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Mr Mark Thomas
Brymore Academy
Cannington
Bridgwater
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Dear Mr Thomas

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Brymore Academy

Following my visit with Paul Williams, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 7–8 December 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 at the school.

This inspection was aligned with an inspection of the boarding provision at the school, the results of which are contained in a separate report that will be published on Ofsted's website.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We met with you, other senior leaders, the designated safeguarding lead, the special educational needs coordinator and the multi-academy trust's health and safety officer. Meetings were also held with members of the local governing body, including the acting chair and the nominated safeguarding governor. I spoke on the telephone to the chief executive officer of the Bridgwater College Trust. Inspectors also met with groups of pupils.

Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentary evidence, including the school's safeguarding and child protection policy. We also visited lessons and observed pupils' behaviour at break, lunch and changeover times. The school's own analyses of attendance, behaviour and exclusions were evaluated. Inspectors took into account 98 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Brymore Academy is a small state boarding school. Approximately half of the 248 pupils on roll are boarders, with the other half attending as day pupils. The school became an academy in 2013, joining the Bridgwater College Trust. Initially it admitted pupils in Year 9 but in 2015 it moved to admitting pupils from Year 7 onwards. The large majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and very few of them speak English as an additional language. The number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is much higher than average. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is lower than average. Typically, pupils enter the school with levels of prior attainment significantly below the national average.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ensuring that safeguarding and child protection arrangements keep pupils safe

In March 2016, the boarding provision at Brymore Academy was judged by Ofsted as inadequate overall, as was the degree to which children and young people were protected. Since then you, senior leaders, governors and other staff have been working hard to improve the procedures that are in place to safeguard pupils in the boarding provision and in the school. As a result, the arrangements to keep pupils safe have become more rigorous and more robust. The school's culture of safeguarding has been strengthened.

The local governing body has a good understanding of safeguarding practice in the school. An improved scheme of delegation has been drawn up. This makes it very clear which specific safeguarding responsibilities are delegated by the trust to the local governing body. The nominated safeguarding governor has a clear understanding of the school's work to keep pupils safe. He has supplied strong strategic oversight in the drive to improve the school's safeguarding procedures. The local governing body regularly reviews its corporate responsibilities for all aspects of the school's safeguarding practice. This is demonstrated in the minutes of its meetings.

The school's single central record is well maintained and its contents meet requirements. The safeguarding and child protection policy that the school has published on its website was ratified in May 2016. It has not been updated, however, to pay due regard to the latest guidance from the Secretary of State, 'Keeping children safe in education', September 2016. Nonetheless, all staff have been provided with a copy of Part one of this document and have signed to indicate that they have read it. Moreover, they are required to complete a short survey to ensure that they have understood its contents. Survey results confirm that staff have an appropriate understanding of their responsibilities. The staff code of conduct, however, is weak and shows little sign of having been drawn up with the particular circumstances of the school in mind. This limits its usefulness.

Staff receive regular updates on safeguarding and it is a standing item on each of the in-service training days throughout the school year. Inspectors spoke to a sample of staff who showed a sound understanding of the school's processes to keep pupils safe. The designated safeguarding lead and his deputy have received training, at the appropriate level, to enable them to carry out their duties effectively. Staff have also been appropriately trained in the government's 'Prevent' duty to tackle radicalisation and extremism. School leaders have a good understanding of how this strategy is relevant to the particular needs of the community of which it is a part.

The school's procedures to deal with complaints or allegations against members of staff have improved. Communication with the designated officer at the local authority is much clearer, as is the record-keeping of such contacts. As a result, the school is able to take advice when needed and act effectively on it.

A review of child protection case files shows that in many cases the school is taking appropriate and timely action, applying the relevant thresholds, contacting the local authority when necessary and recording these processes efficiently. On occasion, however, the school's records lack the necessary detail and the reasons for the actions that were taken are not made clear.

The special educational needs coordinator has a sound understanding of the potentially enhanced vulnerability of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are robust processes in place to identify these risks or any barriers to safety, to mitigate them and to review any actions taken.

The school's admission register is compliant with statutory requirements. The school has efficient procedures in place to ascertain where any pupils who have been taken off the school's roll have moved to. The staff who monitor this have a good understanding of the relevant guidance and the procedures to be followed regarding notifying the local authority of changes to the school's roll.

Pupils are safe and feel safe. This is partly as a result of the way that the school's particular curriculum, with its emphasis on agriculture and horticulture, helps pupils to develop the ability to understand risk and to act in ways that reduce it. When they begin to work with animals on the school farm or to operate complex agricultural machinery, pupils are introduced to a culture of risk assessment as an integral part of all such activities. They can talk articulately and knowledgeably about how this process works and how it helps to keep them safe.

The school's own system of risk assessment is currently being overhauled and leaders are working closely with the trust's health and safety officer to do this. Risk assessments and accident records are being transferred to an online system which allows leaders to identify any patterns and act in an informed way to better manage any hazards.

In discussions with inspectors, pupils stated that they feel very safe at the school and that they have a range of adults to whom they could speak if the occasion arose that they were troubled. They are very clear about how to stay safe online and welcome the systems, including electronic, that allow them to raise any concerns that they may have. The school's internet filtering system is robust enough to prevent pupils accessing inappropriate material. The vast majority of parents who responded to the parental survey believe their child is happy, safe and well looked after in the school.

Levels of absence and persistent absence among day pupils are too high. The school is taking action to improve attendance and is working closely with the local authority in this endeavour. Senior leaders are planning to change the structure of the school day with the intention of promoting better attendance. It is not possible yet to say whether these initiatives will have the desired effect of promoting better attendance, as they have not had enough time to demonstrate sustained impact.

The rate of fixed-term exclusions is also too high, although there are signs that it is reducing. School leaders' analysis of the data relating to exclusions is improving and they now have a better understanding of the underlying patterns. Nonetheless, it is not clear that exclusion is always the most appropriate response to some of the behavioural issues that pupils present in the school.

Pupils' behaviour during the inspection was almost universally good and they displayed very positive attitudes to learning in both outdoor practical work and in the classroom. They often make rapid progress from what are typically low starting points.

External support

School leaders and governors have made good use of the support available to them from within the Bridgwater College Trust in their drive to strengthen safeguarding. They are also working with the local authority to improve attendance.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that the school's safeguarding and child protection policy pays due regard to the latest guidance.
- Improve the staff code of conduct so that it reflects the particular circumstances of the school more accurately.
- Ensure that the records in child protection files are consistently well maintained, so that the reasons for the decisions taken are clear.
- Reduce rates of absence and persistent absence among day pupils.
- Reduce the number of exclusions.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Lee
Her Majesty's Inspector