

Riverston School

63-69 Eltham Road, Lee, London SE12 8UF

Date of visit 07 July 2015

Purpose of visit

This was an unannounced visit carried out at the request of the DfE in response to concerns raised, particularly in relation to upper school, about the quality of education provided, the handling of parental concerns, the welfare, health and safety of pupils, including suitability of staff, arrangements to respond to any incidents of bullying and the quality of the leadership and management of the school. Provision and outcomes for pupils in the upper school were the focus of this visit.

Characteristics of the School

Riverston School is a non-selective day school for boys and girls aged from 1 to 18. Since 1956 it has remained in the sole ownership of one family and aims to have a nurturing ethos aimed at providing inclusive and personalised education to meet the individual needs of its pupils. The proprietor plays an active role in the school and is advised by a family member and the headmistress who act as fellow directors of the company.

The school is located in linked Victorian houses in Lee Green, south-east London, has developed a wide range of facilities and resources within the school and has good access to extensive local sports facilities.

The school has 207 pupils, including 137 boys. There are 56 children in the EYFS, 49 pupils in the lower and middle school and 102 in the upper school including sixth form. Pupils come from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds, and a high proportion of placements are made by London Borough local authorities. The ability profile is mixed in line with the school's aims to meet individual needs, including pupils with additional educational needs or with disabilities. There are 73 children with statements of special educational needs/Education, Health and Care Plans and many more receive specialist learning support from the school. Over 20 pupils have English as an additional language.

Inspection findings

Pupils informed inspectors that there were various mechanisms in the school to make their views known and they were clear about their need to raise any concerns regarding the welfare of learning. They had a positive view of the specialist counselling they receive. Pupils provided examples of issues which they had raised and had been satisfactorily resolved by school staff.

Quality of education provided [ISSRs Part 1, paragraphs 2 and 3]

The school meets these regulations.

The school has a written curriculum which is comprehensive and takes full account of the ages and diverse needs of the pupils at the school. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) plays an active role in the school and implements standardised testing of pupils. When pupils join the school they have an induction day to assess their needs. The SENCO has good awareness of the individual educational needs of pupils but the use of additional tests to confirm specific learning difficulties or disabilities has not been consistently undertaken. The SENCO works with nine local authorities and has formed effective working relationships to ensure suitable plans are developed and implemented. The school has appropriate systems in place to measure and record educational starting points and the progress pupils make. Arrangements for communicating and involving parents in education planning are appropriate.

In discussion with pupils, they confirmed they had good opportunities for learning and were involved. They felt that feedback from teachers was constructive and helpful in most instances. Some pupils raised the issue that some computer equipment was out of date and did not always work in an efficient way causing some frustration when parts of school work were lost. There was not an opportunity during this visit to specifically pursue this issue but inspectors understood from senior school leaders that they were aware of the issue and were taking steps to improve the situation. Pupils have consistently good attitudes to learning across the school. Inspectors examined a sample of school work and found this to be of a consistently good standard, well presented and covering a wide range of subjects and topics.

Outside the classroom, pupils achieve well in group and individual activities. Older pupils feel they are given good help, support and advice on further education and careers. Pupils with EAL or SEND achieve well through skilled support for their learning. Well-structured programmes of work, including one-to-one teaching by specialists enables these pupils to make progress.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils [ISSRs Part 3, paragraph 7 (a) and (b) and paragraph 10]

The school does not meet the regulations.

The safeguarding policy does not meet requirements in a number of significant areas. The school acknowledged that the safeguarding policy published on its website was not the most recent policy from which staff were working. The revised policy lacks necessary updates in line with regulatory changes, including contact numbers for key figures and reference to local safeguarding agencies. It lacks detail of clear reporting lines for children at risk, cases of allegations against adults working in the school and referral to other agencies as required, including cases of pupil-on-pupil abuse. It does not include suitable definitions of abuse. It lacks cross-references to the school's whistle-blowing policy, staff code of conduct and recruitment procedures, and has not been fully implemented in respect of recruitment checks on staff. The policy lacks account of any significant safeguarding issues relating to the needs of pupils at the school and their backgrounds and cultures. It lacks suitable reference to safeguarding arrangements for the EYFS and whether or not the policy covers all aspects of the school including the EYFS; or for the use of mobile telephones, cameras and other electronic devices in the EYFS.

The proprietor showed understanding of safeguarding matters but acknowledged, as did the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), that the safeguarding policy had not been fully updated in light of recent changes to guidance. Processes for reviewing the policy are in place but had not been applied at the time of the visit.

The policy does not make clear that a report should be made to the Disclosure and Barring Service and/or National College for Teaching and Leadership, where the relevant criteria are met. The school has not considered making a referral to NCTL when it is appropriate to do so.

The DSL has been appropriately trained and maintains good oversight of day-to-day safeguarding arrangements in the school. Detailed records are kept of welfare and safeguarding concerns and the action taken in conjunction with external agencies. There are detailed records of concerns and referrals which have been made expeditiously, and the DSL has good links with external agencies. School staff have been trained at three-yearly intervals and new staff receive induction training and support although provision for such training is not included within the report. Staff confirmed having received and read the latest version of KCSIE. Staff show good awareness of safeguarding issues and how to respond to any concerns raised. The safeguarding policy is available on the school's intranet and website. The school employs a trained counsellor who has established an effective service within the school, including processes to give pupils a voice on matters which are important to them, including any concerns about their welfare. Staff interviewed during the visit demonstrated clear awareness of the actions required in the event of any concerns being raised about pupils, staff or volunteers. A whistle-blowing policy is in place.

