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Ms Linda Buchanan
Executive Headteacher
Ridgewell Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Church Lane
Ridgewell
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CO9 4SA

Dear Ms Buchanan

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Ridgewell Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 3 May 2017, 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 because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and the impact on the personal development and welfare of pupils in the school.

Evidence

The inspector scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. The inspector met with the executive headteacher, the designated safeguarding leader, staff, pupils and two governors, one of whom was the chair of the governing body. A telephone call was held with a representative of the local authority.

During the inspection, the inspector took account of other relevant evidence gathered by the school in relation to safeguarding arrangements. A range of documents were scrutinised. These included the local authority statement of action, local authority safeguarding audits, minutes of governors' meetings and those of meetings of the strategic intervention board, attendance records and school improvement update letters to parents.

The inspector, together with the chair of the governing body, visited every class to observe pupils' attitudes to learning and behaviour during lessons. Together they considered the security of the site. The inspector observed pupils' behaviour during less structured times such as lunchtime.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Ridgewell Church of England Primary School is a much smaller than average primary school. The school currently provides education for 92 pupils. The school population includes a lower than average proportion of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who speak English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is just above the national average.

In September 2016, there was a change to the leadership structure of the school. Currently, there is a part-time executive headteacher who is also headteacher at Belchamp St Paul Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School. There are also two heads of school. The school is fully staffed and many staff have worked at the school for several years. There have been no new teaching or non-teaching appointments since the previous inspection in November 2016.

In November 2016, the school was judged to be inadequate and placed into special measures due to ineffective leadership of safeguarding practices. Consequently, this inspection focused on the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and the impact of leaders' work to improve pupils' personal development and welfare.

Main findings

Since the inspection in November, you have wasted no time in ensuring that appropriate action has been taken to improve safeguarding processes and procedures highlighted in the school report. You have received intensive support from the local authority and have taken robust action to ensure that safeguarding is now effective.

Records of the recruitment of staff are complete and up to date. You have carried out the recommendations following the local authority personnel review and all aspects of safer recruitment are now fully in place.

You have ensured that all staff have now received effective safeguarding training and some have also received appropriate first-aid training. You have rightly put in place an ongoing programme of updates for all staff on safeguarding issues, which include the government's 'Prevent' duty.

The designated safeguarding leader has implemented a more effective system for logging child protection concerns which ensure that responses are timely and focused on the needs of the child. You have also rightly centralised all documentation and records around child protection and behaviour issues which ensures that no information is missed. There is still some additional work required to ensure that records are comprehensive and used effectively.

Governors have recognised and acted on the issues raised in the previous section 5 inspection. The local authority has put in place a strategic intervention board to further increase the capacity of the governing body. Consequently, at the point of my visit, the recommended review of governance had not taken place. Governors are still reliant on working with the local authority to ensure that best safeguarding practice is fully in place, especially in ensuring that relevant policies are updated to reflect the improved practice that exists within the school.

However, I saw much evidence that governors are now holding school leaders more to account for the safety and well-being of pupils. Governors visit the school regularly to check for themselves the quality of safeguarding arrangements. Governors are asking pertinent questions about safeguarding and becoming increasingly knowledgeable about their specific roles and responsibilities. Safeguarding is now a standard agenda item in governors' meetings so that they can hold you more to account for the safety of pupils. The chair of the governing body also updates parents with the progress the school is making to address the areas for improvement.

Leaders have ensured that staff are focused on improving the culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff speak highly of the recent changes. Teachers and non-teachers are better trained and more able to identify potential safeguarding concerns. These adults receive updates in regular staff meetings so they can remain up to date with statutory guidance. However, the culture of reporting concerns swiftly, and using the forms you require, is new. Some staff require reminders to ensure that they fully understand the reasons why they follow your school's policy and the crucial role they have in safeguarding pupils.

Pupils spoken with during this inspection explained how staff help them to feel safe at Ridgewell. They spoke articulately about practical safety aspects such as fire drills and demonstrated a good understanding of how and why these are required. Pupils appreciate activities in class where they discuss how to develop friendships and deal sensitively with each other's feelings and emotions.

Pupils have an understanding of e-safety that is appropriate for their age. Following staff and parents attending a recent training event on the subject of e-safety, you now have plans in place to educate pupils further in this important aspect of keeping safe.

You are currently reviewing the school's personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum, because you have identified that it is not fully meeting the needs of your pupils in preparing them well for life in modern Britain. Years 5 and 6 pupils told me how much they enjoy their new lessons and value the fact that they can discuss these issues openly and in a supportive environment. One pupil commented that 'there are no "put downs" when we discuss friendship issues'.

You are rightly proud of the behaviour of pupils at Ridgewell. They typically behave well and are respectful and considerate. Pupils are adamant that there is no bullying at the school and are confident that they are listened to if they have concerns. Pupils could identify an adult whom they would be happy to speak to if they were worried.

You now place great importance on pupils attending regularly. Pupils' attendance is currently in line with national averages. You have procedures in place that are followed if a pupil's attendance falls below your high expectations. School evidence shows that governors request information regarding attendance and ask leaders relevant questions about the effective work of staff to ensure that pupils attend well.

External support

The school currently relies heavily on the support of the local authority which has set up a strategic interim board to ensure that the local authority statement of action is a key focus for all governors, leaders and staff. This additional support is proving effective because safeguarding arrangements are now fit for purpose.

The school has received two external audits from the local authority to improve the practices and process around employment and child protection. School leaders have put in place the recommendations swiftly so that pupils are kept safe.

The school is due to become an academy in autumn 2017.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that leaders review the impact of the PSHE curriculum on the personal development and welfare of pupils.
- Ensure that governors now develop a systematic approach to reviewing all policies around safeguarding so that they are in line with the improved practice at the school.
- Record all relevant information on child protection records so that leaders continue to demonstrate that outcomes focus on the best interest for the child.
- Continue to develop a strong culture of safeguarding so that all staff fully understand their role in child protection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Chelmsford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector