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16 December 2016

Mrs Jackie North
Headteacher
Benwick Primary School
High Street
Benwick
March
Cambridgeshire
PE15 0XA

Dear Mrs North

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Benwick Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 29 November 2016, 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.

Evidence

I scrutinised the school's single central record of checks on the suitability of staff to work with children. I looked at personnel files and a range of other documents relating to the recruitment of staff. I met with you, the assistant headteacher, a group of governors and a randomly selected group of pupils. I looked at a wide range of school documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. You took me on a tour of the school and I observed pupils in their classrooms throughout the school.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Since the last inspection in March 2014 the school has increased in size by the equivalent of an entire class of pupils. There are now 128 pupils on the school's roll, having risen from 97 at the time of the last inspection. An old 'mobile' classroom has been removed and replaced with a modern double-classroom unit to accommodate this growth.

This inspection was carried out with no notice in response to a qualifying complaint concerning the thoroughness and rigour of the school's approach to employing staff. The complaint alleged that the school failed to carry out checks that are required by law. Inspection evidence shows clearly that this is not the case. The school's approach to the safer recruitment of staff is both rigorous and robust and all statutory requirements are met.

You and the assistant headteacher have ensured that the school remains up to date with safeguarding legislation and guidance. The school's safeguarding policy is available on the school website and has been updated to reflect the changes to the statutory guidance 'Keeping children safe in education' that took effect in September 2016. As required, you have provided every member of staff with a copy of part one of the guidance and you keep a clear overview to check that no one has been missed.

The school's single central record of pre-employment checks is well kept and meets statutory requirements. You check the record every month to ensure that it is up to date and no information is missing. These checks are recorded on a simple overview sheet at the front of your file. This good practice is not a legal requirement but reflects the high importance that you place on fulfilling your safeguarding responsibilities.

Staff members' personnel files show an equally thorough approach. Files are detailed and well organised. I sampled a number of files at random and, in every case, the same stringent approach to recruitment had been employed. For example, files contain two good-quality references for every employee regardless of their role in the school. Every employee checked had completed a form to confirm that they are not disqualified from working with children themselves or by their association with someone who is barred from working with children.

You are the school's designated safeguarding lead and the assistant headteacher deputises in this role. You have both received appropriate training to enable you to fulfil the role effectively and you work closely together. You and the assistant headteacher have a tenacious approach to protecting the children in your care. You do not shy away from taking difficult actions when you know that they are necessary and in the best interests of the child. You make referrals to children's social care in a timely fashion and you follow these up persistently. It is clear that you will not take 'no' for an answer when you have serious concerns about the

welfare of a child. You stated that you 'would keep submitting that referral until someone takes notice', and this dogged approach was clearly evident in our discussions and in the school's well-kept child protection files.

You and the assistant headteacher show good understanding of how to manage allegations that are made against adults who work in the school. As with all other aspects of safeguarding, your approach is thorough and detailed records are kept. You take advice appropriately and act on the advice that you are given.

However, when an allegation is made, it is important that the local authority's designated officer is informed and consulted before any investigation takes place rather than during the investigation process. The school's written policy on managing allegations does not make the process clear enough and, as a result, leaders are not sufficiently aware that the designated officer must be the first port of call rather than a subsequent one.

Pupils told me that they enjoy school and they named many aspects that they particularly like, such as sports, playing with their friends and the good support that they receive from staff. Pupils told me that there is occasional bullying but that it is dealt with quickly 'if you tell a member of staff'. Pupils know about the forms that bullying can take and they told me that you give them regular reminders in assembly that bullying is unacceptable. They know that they must tell an adult if they feel they are being bullied.

Pupils have great confidence that staff will listen to them and help them if they ever have a problem or if something is worrying them. They told me that there are posters around the school, showing photographs of you and the assistant headteacher, encouraging them to come and talk to you if they have any concerns.

You have provided the school's governors with useful training on safeguarding. They are aware of possible signs of abuse and neglect, and the action that should be taken when these are seen or suspected. Governors have a clear understanding that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and that all members of the school community must work together to protect children.

However, governors have less knowledge and understanding of their strategic role in this area. They do not hold you and the school's other leaders to account well enough. Governors do not check that legal obligations around safeguarding are met and they are overly reliant on the information that you provide for them. Safeguarding in the school is effective but governors have taken this for granted and have not checked properly that this is the case.

Pupils attend school regularly and on time. Overall attendance so far this year is just above the most recent national average. Where pupils' attendance is not good, you are well aware of the reasons why this is the case. You monitor pupils' attendance closely and regularly, taking appropriate action to address frequent absences.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve governance so that the governing body:
 - has a better strategic understanding of its role in safeguarding pupils
 - understands fully its duties under legislation
 - has sufficient knowledge and information to ensure that the policies, procedures and training in the school are effective and comply with the law at all times.
- Ensure that the school policy on managing allegations against staff fully reflects current guidance and makes explicit the requirement to discuss allegations with the local authority designated officer as soon as they are made.

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

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney

Her Majesty's Inspector