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Ms Melissa Williams
Headteacher
Evolve Academy
20 Kennington Park Gardens
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Dear Ms Williams

Urgent inspection of Evolve Academy

Following my visit with Gaynor Roberts, His Majesty's Inspector, to the school on 1 and 2 October 2024, I write on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and the time you took to discuss the school.

This inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for urgent inspections. The inspection was carried out because His Majesty's Chief Inspector wished to determine the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, the behaviour and attitudes of pupils, and the effectiveness of leadership and management in the school (including governance), as concerns had been raised with Ofsted.

We do not give graded judgements on urgent 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 graded inspection, which will be carried out under section 5 of the Act and be brought forward. If we have serious concerns, we will deem the urgent inspection as a graded inspection immediately.

Evidence

We scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We reviewed headteacher reports, trust reviews, staff training and pupil attendance and behaviour records. We met with you, a trust leader, members of the leadership team and groups of staff and pupils. We also spoke with the interim chief executive officer (CEO) and representatives from the local authority. We visited lessons and observed pupils and staff at other times of the day. Staff's and pupils' survey responses were also considered.

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

Arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Main findings

The school's approach to safeguarding is comprehensive and thorough. There is an open and positive safeguarding culture on both the Kennington and West Norwood school sites. Staff, including new and agency employees, are regularly trained on how to recognise signs of risk and report concerns. Some staff are not fully aware of the reporting processes as outlined in the whistle-blowing policy. They are, however, aware that they should report colleagues' behaviour to leaders, when this behaviour is not appropriate or safe. Staff are subject to the expected pre-employment checks, which are recorded appropriately.

The school keeps thorough records of concerns raised and any follow-on action taken. The school ensures that staff are alerted to concerns and reminded how to safeguard pupils. Twice-daily whole-staff briefings enable the team to communicate with one another about pupils and any immediate concerns or risks. Staff and pupils consider the school to be a safe place.

The school works with a range of agencies to ensure pupils are kept safe. These include the local authority designated officer (LADO) and the police safer school's officer. The school has, historically, made substantiated referrals to the LADO. However, an increase in concerns raised with the LADO by other parties has been a concern. While most of these cases have been unsubstantiated, the school is learning from the LADO's feedback. It is taking action to report all allegations to the LADO and seek advice earlier.

The school use the personal, social and health education curriculum to support pupils to stay safe. It adapts what is planned to address immediate risks when they are presented. For example, an increase in knife crime prompted the school to work with local specialists to implement a series of workshops.

The atmosphere was calm and orderly at both sites. The environment was well presented and in good order. Pupils were always well supervised.

School and trust leaders link positive pupil behaviour to the sustained safety and well-being of pupils and staff. The school has trained staff well on de-escalation and positive handling techniques. It has also established routines to ensure pupils move around the building safely and are not exposed to further risk. Primary-age pupils have lunch and break at different times to older pupils. This helps to ensure that they are not exposed to potential influences that put them at risk.

In classrooms, resources are carefully considered to support pupils to learn how to regulate their emotions. Pupils who need counselling and additional pastoral support receive these.

The school uses a range of rooms for 'reflection'. These are used appropriately, and staff supervise pupils safely while they are there. Any incidents form part of the briefings with staff, and actions taken, which need to be followed up, are recorded appropriately, including phone calls home.

Suspensions are used in response to pupils demonstrating the school's negative behaviour 'non-negotiables'. While suspensions are used appropriately, the school is in the process of reviewing what these are with staff, pupils, parents and carers. The school is seeking to reduce the number of suspensions through refined staff training, bespoke behaviour plans and interventions. It is seeking to develop a deeper understanding of what leads pupils to become anxious or upset and to support pupils' self-awareness and ability to manage their emotions independently.

The school has risk assessments and behaviour plans for some pupils. These are appropriate and contain suitable strategies to support pupils both proactively and reactively. However, some appear generic, contain occasional administrative errors and do not include all relevant information. This indicates that these plans are not quality assured as well as they could be.

Pupil attendance is a key area of focus for the school. The persistent absentee rate is high. Work with the local authority educational welfare officer (EWO), since February 2024, has been a positive step forward to address this issue. Since September 2024, the school has refined its processes around attendance. There is a clear escalation procedure for when pupils do not attend, which includes work with parents to understand barriers to attendance. This work has yet to have the desired impact, but the school is moving quickly to address problems.

Additional support

The trust works with school leaders to support them and ensure safeguarding and behaviour are effective. Weekly headteacher reports to the interim CEO capture up-to-date information that includes safeguarding concerns, suspensions and attendance. This enables the trust to support the school in its priorities and promotes accountability.

Other trust leaders work closely with school leaders to promote their confidence and ensure practices and processes are robust. This has had a particularly positive impact on safeguarding and on teaching and learning.

The school's work is also supported by the local authority. The LADO and the education department offer effective advice and guidance.

Furthermore, the school works with a safer school's officer, from the police, whose day-to-day work with the school is highly valued and effective.

Priorities for further improvement

- The school should ensure that it reduces persistent absenteeism and improves attendance. The school must embed the refined approach to managing attendance that has been designed with the support of the EWO and the local authority.
- The school should further embed and refine the range of tools it uses to help pupils regulate their behaviour. It should ensure that staff are confident in the use of de-escalation techniques and preventative strategies that work for individual pupils. The school should work to prevent escalation to crisis point where suspensions are necessary in order to reduce the number of suspensions.
- The school should refine the quality assurance processes and content of pupil behaviour support documents to ensure accuracy and consistency.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the interim CEO of the Parallel Learning Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Lambeth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Una Buckley
His Majesty's Inspector