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Pat Dubas
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Dubas

Urgent inspection of Brompton Hall School

Following my visit with Stephanie Innes-Taylor, His Majesty's Inspector to the school on 24 and 25 October 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 the 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 pupils' well-being and the leadership and management in the school (including governance) 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 the headteacher, other school leaders, the chief executive officer of Venn Academy Trust and other leaders from the trust. I met with the chair of the governing body, who is also the chair of trustees. I spoke with a representative of the local authority by telephone. We also talked to a proportion of parents by telephone and spoke with a wide range of staff both formally and informally. We visited lessons and observed pupils

during social times and on arrival at school. We spoke with pupils both formally and informally. We reviewed curriculum documentation for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and looked at samples of pupils' work in this subject.

We reviewed a wide range of documents. These included school policies, risk assessments, samples of pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans and their related behaviour management plans, records relating to staff training, behaviour incidents and physical intervention records. We reviewed the minutes of meetings of the trust and local governing body. We 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.

Main findings

The school and the trust have acted promptly to address the weaknesses of the predecessor school and the concerns raised more recently. Much has needed to be done so that pupils and staff have the help and support that they need. There is clear evidence of the improvements that have been made to date. Many pupils and staff are positive about the changes that have been made. However, there is still work to do. A small number of staff continue to be concerned by the challenges of working in this school.

The school has ensured that all staff have the safeguarding training and knowledge they need to keep pupils safe from harm. There are regular updates and a planned programme of safeguarding training over the school year. Staff know how to raise concerns about the well-being of pupils, or if they are concerned about the conduct of staff. The culture of safeguarding is strengthening. Staff increasingly trust the new approach they are being asked to adopt and deepen their understanding of how this contributes towards an effective safeguarding culture. School and trust leaders are visible around school and regularly meet with staff to better understand how to support them. Staff know the role they must play in keeping pupils safe. Detailed records show that staff report safeguarding concerns promptly and that the school takes appropriate actions to swiftly follow up any concerns. As a result, staff are taking more responsibility for their part in safeguarding pupils.

There is a recent increase in the number of pupils who are attending the school. All pupils have significant complex and challenging behavioural and emotional needs. When pupils are dysregulated, they can lash out both verbally and physically. Staff act promptly to calm pupils and use carefully considered language and de-escalation techniques. When required, well-trained staff take appropriate steps to physically restrain pupils. This is so that pupils do not hurt themselves or others. When pupils are calm, they are helped by caring staff who know them well to reflect on their actions. Over time, the school is developing a deep understanding of each pupil and how best to help them. As relationships with staff grow, pupils' behaviour and attendance improve.

On occasion, pupils abscond from the school. Staff know the procedures to follow when this happens. Staff work with pupils and enable them to develop strategies to help them to cope when they become overwhelmed. Over time, these pupils make better choices, and they abscond less often. Sometimes, pupils become dysregulated as an expression of their special educational needs and/or disabilities. When this happens, a small proportion of dysregulated pupils cause injury to themselves or others. Staff are concerned when this happens. The school is taking the right steps to minimise these incidents. This includes a positive approach which uses de-escalation techniques and restorative practice. Pupils and staff gain more effective strategies to de-escalate situations successfully. As a result, the number of repeat incidents of challenging behaviours from individual pupils is decreasing over time.

Some staff speak positively about the changes. They feel part of this and see the potential for further improvement using this approach. However, a few staff are less confident that the new positive approach is working sufficiently well. Some worry about the increased challenge with greater numbers of pupils and the behaviours that they exhibit. There is not always a consistent approach taken when dealing with pupils who are struggling to behave. There is work to do to address staff's concerns so that they understand and are fully involved in the shaping of the school's vision and practice to meet pupils' special educational needs in a holistic and positive way.

Most pupils spoken to were positive about the school. They feel safe and are confident that they can raise any concerns they may have with an adult. They know that staff will act in pupils' best interests to keep them safe and to address any concerns they have. Older pupils can explain how behaviour has improved over the last year. They know there are now fewer serious incidents than was previously the case. A few pupils worry when others display challenging behaviour. The school talks to pupils about this and ensures that there are places where they can go to talk with a trusted member of staff. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe through the PSHE curriculum. They know how to manage the different risks they may face, including when online. They know how to speak up if they have concerns.

The school closely monitors incidents of poor behaviour, including derogatory language, and any instances of when physical intervention is required. Some staff have undertaken specific training in the use of physical intervention. Untrained staff know how to summon help quickly if it is required. Information recorded is detailed and shows that staff quickly take appropriate steps to help pupils. Records are appropriately detailed. They demonstrate that over the course of an academic year, incidents of poor behaviour reduce over time. This includes the number of instances of derogatory language and the need for restraint. All of these numbers are relatively low.

Pupils joining the school take part in a half-term 'transition timetable'. This helps pupils to settle into school and understand the school's expectations for them. It also helps the staff to develop a deeper knowledge of each pupil and how best to help them. Behaviour management plans and risk assessments are refined over time as pupils' needs and triggers are increasingly understood. These documents outline strategies that staff use to

help pupils. However, some information could be clearer so that staff can more easily adapt their practice. For example, EHC plan targets are not always broken down to clearly identify for all staff the small steps that pupils need to make towards the long-term outcomes stated in their EHC plan.

Trust and school leaders work closely together to ensure that the school continues to improve. They have an accurate understanding of the school and of where to focus their efforts. Safeguarding rightly remains a key priority for leaders. There is close monitoring and regular scrutiny by executive leaders. Documentation evidences a clearly targeted and strategic approach to bring about the change that this school needs. The school and the trust are taking the right steps to improve the school.

Additional support

The school benefits from the human resources and safeguarding support it receives from the local authority. This support includes help for the school in dealing with any staffing matters or complaints.

Priorities for further improvement

- At times, the pressures to respond to incidents mean that there is a reactive rather than a proactive approach. The school should continue to review and strengthen actions and systems to assure itself that what it is doing continues to have a positive impact and that it can develop an increasingly proactive approach to driving further improvement.
- A number of staff are concerned about the way that some incidents of poor behaviour are managed. On a few occasions, the approach to helping pupils who are increasingly dysregulated is not consistent. Leaders should redouble their efforts to work with staff so that pupils benefit from a consistent approach to supporting them in times of crisis.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Venn Academy Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for North Yorkshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Eleanor Belfield
His Majesty's Inspector