The PSHE scheme of work is effective in enabling pupils to have an understanding of personal risk, including internet safety. The school actively promotes the values of cooperation, responsibility, respect and understanding of different needs and cultures. The pupils interviewed said that they are happy and feel safe. They also stated that bullying was rare in the school and when it did occur staff acted promptly to resolve issues. However the anti-bullying policy does not include sufficient detail to be an effective support to staff and pupils.

Overall, pupils felt they make good progress at the school and enjoy being there. They were positive about the help and support they receive from teachers and other staff.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietor [ISSRs Part 4, paragraphs 18-21]

The school does not meet the regulations.

The staff overseeing the single central register (SCR) of appointments understand the importance of maintaining an effective system in order to promote the safe recruitment of all staff at the school. Recommendations from previous inspections with regard to the central register have been implemented. However, at the time of this inspection prohibition order checks for staff in a teaching role since April 2012 had not been carried out for a small number of staff. All other checks had been undertaken in an appropriate and timely fashion. Staff files were in good order.

Quality of leadership and management of schools [ISSRs Part 8, paragraph 34 (1) (b) and (c)]

The school does not meet the regulations.

School leaders demonstrate a sufficiently good understanding overall of the needs of the pupils to meet their needs through the curriculum and teaching and have clear aims and objectives for the school which reflect its ethos. However, they have not exercised sufficient oversight to ensure that the required standards in relation to welfare policies and procedures are met and the well-being of pupils is effectively promoted in all cases. Leaders show

ambition for pupils and seek to respond to individual needs in constructive ways. Suitable systems and processes are in place to monitor progress and to measure progress against the school improvement plan.

In discussion with the proprietor and leadership team it was acknowledged that the current safeguarding policy did not reflect current guidance and required updating. Prohibition order checks had not been completed or recorded on the SCR.

Regulatory action points

The school does not meet all the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and requirements of the Early Years Statutory Framework

Arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school [Part 3, paragraph 7 (a) and (b)].

Improve the wording and implementation of the safeguarding policy as follows:

- Ensure that the contact details for the DSL and deputy DSLs, Local Authority Designated Officer, children's services of the local authority where the school is located and proprietor are included in the policy;
- Ensure reference is made to the Pan London safeguarding procedures, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2015 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 in the policy;
- Ensure that the policy includes a statement that the DSL will seek advice from the LADO and/or children's services on all matters of referral;
- Ensure the policy includes a reference to the promotion of pupils' welfare and how this will be actively implemented within the school and in conjunction with key external agencies;
- Make clear that, where there is an immediate risk to a child, a referral will be immediately made to children's services;
- State that all allegations regarding concerns about staff or volunteers are reported within one working day to the LADO and, if a crime is thought to have been committed, to the police;
- Provide definitions of the types of abuse with reference to KCSIE and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015;
- Remove any suggestion in the policy that children and young people under the age of 16 years are able to give informed consent to sexual activity;
- Include cross-references to the school's whistle-blowing policy, staff code of conduct and recruitment procedures;
- Ensure that the policy is explicit about safeguarding being 'everyone's responsibility' and that staff can report directly to relevant agencies if they have concerns about the welfare of a child;
- Include the arrangements for handling situations of abuse by one or more pupils against another pupil and the need to engage external agencies for advice or action;
- Amend the statement that 'only the headmistress has the authority to act in the dual role' to make clearer that the DSL role has sufficient authority and status to act in accordance with local guidance and thresholds;
- Provide for a report to be sent promptly to the Disclosure and Barring Service if the school dispenses with a person's services because of unsuitability to work with children, or would have done so had the person not resigned;
- Ensure the policy includes details of the requirement to train staff at suitable intervals in safeguarding and the process for overseeing and monitoring this training;

- Ensure sufficient account is given in the policy to any significant safeguarding issues relating to the needs of pupils at the school and their backgrounds and cultures (reference to KCSIE page 11)
- Clarify the DSL arrangements for the EYFS and whether or not the policy covers all aspects of the school including the EYFS;
- Ensure there is clarity regarding the use of mobile telephones, cameras and other electronic devices in the EYFS.
- Ensure that the proprietor, through governance arrangements, maintains effective oversight of the safeguarding policy and procedures and implementation in accordance with the statutory guidance in operation at the time'
- Ensure that consideration is given to making a referral to the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) where a teacher has been dismissed or would have been dismissed if they had not resigned, and a prohibition order may be appropriate because of unacceptable professional conduct or a conviction at any time for a relevant offence, or where conduct may bring the profession into disrepute. or a conviction at any time for a relevant offence. Specify this in the policy.

Anti-bullying strategy [Part 3, paragraph 10]

Ensure that the anti-bullying policy contains sufficient guidance to staff in relation to:

- the seriousness of bullying;
- the need to be alert to children who may be vulnerable and at risk from bullying;
- roles, responsibilities and procedures to follow for reporting (including for cyber-bullying and bullying which occurs outside school);
- the threshold for referral to external agencies;
- raising awareness through training;
- use of sanctions;
- involvement of parents and pupils;
- availability of pastoral care;
- use of technology in the classroom and beyond.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietor [Part 4, paragraphs 18 and 21]

Ensure Prohibition Order checks are completed for all relevant members of staff employed since April 2012 and the date of the check recorded on the SCR [Paragraphs 18(2)(b) and 21(3)(b)].

Quality of leadership and management of schools [Part 8, paragraph 34 (1) (b) and (c)]

- Ensure those with leadership and management roles fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the Independent School Standards are met consistently.
- Actively promote the well-being of all pupils in relation to oversight of welfare policies and their implementation.