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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231

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Ms Sabrina Hobbs
Principal
Severndale Specialist Academy
Woodcote Way
Monkmoor
Shrewsbury
Shropshire
SY2 5SH

Dear Ms Hobbs

No formal designation inspection of Severndale Specialist Academy

Following my visit with Lesley Yates Her Majesty's Inspector to the school on 10 July 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. This inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for no formal designation (NFD) inspections.

The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and aspects of leadership and management at the school. Ofsted is aware that investigations relating to safeguarding at the school are being carried out by other agencies. These have had no impact on the inspection outcome.

We do not give graded judgements on NFD inspections. This visit has raised serious concerns about the effectiveness of the school's work to safeguard pupils and the oversight and scrutiny of leaders. Under normal circumstances, we would have immediately treated this NFD inspection as a full section 5 inspection. However, due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, I am recommending that the next inspection of this school is a section 5 inspection and is brought forward once routine inspection resumes.

Evidence

During the inspection, we scrutinised the school's single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We held meetings with the principal, senior leaders, and those with responsibility for safeguarding. We spoke with parents and staff, including drivers, escorts and

premises team members. We talked to the chair of the trustees and other trustees. We visited the 'Futures' provision for 16 to 25 years olds at Shrewsbury Colleges Group. Inspectors held a telephone conversation with senior leaders at Mary Webb School, where several pupils on roll at Severndale Specialist Academy are based.

We completed learning walks at the Monkmoor campus site and the 16- to 25-year-old provision. During these walks, we spoke with the staff about their safeguarding training and their understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities.

Various school documents were scrutinised and evaluated, including a range of policies, improvement plans, risk assessments and the minutes of meetings of the board of trustees. Information about pupils' behaviour, attendance and welfare were also analysed.

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

Safeguarding arrangements are not effective

Context

There are currently 407 pupils on roll at the school with a broad range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. These include speech, language and communication needs, physical disabilities, social and emotional difficulties and autistic spectrum conditions. The school operates a nursery provision at the Monkmoor campus site. The school's 16 to 25 provision at the local college caters for 48 students with moderate learning difficulties. The school also operates a satellite provision at a local secondary school, which offers provision for 31 pupils also with moderate learning difficulties.

Currently, and due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there are approximately 130 pupils in attendance across all provisions. Teachers provide daily remote learning sessions for pupils who are not attending school.

Main Findings

Pupils and students in this school are at risk of harm. The school's safeguarding policies and practice are not effective. Leaders, including trustees, and staff do not have a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of safeguarding. Consequently, there is inconsistency in how staff identify and address safeguarding issues.

Leaders have not successfully established and embedded a culture for keeping pupils safe. Policies and procedures are not effective in ensuring that all staff would raise relevant concerns and that these concerns would be appropriately investigated. Leaders are not confident in their ability to use school-based systems to analyse patterns of concerns over time. As a result, the risk of harm to pupils and students might go unnoticed.

Leaders have not ensured the school's current safeguarding policies and procedures reflect current national guidance. Consequently, staff have very little understanding of issues such as contextual safeguarding or child on child sexual violence and sexual harassment. This lack of awareness limits the staff's ability to support and develop the pupils' understanding of how to identify and deal with risks in their local communities.

The safeguarding policy contains very few references to the broad range of needs of the pupils at the school. For example, the policy does not identify the safeguarding implications for those children who do not use spoken words to share their worries and concerns. Staff do not get clear advice from the policy or training on how to deal with specific safeguarding concerns. Consequently, the school's procedures for dealing with safeguarding issues are disorganised and haphazard.

As a result of weak and ineffective self-evaluation, leaders have not identified the weaknesses in safeguarding policy and practice. Leaders are too reliant on external services to identify these weaknesses. They have not acted quickly or effectively to address or plan to address the failings identified at two recent local authority safeguarding audits. Leaders and trustees do not have the necessary safeguarding knowledge, understanding and expertise to implement, monitor and evaluate effective safeguarding procedures.

Trustees do not have the necessary skills and knowledge to hold leaders to account on the safeguarding systems and procedures at the school or to ensure that the school's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements. Trustees' systems for monitoring leaders' work and their impact are underdeveloped and inconsistent.

