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Ms Laura Astarita
Fern House School
Keswick Drive
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Dear Ms Astarita

No formal designation inspection of Fern House School

Following my visit, with Sam Hainey, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 19 to 20 June 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. Inspectors also scrutinised documentation including policies and minutes of meetings relating to behaviour management and attendance. We met with you, senior leaders, representatives from the local governing board and the trustees, and with a group of staff. We visited all classes in the school. We observed pupils at the start and finish of the school day and spoke to pupils formally and informally. I spoke on the telephone to representatives from the local authority's multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and to a senior representative from the local authority children's service.

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

safeguarding is effective.

Context

Fern House School is a mixed special school for pupils with complex social, emotional and mental health needs. It opened in November 2017 as a sponsored academy school and as part of the Enfield Learning Trust. There are currently 49 pupils enrolled at the school. All pupils have an education, health and care plan and almost all are eligible for pupil premium funding.

Over the past two years, your school has experienced significant change in its leadership. You were appointed as headteacher in April 2018 and your current leadership team has only been in place since September 2018.

Safeguarding arrangements

Leaders bring a mixture of skills and experience to their safeguarding roles. You know your pupils well and are aware of the risks and vulnerabilities that they encounter in their daily lives.

School records show that safeguarding policies are adequately implemented. Leaders carry out all necessary pre-employment checks before adults start working at the school. They make sure that pupils understand how to stay safe at all times of the school day, including when outside of the classroom. Leaders also make sure that pupils understand how to stay safe during emergencies such as fire drills and lock downs. Leaders seek the support and advice of external agencies as required.

Pupils told us that adults supervise them well and make sure that they are safe. They know they can speak to a trusted adult if they are worried. Leaders work closely with parents and carers to raise awareness of the risks that their children may encounter, including staying safe online and awareness of knife crime. Annual reviews show that parents recognise improvements in their children's ability to act safely.

Record-keeping is of variable quality. Leaders keep accounts of referrals, incidents and actions taken. However, records are not consistently detailed or clear enough to understand the decisions that were taken and their impact.

Those responsible for safeguarding regularly share information about individual pupils and the concerns raised. However, they rely too much on informal conversations rather than regular, systematic, recorded meetings.

The management of pupils' behaviour

Leaders have developed an agreed approach to behaviour management. The majority of staff have been trained and more training is planned. Staff appreciate the training that they have received. They told me that it was of good quality and it has helped with improving their practice. Adults support pupils well if they present with challenging and potentially unsafe behaviour.

Other changes are also helping to improve pupils' behaviour. For example, you altered the timetables to reduce unnecessary movement between lessons and support positive relationship building between adults and pupils. This change contributes to the calm and orderly atmosphere in lessons.

Since September, leaders have begun to consider how the curriculum can support pupils to develop positive behaviours. Personal, social and health education, sex and relationships education and the curriculum for e-safety include plans to help pupils improve their behaviour, build resilience and adopt positive attitudes.

Teachers model appreciation and care. They value pupils' work and show respect for the pupils and their environment. They make sure that classrooms and shared areas are tidy and well organised. Displays of work celebrate pupils' achievements. Books are kept tidy and well presented. We saw no examples of books that had been damaged or defaced.

Leaders' and teachers' actions to improve behaviour are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' learning. Since September, the number of serious incidents leading to fixed-term exclusions has reduced.

The behaviour policy is not consistently applied. For example, at the end of each session it is agreed practice for teachers and pupils to reflect on pupils' achievements and whether or not they have met their targets. On occasions, if pupils know that their work or behaviour has fallen short of expectations, they avoid having the conversation and facing the consequences. Teachers do not always challenge this. They miss valuable opportunities for pupils to comply with what is expected and to learn from the experience.

Adults do not always speak to pupils in a manner which helps them to learn the difference between familiar and formal forms of address. Terms such as 'mate' and 'sweetheart' do not further their understanding of when it is acceptable and when it is inappropriate to speak informally.

Adults treat pupils kindly and sensitively. Pupils do not all show the same respect to all adults, including those who are unfamiliar, or their peers. They can be rude and unkind in their choice of language and their behaviour. The behaviour of older pupils is not as positive as that of the younger ones.

Transitions are not always tightly managed. The day starts in a calm and orderly way. Pupils are warmly welcomed and there is a prompt start to learning. However, the transition between lunchtime and the afternoon lessons is too fluid. Inspectors observed pupils and staff still eating their lunch as the afternoon lessons were beginning.

Leadership and management

Leaders are passionate and ambitious about improving the life chances for young people. While they have a broad understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, they are aware of the need to develop their strategic school improvement. New appointments to the leadership team have brought expertise

and further improvements to the curriculum design and organisation. These changes are having a positive impact on behaviour and learning.

Trust leaders are supportive of the school leaders, particularly in their work to improve teaching and behaviour. Trustees and governors have taken swift action to further improve safeguarding. The installation of new perimeter fencing has improved site security. Steps to improve access management and strengthen staff vigilance have both had a positive impact on safeguarding practice.

Leaders are developing the curriculum so that it supports pupils' development academically, socially and emotionally. It is early days and while signs are positive, it is too soon to evaluate fully the impact of those changes. Leaders recognise there is more work to do on systems for assessing pupils' progress.

Leaders keep records of incidents and accidents. In some cases, these are very detailed. However, leaders do not analyse the information, learn from it and use it as a tool for school improvement.

Trust leaders are not sufficiently robust in their monitoring and oversight of safeguarding and behaviour. They do not test out trends and patterns well enough to challenge leaders to improve their practice.

External support

Leaders work closely with the local authority multi-agency safeguarding team. They also receive support and take advice from the designated officer.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that all record-keeping is meticulously maintained and routinely checked.
- Deeply analyse information to further support school improvement plans.
- Refine the behaviour for learning policy so that pupils learn how to interact respectfully and kindly with adults and among themselves, including in unfamiliar situations.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Enfield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jane Moon
Her Majesty's Inspector