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5 January 2016

Mrs Helen Round
Principal
Oasis Academy Fir Vale
Owler Lane
Sheffield
S4 8GA

Dear Mrs Round

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Oasis Academy Fir Vale

Following my visit with Chris Keeler, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 11 December 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out at the request of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector due to a number of complaints made to Ofsted, expressing concern about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and aspects of behaviour and welfare of pupils at the academy.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. Inspectors met with you, senior leaders, teachers, pupils and the regional director of the academy trust. A phone call was held with a representative of the local authority who is also a member of the local academy council. Attendance records and policies and procedures relating to behaviour management were scrutinised.

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

The academy's safeguarding arrangements do not meet requirements.

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action to improve behaviour and secure consistently positive attitudes to learning.

Context

Oasis Academy Fir Vale opened as a new school in September 2014. There are 255 pupils on roll at the academy. The proportion of pupils who join and leave the academy other than at the usual times is above average. The vast majority of pupils are of minority ethnic heritage, and most speak English as an additional language. Nearly half of all pupils attending the academy are known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium funding. One fifth of pupils, almost twice the national average, have been identified as requiring support for a disability or special educational need. The number of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is below the national average. There has been considerable turbulence in staffing at every level since the academy opened. At the time of the visit, three long-term supply teachers were in post. A new Principal, the third since the academy opened, was appointed at the start of September and a new deputy Principal took up post this half term.

Standards of attainment at the academy are very low. Children enter the Reception class with language, communication and other skills that are below those typically seen for their age and are not making rapid enough progress to enable them to enter Year 1 with the skills they need. In 2015, only 4% of pupils achieved the expected standard in the Year 1 check on phonics (the sounds that letters make). Pupils in Year 2 attained very low levels in reading, writing and mathematics. Year 6 pupils attained levels around three years behind their peers nationally last year, in reading, writing and mathematics and, as a consequence, are not well prepared to start secondary school.

Attendance rates are of serious concern. Absence is four times the national average. Over one quarter of all pupils are persistently absent, meaning that the proportion of pupils regularly absent is 10 times greater than is found in primary schools nationally.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Together with the new regional director for the academy trust, you have accurately identified that much work needs to be done to ensure that the academy's work to safeguard pupils is fully effective, and that pupils learn appropriate behaviours to enable them to achieve well. You have made plans to improve all areas of the academy's practice but as these plans are very new, they have not had sufficient impact on raising the standard of education, behaviour and safety in the academy.

Safeguarding policies are provided by the academy trust. Leaders and staff at the academy have insufficiently interpreted these policies to make them relevant to Oasis Academy Fir Vale. Leaders have responded to safeguarding issues in line with the trust's policy, but the academy has not involved parents so that they understand the work it does to safeguard pupils. The academy's work to teach pupils how to keep safe is not yet effective. Pupils understand bullying in its various forms but do

not understand how to protect themselves from extreme views, or how to keep safe when they are out in the community. Leaders work with the local authority to establish the whereabouts of pupils who are missing from the academy for substantial periods of time, but procedures for identifying when referrals should be made are unclear.

Many pupils arrive late to the academy, delaying a prompt start to lessons. Recently, leaders have made some impact on reducing the frequency of single-day absences because staff phone parents or make home visits to establish where pupils are. Leaders have also introduced rewards for pupils with full attendance, including certificates and vouchers, but despite this, too many pupils are missing school every day and attendance at the academy remains poor. This poor attendance is having a detrimental impact on pupils' learning.

Staff responsible for overseeing safeguarding at the academy have received appropriate training and all staff have been trained in basic child protection procedures. At the time of this visit, the single central register did not contain details of all adults who are regular visitors to the academy. Leaders responsible for appointing new staff are trained in safe recruitment practices but recruitment to the academy has been challenging, resulting in some staff being deployed from supply agencies. The constant change in staff at all levels has contributed to considerable inconsistency in the approach to behaviour management and to keeping pupils safe.

In the early years, children, particularly boys, are very physical with each other, often play-fighting and tugging each other to the ground during outdoor activity. This behaviour is not always checked by additional adults. Teachers in the early years are not providing activities that are appropriately matched to the stage of development of children at the academy, leading to most children being unable to concentrate, looking around and sometimes simply leaving the area where teaching is taking place.

There are many occasions in lessons at Key Stages 1 and 2 when pupils do not exhibit positive behaviour. Teachers do not follow the behaviour management system robustly and pupils take advantage of this. As a result, attitudes to learning are very inconsistent from class to class, leading to low-level disruptive behaviour being the norm in most classes. In several classes, teachers' low expectations of the work that pupils will do are contributing to poor progress in learning. On occasion, inappropriate behaviour is not checked by teachers and some pupils are calling out or walking out of lessons without permission from the teacher. Some pupils are regularly removed from class and taken to other areas in the academy to calm down. Adults supervise pupils during these withdrawal periods but it is not clear how pupils are learning to better manage their behaviour through these absences from lessons. Classes that are not in use are locked so that pupils cannot return to them unsupervised.

Pupils play safely at lunchtime and playtime due to the high level of adult supervision present at all times. Leaders make use of the pupil premium funding to employ specialist coaches and play leaders to help pupils to play together and socialise at breaktimes. However, there is a heightened sense of excitement during breaktimes and pupils regularly fail to respond to adult direction, running off or failing to wait in line. This is as a result of wavering expectations of staff and inconsistent consequences for pupils when they do not follow instructions and routines.

As a result of some serious breaches of behaviour, there is a higher number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions at the academy than is normally seen in a primary school. However, pupils report that, although there is some bullying at the academy, it is suitably dealt with by teachers. They say that fighting among pupils does occur but that adults keep them safe. Pupils explained that swearing in their home language often goes unchecked and that talking when the teacher is talking, or calling out, is normal behaviour at the academy. Older pupils understand the academy system for rewarding good behaviour and know that if they are good they will get 'treat time' at the end of each day.

External support

Oasis Academy Trust has faced considerable challenge in the initial organisation and appropriate staffing of the academy. As a result, the trust has not been effective in supporting the academy to provide a good standard of education for pupils. However, the trust and local academy council have a clear understanding of the issues facing Oasis Academy Fir Vale and accurately identify its inadequacies. In response, they have appointed a new deputy Principal from another Oasis academy. The new regional director of the trust is now present in the academy every week, challenging and supporting academy leaders with a renewed focus to improve teaching and learning for pupils.

Priorities for further improvement

To rapidly improve behaviour at the academy by:

- improving teachers' delivery of the curriculum so that it appropriately meets the academic and social needs of pupils at the academy
- ensuring that all staff consistently apply agreed behaviour management systems
- improving leaders' work with parents and pupils to establish crystal-clear expectations of behaviour
- improving support to pupils who are having difficulty managing their behaviour.

To urgently guarantee effective safeguarding of pupils by:

- swiftly engaging with parents, pupils and external agencies to ensure pupils' regular attendance at the academy
- ensuring all policies and procedures are effectively guiding safeguarding practices at Oasis Academy Fir Vale and that parents understand procedures to ensure the safety of pupils.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Oasis Academy Trust, the Secretary of State for Education, the Director of Children's Services for Sheffield and as below. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Butcher
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc Chair of the Academy Council