Despite having completed frequent safeguarding training, staff are not confident in implementing that training or the school's policies effectively. This means that staff do not have the necessary knowledge and understanding to be able to identify and then report concerns to relevant senior leaders. Leaders and trustees were aware of this but have not taken effective action to tackle this systemic weakness. Staff training logs are overcomplicated, meaning leaders cannot identify gaps in knowledge. Leaders rarely assess the impact and effectiveness of training, including for new staff. This includes systems for staff induction.

Designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) do not fully utilise systems for recording and monitoring safeguarding incidents. While the current online reporting system has been in the school for some time, very few DSLs are confident in its use. Leaders have recognised the need for training. However, this has not currently taken place, leaving DSLs unable to use the system successfully. This inability to use the school systems effectively and consistently has meant that not all safeguarding concerns and patterns of concerns are responded to. As a result, children and young people are at risk of harm.

The procedures for identifying who has safeguarding responsibility for children and young people attending the different settings are not effective and contribute to putting pupils at risk. For example, there are no fixed systems for how school leaders ensure that any concerns raised about students being educated on the site of the 16 to 25 provision are shared with DSLs. This disorganised arrangement means leaders cannot always identify or support those students at risk of harm.

Trustees and leaders have ensured that manual handling, personal behaviour and emergency evacuation plans are precise and provide the right protocols for all staff to follow. Leaders have ensured that thorough checks are in place for visitors and staff. Leaders make sure all required pre-employment checks are in place. However, initial risk assessments during the COVID-19 pandemic did not ensure that contact was made with all pupils frequently enough. Leaders are currently reviewing these risk assessments so they can ensure visual contact is made with all pupils weekly.

External support

Leaders are working with officers from the Shropshire Council safeguarding team, and education services, who have reviewed safeguarding arrangements in school. As a result, leaders have started to engage with systems to develop their safeguarding knowledge and processes.

Leaders have also commissioned regular health and safety support from Shropshire local authority.

Priorities for further improvement

- The current school policies and procedures do not accurately reflect national statutory guidance, such as Keeping Children Safe in Education 2019. Such aspects as contextual safeguarding and child on child sexual violence and sexual harassment do not appear in the policy. These omissions mean staff do not have a clear understanding of the potential risks to pupils in the community. Leaders need to ensure current policies, procedures and systems are in line with national statutory guidance so that the most current risks and strategies are well identified and shared. Leaders need to make sure staff have the knowledge, understanding and expertise to identify and report any concern no matter how minor.
- Trustees and those responsible for governance have not ensured the school's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements. They do not have the necessary skills and understanding to hold leaders to account. Trustees' checks on safeguarding systems are inconsistent. Trustees need to ensure they all have the most current understanding of statutory guidance, so they can hold leaders to account and ensure safeguarding systems and procedures are fit for purpose.
- Leaders have been over-reliant on external agencies to identify weaknesses in their safeguarding procedures and systems. Some leaders are working on addressing those areas for development identified by external agencies. However, they have not yet identified the transparent processes for evaluating their impact

on keeping children safe. Leaders do not communicate these plans throughout the school, to other leaders, trustees and staff. Leaders and trustees need to ensure they identify, implement and review effective systems for identifying and correcting weaknesses in safeguarding at the school.

- Leaders do not currently check on the effectiveness of training. Leaders do not know if all staff have a firm understanding of their safeguarding roles and responsibilities. While training happens frequently, leaders are not confident that all staff have accessed and understand the training. Consequently, staff do not have the necessary knowledge to carry out duties to identify risks, report concerns and keep children safe. Leaders need to identify a clear programme for training that reflects statutory guidance and check that all staff have a secure and tested understanding of training so that they can identify and report any safeguarding concerns.
- Leaders' record-keeping and ongoing monitoring of safeguarding concerns are not effective. Not all of the DSLs have completed the training to be able to use the school's online reporting software effectively. Consequently, leaders are not able to quickly analyse and review the information to spot any trends and patterns of concerns, neglect or abuse over time. Leaders need to make sure all DSLs understand school systems, to allow them to spot signs and patterns in safeguarding concerns more effectively.
- The shared safeguarding responsibility between the school and partnership providers is inconsistent. There are some examples of effective partnership systems with the local secondary school. However, this is not the case across all providers. Communication around the investigation of safeguarding concerns is not clear. All parties do not consistently share vital information. Leaders need to identify and regularly review safeguarding systems and responsibilities between partnership providers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the Director of Children's Services for Shropshire, the Education and Skills Funding Agency, the Regional School's Commissioner and the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Pollit
Her Majesty's Inspector