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Anita Cameron
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Dear Ms Cameron

Urgent inspection of Birtenshaw

Following my visit with Ian Hardman, His Majesty's Inspector, to the school on 28 February 2024, 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 was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the school and the effectiveness of leadership and management at the school (including governance).

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 you, other senior leaders, groups of staff and pupils. We also held discussions with executive leaders from the Birtenshaw Group and a member of the governing body. We spoke with a local authority representative.

We conducted a tour of the school site, visited lessons and observed pupils at breaktimes and lunchtimes. We reviewed behaviour and attendance records and considered curriculum documents, including pupils' work, relating to developing pupils' welfare and well-being.

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

Safeguarding is effective

Main findings

The school has established a strong culture of safeguarding. This helps pupils to feel safe and happy. All pupils at the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school understands the possible increased vulnerability associated with pupils' SEND. Supportive relationships between pupils and staff help to ensure that any concerns about pupils' welfare are identified quickly and dealt with effectively.

The school has made sure that several leaders have completed appropriate safer recruitment training. As a result, leaders understand the recruitment procedures required to employ staff who are appropriate to work with pupils. Furthermore, leaders understand the importance of the checks that are required before staff work at the school. These checks include ensuring that staff have the right to work in the UK and that they have a satisfactory enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check. The single central record is compliant.

The school provides a range of safeguarding training for staff. This includes training during a formal induction period for new staff, and ongoing training and supervision for established staff. As a result, leaders and staff understand their duties in relation to keeping children safe. Staff know how to identify and manage safeguarding concerns effectively.

The school keeps detailed records about any concerns that pupils or their families have and any risks that they may face. When required, these concerns are escalated to other appropriate agencies promptly. The school is tenacious in its approach to ensuring that pupils and their families receive the support that they need to stay safe. For example, it monitors pupils' safeguarding records regularly. This helps the school to identify and act on any emerging concerns early. For example, by providing bespoke support to pupils through the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum.

The curriculum provides pupils with many opportunities to learn how to stay safe. For example, pupils learn how to walk safely around the local community, how to be safe when playing or working online and how to make and maintain healthy relationships. Alongside the well-designed PSHE curriculum, pupils receive suitable relationships and sex education and health education in a considered way. This further enhances pupils' ability to keep themselves safe.

There is a consistent and coherent approach to the management of pupils' behaviour across the school. Pupils' individual behaviour profiles make clear to staff the possible triggers for, and likely supportive strategies to improve, pupils' behaviour. Staff are well trained in the appropriate use of physical restraint. They understand the importance of prioritising distraction and de-escalation techniques whenever possible. The school keeps detailed written records of behaviour incidents, including the use of restraint. Parents and carers are kept informed and involved with regards to their child's behaviour.

The school has ensured that sufficient staff are deployed to support pupils' behaviour and SEND. During lessons, pupils respond well to staff's instructions. Well-established routines help to maintain a calm learning environment. This extends to social times, and lunchtimes. Transitions to social times and back to classrooms are well managed. This helps to ensure a smooth start to lessons.

The school has established robust procedures to maintain the safety of pupils who are absent. Staff call parents promptly when pupils do not arrive on site. When pupils are absent for extended periods, welfare calls are made to parents to offer support. If required, social workers are kept in regular contact to check that pupils are safe.

Those responsible for governance, including senior leaders in the Birtenshaw Group, keep a watchful eye on the work of the school and they fully understand their duties. They offer appropriate support and challenge to leaders. This includes checking that recruitment procedures are followed diligently, and that the safeguarding policy is being implemented effectively. Staff reported that leaders are available and supportive. Formal and informal supervision, for instance as part of morning briefings, provides regular opportunities for staff to work together to help meet pupils' needs.

Additional support

The school benefits from the support provided by the Birtenshaw Group. This support offers additional expertise and capacity. Moreover, this support provides a strong oversight of the school's safeguarding policy and practice.

The school works hand in hand with a range of internal and external specialists. These colleagues help staff to identify, assess and meet pupils' emerging and changing SEND, and any concerns about pupils' well-being, well.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of governors, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Bolton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Adam Sproston
His Majesty's Inspector