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Susan Trigger
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Dear Mrs Trigger

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Bitterne Park School

Following my visit with Suzanne Richards, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 10 and 11 July 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 aspects of the effectiveness of leadership and management in the school, including governance.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. Inspectors toured the school, observing pupils' behaviour and the arrangements to keep them safe. Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, teachers, groups of pupils, parents, governors, and representatives of the local authority. The lead inspector conducted a phone conversation with the chair of the governing body.

Inspectors also reviewed minutes of governors' meetings, headteacher's reports, reports of visits to the school by local authority representatives and relevant curriculum documents. Inspectors also examined a wide range of information about attendance and other indicators of pupils' well-being and safety.

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

safeguarding is effective.

Context

Bitterne Park School is a larger-than-average school with 1,616 pupils on roll. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is broadly average and the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is also broadly average; the proportion of disadvantaged pupils is broadly average; there are above-average proportions of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in all categories of need. The school is fully staffed and has a widely distributed senior leadership team. The school is a lead member of the Southampton Riverside Federation. Members of the leadership team take on secondments in other schools across the city.

Main findings

The arrangements for safeguarding were narrowly judged to be effective. Positively, inspectors found great commitment to pupils' well-being and welfare on the part of senior leaders and heads of year as well as pastoral support managers. For example, the compassion for and care of vulnerable pupils in the additionally resourced provision are exemplary. Other staff work effectively, sensitively and carefully with pupils on the integrated studies programme. Inspectors also found a wide range of activities designed to support pupils who had disclosed personal challenges in their lives. Leaders require a minority of other pupils to engage in these or similar activities. Leaders take decisive action of this sort if pupils' behaviour suggests that they are vulnerable, at risk, or a danger to themselves or others.

Pupils conduct themselves well, for the most part, in lessons, around the school and at lunchtimes and breaktimes. They are courteous to each other and staff. They are polite to visitors. Pupils generally respect the many differences they have, including differences in backgrounds and beliefs. Leaders' work to promote gender diversity and equality is liked by pupils. Pupils told inspectors that the use of the word 'gay' as a term of abuse stopped almost as soon as the school 'put up Stonewall posters', challenging negative attitudes to homosexuality. Regrettably, however, governors have not published the required equality objectives on the school's website.

Leaders and parents recognise the potential threat to pupils' well-being and good mental health posed by social media. Pupils told inspectors that they have received education and training about how to stay safe online, how to protect their identity, how to report anyone trying to groom them online and the dangers of engagement with particularly unpleasant and highly focused chat rooms. Parents and pupils gave several examples of occasions when leaders had dealt decisively with social-media-driven incidents that had spilled over into school.

Leaders pay due attention to health and safety on the site and have, for example, safeguarded the pupils during the extensive and ongoing building works. They have initiated and tested a robust 'lockdown' procedure. Staff supervision is sufficient to

ensure that pupils largely remain safe on the complex site.

Leaders use two separate software systems for tracking incidents. One is used by classroom teachers to record any incidence of behaviour, positive or negative. This system supports the school's admirable ambition to celebrate success and formally note personal achievements. It also enables leaders to react swiftly to, and tackle effectively, poor or disruptive behaviour. The other system is used, mainly by pastoral care staff, to note any incidents which might signal a wider issue of child protection or safeguarding. Such examples include teachers' well-founded concerns that a pupil is showing symptoms of vulnerability, any pupil disclosures, and instances of pupils' behaviour which exceed the thresholds staff use to note events in the first system. The system sensibly draws in absence data from the school's own information management system. It is, therefore, easy to spot problem absence here and match it with other information about a pupil.

Conversely, staff do not apply a shared understanding of the thresholds for each system. Similarly, the point at which senior leaders recognise a threshold has been reached and intervene accordingly is not expressed precisely enough to ensure necessary consistency across the school. Inspectors were clear, however, that senior leaders make the right referrals to the most appropriate agency once they are aware of the urgency or intensity of a pupil's specific needs.

The school has adopted the city council's child protection policy. Leaders have not, though, judiciously adapted this to the specific context of Bitterne Park School. Thus, the child protection policy can only be judged to meet minimal requirements. Inspectors found very limited evidence that governors had directed leaders to strengthen child protection policies, practices and procedures. However, governors rightly created a sub-committee to overview safeguarding in February 2017, recognising the need to tighten these areas of the school's work. This action is very recent so it is too early to see the impact of the new committee's work. Although administrative staff ensure that the checks made on anyone wishing to work at or volunteer at the school meet requirements, leaders, including governors, do not routinely evaluate the quality of this work.

