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Mr S Harris
Interim Headteacher
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Dear Mr Harris

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Mayfield School

Following my visit to your school on 13 November 2018 with Kim Ellis, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in May 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, my colleague and I held meetings with you, the interim associate head of school and the executive headteacher of Mayfield's 'school support partner'. We met with senior leaders and groups of staff, including teachers, teaching assistants and administrative staff. I spoke to the school's 'priority partner' – the person who provides support brokered by the local authority (LA). We visited lessons to look at how well pupils were being kept safe and how effectively behaviour was managed. We observed pupils' arrival at school and also observed pupils at breaktime and lunchtime, including the time pupils spent outside. We talked to pupils in lessons and at social times, and to a small number of parents. A range of documents were scrutinised. The LA's statement of action and the school's action plan were evaluated.

This inspection focused mainly on the first, fourth and fifth areas for improvement that were identified at the section 5 inspection – those relating to safeguarding, including the management of behaviour and attendance – as these were the most urgent areas that the school needed to focus on.

Context

The substantive headteacher retired in July. You took over as interim headteacher at this point, along with an interim associate head of school.

Four teachers and four teaching assistants left the school at the end of the summer term, and one teacher joined in September. Of the current staff, 13 are on temporary or fixed-term contracts and another 24 are agency staff.

Mayfield is working with another local special school – its 'school support partner' – whose leaders and staff are providing a range of support and training.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

On appointment, you quickly recognised the extent of the weaknesses in the school and developed clear plans to put these right. You and the interim associate head of school have taken swift and effective action on a range of issues. You rightly prioritised the actions that related to safeguarding, health and safety and pupils' well-being. These actions have had a clear impact in a short space of time. As a result, the school is a safer place for pupils of all ages.

The interim associate head of school is the new designated safeguarding lead (DSL). She has taken clear and decisive leadership of safeguarding. Roles and responsibilities for the lead and assistant DSLs have been clarified. Concerns and incidents are systematically recorded by teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) in an electronic system. I looked at a sample of recorded concerns during the inspection and I could easily see what action had been taken, by whom and when. Sensibly, lunchtime supervisors continue to record their concerns in paper format, which DSLs receive immediately from them.

Crucially, you arranged intensive safeguarding training for staff over four days – one in July and three in September. Staff in all different roles – teachers, TAs, lunchtime supervisors, site and administrative staff – attended relevant workshops. This training has had a clear impact on staff's understanding of a range of safeguarding issues. Staff emphasised to us that they now understand that safeguarding 'really is everyone's responsibility'. Because of this training and better communication from leaders, staff see the point of raising concerns, and therefore do. The staff to whom we spoke during the inspection were keen to emphasise how they are now told by leaders what action has been taken when they have expressed a concern about a pupil and what they need to do themselves.

The school has adopted the local authority's safeguarding policy. While this covers most of the main areas needed, it is too generic for this specialist provision. It needs to be adapted to reflect fully the ways in which aspects of pupils' special needs can make them more vulnerable to safeguarding concerns, alongside the actions the school is taking to mitigate these vulnerabilities.

Each class now has an extensive 'induction profile' which gives important information about the pupils to new staff. These profiles highlight particular needs in different situations, for example when evacuating the building because of fire, medical needs and allergies, and pupils' behaviour. Staff showed a good knowledge of these risk assessments and what they needed to do as a result of the information contained within them.

The new 'care profiles' for pupils who have the most complex needs are detailed and very useful. They cover important areas of pupils' day-to-day lives, including personal care, eating and drinking and 'manual handling' (for example moving pupils from wheelchairs into hoists). Parents and carers have contributed to their completion. These profiles are used by staff to check pupils' needs in different situations. Given the large number of temporary staff, some of whom are new to the classes they are working with, this information is extremely valuable and is making an important contribution to pupils' safety, care and dignity. Manual handling training has taken place for staff who need it. This has made staff understand better how important it is to move pupils well and safely and communicate properly with pupils about what is happening to them when they are moved around.

