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Christine Farrell
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Farrell

No formal designation inspection of Hamstel Junior School

Following my visit with Lesley Stevens, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 2 November 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave us and the time you took to discuss your school.

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 wished to determine the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements at the school as concerns had been raised with Ofsted.

We do not give graded judgements on NFD inspections. However, if we find some evidence that overall standards may be declining, but where no serious concerns have been identified, then the next inspection will normally be a section 5 inspection and will be brought forward. If we have serious concerns, we will deem the NFD inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

Evidence

We scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We met with you, the designated safeguarding leaders, teachers and non-teaching staff, a group of pupils, some parents, the chief executive officer (CEO) and two trustees of the Portico Academy Trust. The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority.

We observed pupils' behaviour throughout the school and at playtimes. We reviewed behaviour and attendance records, and minutes of trustees' meetings. We also considered the 34 responses made by parents to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.

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

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Hamstel Junior School is a larger-than-average primary school, with 567 pupils currently on roll. Most pupils are of White British background. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is much higher than the national average. Similarly, the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those with an education, health, and care plan are both above the national average.

Since the previous inspection there has been no change in the leadership team and very few changes to the staff team. In September 2020 the local governing board was disbanded and trustees took over responsibility for governance of the school.

Main Findings

Leaders have made sure that safeguarding and child protection are central to all aspects of the school's work. Staff are familiar with important safeguarding policies and procedures and these are used effectively to protect all pupils. Staff know and fully understand that safeguarding and child protection are everybody's responsibility. Teachers and non-teaching staff spoken with during the inspection feel valued and fully encouraged to play an active role in the whole-school culture of safeguarding.

Staff receive thorough training related to their safeguarding responsibilities. Leaders provide regular training sessions, weekly updates and catch-up events as required. This includes how staff must respond to signs of extremism and radicalisation. Staff are trained how to handle reports of sexual harassment and online sexual abuse between pupils, both in and outside the school. This comprehensive training supports staff to identify when pupils may be at risk of harm and to know what to do to report their concerns.

Leaders have chosen to use an electronic system for recording and reporting safeguarding concerns. The designated safeguarding leaders with specific responsibility for child protection make sure that all staff know how to use this system consistently and with confidence. Staff understand that they must respond to concerns quickly and make sure that they record any concern, no matter how small.

During this unannounced inspection, a range of pupil case studies were discussed and reviewed. The designated safeguarding leaders have a secure knowledge of pupils and their families. This enables them to take appropriate actions, and these are well documented. Any specific concerns are raised quickly with external agencies such as social

services and the police. Leaders monitor the needs of the most vulnerable pupils very closely to ensure that these pupils are kept safe and make good progress in their personal development and well-being.

Leaders follow statutory guidance when appointing staff. All the necessary checks are completed before staff begin to work at the school. These checks are recorded accurately on the school's single central record. Interview procedures fully comply with the government's requirements for the safe recruitment of staff. This ensures that all staff are suitable to work with pupils.

Behaviour observed throughout the inspection was positive. Pupils typically behave well and are respectful and considerate. Pupils move sensibly around the building, speaking politely to staff and with good manners.

Pupils spoken to during this inspection were able to explain how staff teach them to keep safe in different situations. For example, when using the internet or when crossing roads. Pupils are confident about sharing any worries they have with staff. Pupils believe they are listened to and that their concerns are sorted out quickly. Pupils gave examples of how staff have helped them to solve friendship problems. They say that bullying is very rare and that most pupils are friendly and caring towards each other.

Behaviour and racist incidents are documented and followed up with the parents of pupils involved. Leaders monitor this information regularly to identify trends and patterns to put appropriate support in place for pupils. Analysis of these records and discussions with pupils confirm that the number of incidents is reducing.

Pupils' personal development and welfare are important in this school. The personal, social, health and economic education curriculum, supports pupils' safety and well-being effectively. COVID-19 has affected some pupils in different ways. Leaders are currently adapting teaching plans so that the curriculum meets pupils' needs more accurately. New topics focusing on pupils' physical and mental well-being will encourage and support pupils to live the 'Healthy Hamstel' way.

Almost all parents who expressed their views through the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and those we spoke to, agree that their children are happy and safe at school. Parents appreciate the practical and emotional support leaders and staff give to pupils and their families.

Leaders understand the link between good attendance and effective safeguarding. They monitor pupils' attendance closely and act quickly if there are any concerns. Consequently, the attendance of pupils overall has improved since the previous inspection. The attendance of some pupils has been affected by COVID-19. Leaders place a particular focus on those pupils who are persistently absent, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. Leaders provide practical support to these pupils and their families so that they attend school more often.

Trustees are keen to support and challenge leaders to ensure that safeguarding remains a priority throughout the school. Trustees receive regular training on their legal duties, including safeguarding. However, trustees do not have a secure understanding of safeguarding arrangements in the school. They have begun to tighten up their systems for checking safeguarding arrangements. Trustees are currently determining what actions need to happen and when so that they can increase their oversight and hold leaders to account more stringently for pupils' safety and well-being.

Additional support

Leaders access support and challenge from external specialists to ensure that the school continues to improve. The headteacher has sought local authority expertise to make sure that all staff maintain the high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Likewise, that individual pupils receive the specific support they need. The headteacher plays an active role in identifying and planning joint training needs and sharing good practice with local schools.

Priorities for further improvement

- Trustees do not have a sufficient understanding of the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements in the school. As a result, they do not hold leaders to account stringently for the safety and well-being of all pupils. Trustees need to develop a more structured and systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation. This will enable trustees to challenge and support leaders further in all aspects of safeguarding.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of the Portico Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Southend-on-Sea. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Webb
Her Majesty's Inspector