Representatives of the city council provided clear evidence that they had challenged the headteacher and governors over the policy framework for safeguarding and child protection in December 2015. Inspectors agree that not all mandatory policies and procedures meet requirements and are available on the website. The school was visited by a representative of the local authority in November 2016. His report states, 'Leaders are aware that not all aspects of the website are compliant with requirements...'. Neither the governors nor the headteacher have acted decisively since then to address this shortcoming.

Inspectors were presented with evidence of many things that the school is 'doing' to safeguard pupils and promote their mental health and well-being. Inspectors found little evidence of a strategic approach to reviewing all the effort and each activity.

Leaders could not say which intervention or action is most effective, except, in their opinion, the work of the part-time mental health nurse. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a root and stem evaluation of all the provision to see what works best.

Inspectors were taken aback by the frequency with which pupils reported that they had been the victims of bullying. This is despite information presented by leaders that, over time, incidents of bullying in school are rare. A few of the parents who met the lead inspector disclosed that both historically and at the present time, their children had experienced bullying or 'one-off' extremely unpleasant behaviours. A group of teachers commented that all of them were aware of pupils who had been bullied or had witnessed bullying themselves. Only two thirds of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's confidential online survey, agreed or strongly agreed that, 'the school deals effectively with bullying'. Leaders were able to show, though, strong evidence that when bullying is detected or brought to their attention, they deal with it effectively. Sadly, despite the school's efforts, the impact of its work on bullying is not changing a minority of pupils' behaviour. They are not hearing powerful messages about the harmful and destructive nature of their actions. As a matter for immediate action, therefore, a holistic review of the school's anti-bullying work is required.

On balance, inspectors judged the pupils to be safe while at school. Inspectors remain concerned that pupils may still be at risk at home, online and in relationships. For example, a few pupils told inspectors they had chosen not to disclose bullying to teachers. It is a matter of concern that not all staff had read, at the time of the inspection, part 1 of 'Keeping children safe in education' (2016), which is the government's minimal requirement for safeguarding training. The designated lead for safeguarding rectified this situation immediately. This was not just so that the school could be judged to be compliant with requirements. It is so that every teacher might be better able to spot the signs of potential abuse or exploitation.

In addition to those stronger aspects of the school's safeguarding and child protection activity cited above, there is other effective and successful practice. For example, the designated safeguarding lead has an imaginative approach to training staff, which they appreciate. He understands fully those aspects of the policy framework for the school which need to improve, and he is totally committed to ensuring the well-being and safety of all. Heads of year and pastoral leaders share this passion for safeguarding pupils, even though there is some variability in the way they exercise their duties. All say they know their pupils well but some were unaware of some issues facing a minority of pupils uncovered by inspectors.

Leaders have sought to create a curriculum that provides age-appropriate learning opportunities for pupils on matters of well-being and safeguarding. Notably, the middle leader responsible for curriculum leadership of religious studies, the school's contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, the school's

contribution to personal, social, health and economic education, and the school's assembly programme, has created an effective curriculum plan for the whole school. Regrettably, this leader does not have sufficient time to ensure that this well-intentioned programme is delivered to the same degree of effectiveness in all tutor groups. Other leaders do not routinely check the quality of this provision either. Leaders, therefore, do not have a clear view about the quality of this element of the curriculum, or the extent to which it has a positive impact on pupils' behaviour, personal development and welfare.

External support

Senior leaders have built successful working partnerships with mainly charitable organisations such as Young Minds, The Saints Foundation, No Limits and an education welfare officer who deals with attendance problems. Many pupils have been signposted to relevant services on an identified-needs basis. The school works with Southampton City Council's multi-agency support hub when pupils' needs or behaviour meet this body's thresholds. When available, the school refers the most vulnerable pupils to the statutory Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

Priorities for further improvement

- Urgently review, amend, update and republish all policies and procedures relating to safeguarding, child protection, behaviour and bullying.
- Critically evaluate and strengthen the quality and effectiveness of governors' oversight of safeguarding and child protection activity.
- Review the procedure for evaluating the quality of provision and delivery of personal, social, health and economic education and its impact on pupils' personal development.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector