

Gad's Hill School

Gad's Hill School, Higham, Rochester, Kent, ME3 7PA

Date of visit: 24 March 2015

Chair of Governors: Kirsty Hillocks

Purpose of visit

This was an unannounced visit carried out at the request of the DfE, to focus on the compliance of the school with the Independent School Standards Regulations (ISSRs) particularly, those concerned with safeguarding, measures to promote good behaviour and counter bullying, and oversight by governors and school leaders. The visit also looked at some aspects of the school's handling of complaints.

Characteristics of the School

Gad's Hill School is a co-educational day school for pupils aged from 3 to 16 years. The school is located around a Grade 1 listed building, the former home of Charles Dickens, west of Rochester in Kent. It was founded as a girls' school in 1924 but has admitted boys since 2001. The school is a charitable trust and a company limited by guarantee, administered by a board of governors.

At the time of the visit, the school educated 395 pupils, 201 girls and 194 boys. The junior school, for pupils up to eleven years of age, contains 202 pupils, of whom 41 are in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The senior school, for pupils up to Year 11, contains 193 pupils. One pupil has a statement of special educational need and the school has identified a further 51 with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupil has English as an additional language. The junior school and the senior school each have their own headteacher.

Inspection findings

The pupils spoken to were personable, articulate and very happy with the all-round education provided by the school, particularly the extra-curricular activities. They felt safe and well looked after. They particularly singled out the friendly pupils, the small classes, and the approachable and supportive teachers who listen to pupils' views and concerns. Asked to identify any areas where the school might improve, all they could think of were the small size of some of the bag racks and the lack of a sixth form.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding [ISSR Part 3, paragraphs 7 (a) and (b); EYFS requirements paragraphs 3.4-3.7]

The Regulation is not met.

The wording of the school's safeguarding policy does not have full regard to *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (KCSIE). The policy requires some additions and amendments, mainly with regard to clearer reporting systems in the event of an allegation against staff or other adults working in school, and minor additions of relevant contact details and items relevant to the EYFS setting.

The headmaster is the designated lead person for safeguarding (DSL) and he has two deputies, the head of the junior school and also the medical carer. Higher-level training in child protection and inter-agency working relevant to local authority procedures is up to date. Refresher training for all other staff and adults has been carried out in several sessions during the last year. Staff spoken to confirmed that the content of the training contains reference to the code of conduct, signs of abuse and the need to report concerns promptly, and includes an awareness of e-safety. New and established staff confirm that they have been given and have read Part 1 of KCSIE. Attendance at safeguarding and other relevant welfare training is recorded centrally. Staff readily report pastoral and welfare concerns to the DSL and issues of a safeguarding nature have been shared with appropriate authorities. Child protection records are kept separately from other elements of pupils' records. The school has reported instances of children who have left the school at an unusual or unexpected stage.

Safeguarding procedures, including training and safe recruitment are regularly monitored by the school's safeguarding committee and the designated governor, who is the board chairman. This oversight enables the full board to discharge its responsibility to carry out its formal annual review of the school's safeguarding practice, although the board's minutes do not contain a sufficiently detailed record of the discussions and debate carried out.

The school demonstrates some awareness of its wider safeguarding responsibilities to support pupils in need and liaise as needed with other external agencies. Staff are aware of the need to be alert to concerns about pupils' emotional and mental health, although the school's responses and procedures are not yet incorporated into a coherent policy covering issues like self-harm and eating disorders.

In the last six months, the school has strengthened its safeguarding provision by commissioning an external review of its practice which made a number of advisory recommendations which the school has started to implement. These include the provision of additional training in data protection, communication and confidentiality and reminders to staff about key child protection procedures.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – the promotion of good behaviour [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 9; EYFS requirements paragraphs 3.52]

The Regulation is met.

The school's policy on promoting good behaviour and dealing with misbehaviour applies to the whole school, including the junior school and the EYFS setting. It is somewhat limited in highlighting specific approaches for dealing with misbehaviour by the youngest pupils. It provides for good communication and liaison with parents and governors on disciplinary matters and documentation indicates that this is achieved as needed. Records of serious incidents and significant sanctions are logged on the school's on-line management system, and the logs clearly show that they are regularly monitored by both senior staff and governors. Sanctions appear generally to be consistent and proportionate, and this was confirmed by the pupils spoken to. Staff are generally vigilant at identifying mis-behaviour, although they have not received formal guidance or training recently on behaviour management.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils –countering bullying [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 10]

The Regulation is not met.

