupils' best interests are at the heart of the school. Detailed records confirm that leaders and staff respond promptly should a safeguarding concern arise.

Pupils say that they are happy and feel safe at school. They describe staff as kind. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe through the school's strong personal, social and health education curriculum. For example, pupils learn about online safety, healthy relationships and consent in ways that they can easily understand.

During the school day, some pupils require the administration of regular medication and essential medical procedures. The school's arrangements for this provision are robust and secure. The full-time healthcare assistants, supported by other staff, ensure that pupils receive safe, high-quality care and treatment. Staff carry out this important work in ways that respect pupils' dignity.

Pupils behave very well, in lessons and at social times. The positive relationships between pupils and adults enable pupils to thrive. The atmosphere around school is calm and purposeful. Pupils respond well to the familiar routines and expectations. They treat one another with respect. Pupils express positive opinions about the school, such as 'this school has the right mindset' and 'they know what is right for us and what can help us get on in life'. Pupils greet visitors confidently. They are eager to share the experiences provided for them, such as the recent successful residential visit.

On occasion, some pupils struggle to regulate their behaviour and emotions. When this happens, staff respond appropriately. The 'safe space pods' and the sensory rooms provide pupils with the time and space to step away from class and receive help to calm themselves. Two members of staff are trained as emotional literacy support assistants. This provision enhances pupils' well-being.

Leaders track pupils' behaviour closely. This includes any instances when physical intervention is required. Records show that such instances have reduced during the course of the year and are relatively low. Most staff have undertaken specific training in the use of physical intervention. Leaders plan to expand the scope of the training to all staff over time. Untrained staff understand how to summon help quickly if it is needed.

Leaders ensure that staff create behaviour plans for pupils who require extra support. However, leaders have not checked the consistency of this provision. They have not provided sufficient guidance for staff in drawing up pupils' plans. Some of the support plans are notably more detailed and thorough than others. Staff do not always include precise information to ensure that pupils receive consistent support. This is also the case for some of the off-site risk assessments. Nonetheless, staff know the pupils, and their needs, very well.

Governors provide effective support and challenge for the school. They are frequent visitors, who check for themselves that the school is providing the best possible standard of education and care for its pupils.

Additional support

The school benefits from support from the local authority. This support includes undertaking suitability checks on centrally employed staff and providing support for governors in dealing with any staffing matters or complaints.

Priorities for further improvement

- The quality of pupils' behaviour support plans and personal risk assessments is variable. Leaders should ensure that these plans are sufficiently clear and detailed and enable all pupils to receive consistently effective support that is precisely targeted to their needs.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Nottinghamshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Watkins
His Majesty's Inspector