You and the interim associate head of school have set a clear direction for the management of behaviour, focused on staff understanding that different behaviours are a form of communication. Staff have become more reflective as a result of this direction. I saw two good examples during the inspection of staff showing patience and understanding when pupils found transition from one place to the next difficult, taking time to talk to pupils and give them space to make their own decisions. The use of restrictive physical intervention is minimal. When it is used, it is recorded properly and the reasons for its use are analysed. Classroom displays promote respect for and tolerance towards each other. You have planned an extensive communication audit, the intention of which is to lead to a clear communication strategy for every pupil.

Systems to follow up on pupils' absence, which were previously lacking, are now in place. Senior leaders meet weekly to discuss attendance and to plan actions. 'Safe and well' visits for pupils who are not attending have been reinstated. Appropriate attention is paid to the links between non-attendance and safeguarding. The initial impact of these actions is showing in the primary phase, where attendance has risen by 3% this term. The impact on actual attendance is less clear in the secondary phase but the systems, processes and emphasis on safeguarding are all much better than they were.

You have paid close attention to the safety and suitability of the school site. Rightly, at the end of the summer term you decided to close the early years class, because you considered that the physical environment was unsafe. You worked closely with the LA to implement this decision and to ensure that children were suitably placed in the school or elsewhere. You also arranged for a carefully designed fence to be put into the secondary playground to make the area safer.

During the inspection, arrival and departure of pupils was safely organised and managed on the secondary site, with evidence of good routines in place. You have rearranged the way in which buses arrive on to the primary site, which is a clear improvement on previous arrangements. However, the extent to which drivers comply with the new expectations still requires some attention.

Changes to lunchtime routines at the primary site have reduced the number of pupils eating at any one time, which staff say has made the lunchtime calmer and more sociable for all. Pupils eat pleasantly together, with help where needed but with an emphasis on independence. Helpful place mats give staff details about pupils' likes and dislikes and how best to help them, but not all classes had their mats on the tables. During the inspection, outside supervision was suitable, and pupils were enjoying the games being led by staff. The outside space has little for pupils to do independently, an aspect that you and the deputy headteacher in charge of primary provision have plans to improve imminently.

At lunchtime on the secondary site, pupils selected their own food, were suitably independent and cooperated well with each other. There were clear routines in place and behaviour was good. Lunchtime for pupils who have most complex needs was calm. Pupils received appropriate assistance with eating and were helped to be independent where possible. On the playground, supervision by adults was vigilant.

As well as producing a post-Ofsted action plan to address the most urgent issues, you are thinking beyond this and have a clear school development plan which focuses on improving teaching, learning and outcomes for pupils. Importantly, you have clarified the roles of the senior leaders, and started to establish clear lines of accountability. Leaders know what they are responsible for and have started to take action to improve their respective areas. Until now there have been no systems for staff appraisal. You have taken the initial steps to put appraisal in place.

Staff appreciate the way in which you and the interim associate head of school have already got to know them and the pupils on both sites. The staff to whom we spoke during the inspection said that they can make suggestions, put forward ideas that they want to try, or raise concerns, and that this communication is encouraged. Staff are therefore feeling motivated and well supported and are working hard to secure the necessary improvements.

You have made a significant and successful effort to engage with parents and carers. Around 100 parents attended an initial meeting at the school in the summer term and 150 attended a second meeting in September. The small number of parents we spoke to during the inspection were very pleased to have been properly consulted about their children's education, and to be asked to participate in making decisions. Staff are pleased with the greater parental engagement but rightly recognise that there is more to do to make parents a full part of their children's education.

The school faces serious challenges in terms of budget overspend and staffing. You are working closely with the LA to address the budgetary issues and are working hard to recruit suitable permanent staff.

There have been two governing body meetings since the inspection in May that were quorate for part of the time, allowing some policies to be ratified. An interim executive board (IEB) has just been formed and the first meeting is imminent.

The support provided by the school's priority partner, brokered by the LA, is supportive and challenging. She knows the school well and is focusing carefully on the areas that require the most improvement, while helping to develop the capacity of substantive leaders. Mayfield is also benefiting from very good support and training from the executive headteacher and different staff from its school support partner.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King
Her Majesty's Inspector