The school's anti-bullying policy covers most of the items listed in the government's non-statutory guidance. Helpful additions to the policy would include recognising the vulnerability of any looked after or adopted children, or those acting as carers, and a recognition of the responsibilities of those pupils who find themselves as bystanders to bullying behaviour. The policy would benefit from a stronger cross-reference to the school's e-safety policy covering cyber-bullying. Staff are periodically briefed on the importance of vigilance and early intervention, but the policy is not implemented effectively in all respects. No formal training in countering bullying (apart from specific briefings about e-safety) has been undertaken recently. Bullying incidents are recorded through the on-line data system with responses and any sanctions applied. However, it is difficult to monitor types and patterns of reported bullying issues because bullying incidents are incorporated into the major incidents and sanctions section of the database and not separately logged. The school does not, therefore, implement efficiently the provision in its policy requiring types of bullying and frequency of incidents to be specifically monitored. The school is in the process of moving over to a more sophisticated management information system which has the potential to allow greater discrimination in the analysis of electronic records. The pupils spoken to were unanimous in their view that bullying is not an issue of concern to them. They are well aware of the school's strong stance on the issue; they know what to do and have confidence in robust and effective responses by staff in the event that bullying behaviour might arise.

Handling of complaints [ISSR Part 7, paragraph 33; EYFS requirements 3.74-3.75]

The Regulation is not met.

The complaints policy for parents does not fully meet the regulations in respect of clear timescales, and several sections have not yet been amended to reflect the changes required by the new 2014 regulations.

The recording of informal and formal complaints is clear, detailed and efficient and the logs are regularly reviewed by the head and governors.

Quality of leadership in and management of schools – [ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34]

The Regulation is met.

Governors and senior leaders communicate well together, and an efficient system of governors' committees, of which senior staff are members, enable shared responsibility for the school's success and efficient identification of any weaknesses in practice. The entire senior management team attend all full board meetings. Inspection of governors' minutes and discussion with the chairman reveal an openness to identify deficiencies and remedy weaknesses.

Regulatory action points

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding [ISSR Part 3, paragraphs 7 (a) and (b); EYFS requirements paragraphs 3.4-3.7]

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

Policy wording

- Specify the local authority whose procedures the policy follows.
- Specify that if a crime has been committed, or in cases of serious harm, the school will inform the police.
- Include signs and symptoms of abuse, as well as definitions.
- Include the key points from the separate allegations against staff policy within the safeguarding policy.
- Amend the wording that empowers the school to investigate allegations after “consultation with the LADO” to make it clear that this should be “with the agreement” of the LADO.
- State that an allegation against staff in the absence of the head will be reported to the chair of governors, and an allegation against the head will be similarly reported without the head being informed.
- Confirm that the head (or chair of governors), on receiving an allegation, will contact the LADO within one working day.
- Include in the safeguarding policy the commitment to refer staff if necessary to DBS and/or NCTL (as outlined in the separate policy).
- In the staff code of conduct, give further detail and examples of what is meant by “inappropriate physical contact” with pupils, and include further detail about one-to-one and physical contact situations, as appropriate to the school – e.g. instrumental music lessons, sports coaching, supervision of changing rooms, intimate care of the youngest children.
- Specify that all staff and volunteers will read Part 1 of KCSIE.
- The DSL’s training refers to information in Annex 2 which is missing.
- Include information on the restrictions on the use of cameras and mobile phones in the EYFS setting.
- Under record keeping, clarify that sensitive information should only be cautiously shared with those who have a critical need to know, rather than openly at a staff meeting.

Implementation

- Ensure that staff are aware of changes to the wording of the safeguarding policy, and are reminded about the key features of reporting concerns and disclosures.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils –countering bullying [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 10]

- ❖ Widen the scope of the anti-bullying policy to incorporate all the elements recommended in the latest government guidance.
- ❖ Provide suitable training to staff about dealing with challenging behaviour and countering bullying.
- ❖ Keep records of reported bullying incidents suitably separate in order to allow efficient monitoring of patterns and trends.

Handling of complaints [ISSR Part 7, paragraph 33; EYFS requirements 3.74-3.75]

- ❖ Amend the policy wording by providing clearer timescales for the stages of management of an appeal panel hearing [Regulation 33(c)]; correct the wording for the provision of written records of complaints [Regulation 33(j)] and keeping documents confidential [Regulation 33(k)].

Other Recommendations

In addition to the above regulatory action points, the school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Improve further the wording of the safeguarding policy as follows.
 - Provide greater detail about the school's readiness to consult with other agencies to support children in need, and referring specifically to children suffering from mental and emotional health issues.
 - The policy should be clearly 'signposted' on the school's website, rather than included in a handbook on the website.
 - Include contact details for the LADO and the chair of governors.
 - Remove reference to the obsolete ISA and CRB in the safe recruitment and staff allegations policies.
 - Resolve the conflicting/confusing references to SSD, Children's Social Care and Children's Social Services; and to the terms DSL and designated child protection officer.
2. In the behaviour and discipline policy, outline more age-appropriate approaches for the youngest children to promote good behaviour and deal with misbehaviour.