

## Thorpe Hall School

Thorpe Hall School,

**Date of visit**            05 December 2014

### Purpose of visit

This was an unannounced emergency visit carried out at the request of the DfE, to focus Parts 3 and 4 of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010 as amended (ISSRs), and the EYFS requirements where policies checked require specific reference, particularly, those concerned with safeguarding pupils' welfare, including the code of conduct for staff and arrangements to check the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors.

### Characteristics of the School

Thorpe Hall School is a co-educational day school for pupils aged 2 to 16 in Thorpe Bay, near Southend, in Essex. There are 355 pupils, roughly equally made up of boys and girls; a number of girls recently joined the school following the closure of a neighbouring girls' school; pupils come from a range of ethnicities which reflects the local area. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) educates around 60 children. Around 50 pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); three have a statement of special educational needs; none requires support for English as an additional language (EAL). The school is a charitable trust, overseen by a board of governors. The previous inspection was in March 2014.

### Inspection findings

#### **Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 7; EYFS requirements paragraphs 3.4-3.7]**

The school does not meet the regulations.

The school's safeguarding policy, dated October 2014, identifies the need to safeguard children, both those in need and at risk of harm. It acknowledges guidance from the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) and makes suitable references to statutory guidance, including *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (KCSIE). The policy is provided to parents on the school's website. It is supported by a comprehensive recruitment policy and suitable staff code of conduct, although the latter gives limited advice on how staff can prevent themselves being placed in potentially compromising situations.

In interviews staff, including those in the EYFS, demonstrated confident understanding of safeguarding procedures and how to implement them. All showed clear awareness of the guidance given in the code of conduct, and of that given in an additional policy about the

taking and storing of photographic images referenced in the safeguarding policy. They were aware of the need to avoid being placed in any potentially compromising situations with pupils.

The policy does not meet requirements because the definitions of abuse given do not fully reflect those provided in KCSIE. It also lacks clarification that the school is alert to identifying other forms of harm that may adversely affect children and will respond to obtain any additional advice and support in line with the needs of the school population and local community at any one time.

The policy provides appropriately for the handling of allegations of abuse by one pupil against another. Discussion with the DSL identified that pupils receive the right help at the right time to address risks and prevent issues escalating; that the DSL acts on and refers the early signs of abuse and neglect, keeps clear records, listens to the views of the pupil, reassesses concerns when situations do not improve, shares information quickly and challenges inaction, as required by KCSIE. Records identified that pupils in need have been assessed, and their needs for counselling identified and met. Help has been obtained through effective referral to external mental health agencies where these strategies have not helped the situation to improve. The school educates pupils in staying safe effectively through personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons, presentations from external specialists, and guidance from an effective tutor system. In interviews pupils were confident that they know who to go to if they are uncomfortable with an adult's actions.

The school's safeguarding policy shows awareness of the procedures of the local children's services department, Southend. It guides staff as to what to do if they have concerns and requires immediate reporting but does not fully reflect KCSIE because the policy does not state clearly that anyone can make a referral, referring only to 'staff and volunteers'. The policy requires the DSL to work closely with local agencies and that referral is within 24 hours. The policy gives contact details for local agencies. It is stated that staff must not ask leading questions or promise confidentiality to pupils and reference is made to LSCB procedures. In interviews, staff showed clear understanding of this guidance and readiness to go beyond the school's structures for the management of safeguarding to contact local agencies if necessary. The openness evident within the school supports this willingness to take action. Senior managers and other staff interviewed showed themselves ready to listen to children and act upon concerns. This readiness was confirmed by pupils' responses in interviews; they confirmed that they have several people they would turn to if they have a problem.

The policy provides appropriately for dealing with allegations of abuse. It makes clear that any allegations about staff, the DSL and volunteers must be made to the head. Any allegation against the head must be made to the chair of governors without the Head being informed. Suitable provision is made for reporting when the Head is absent. The policy states that the head will contact the LADO immediately; contact details are given. The policy states that the police will be informed from the outset in cases of serious harm. The policy provides for reporting any person whose services are no longer used where referral criteria are met to DBS or NCTL.

The school names an appropriate individual from the leadership team to take responsibility for child protection matters, together with an alternative person in the absence of the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). The role of the DSL is outlined appropriately. It identifies a governor to liaise regarding safeguarding but does not specify liaison with the LSCB and other agencies. In practice, this figure is pro-active in oversight of safeguarding in the school, for example scrutinising the recording systems of the DSL. At present, although the single central register (SCR) of appointments is scrutinised annually, no checks are made of the implementation of the school's recruitment policy and procedures through

checking staff files. No governor has undertaken training in safer recruitment. The safeguarding policy requires that any deficiencies or weaknesses in child protection arrangements are remedied without delay, and provides for annual review by the full governing body. The deficiencies in the published policy show that the annual review is not wholly effective.

Appropriate training is provided for all staff, including volunteers and temporary staff on induction and thereafter. The training identified for the DSL and his deputy is appropriate and up to date. Induction training is provided for appropriately. The contents of training identified are suitable; the DSL is trained and approved by the LSCB to deliver training within the school, using LSCB materials. Records of training confirm that it is appropriately regular. In interviews, staff showed awareness and understanding of their most recent training, including elements of KCSIE. Their awareness of KCSIE definitions of safeguarding extended beyond the limited wording included in the school safeguarding policy. The policy states that it applies to the EYFS, identifies a safeguarding lead for that area and includes information about the use of mobile 'phones and cameras in the setting which staff understand and implement. No staff use their personal phones or cameras during the school day. The policy includes suitable provision for reporting incidents to OFSTED as a registered setting.

### **Suitability of staff [ISSR Part 4, paragraphs 19-22; EYFS requirements paragraph 3.9 – 3.13]**

The school meets the regulations.

The safeguarding policy provides comprehensively for the recruitment of staff, volunteers and governors. This is implemented successfully and checks are suitably recorded on the SCR. All recent appointments have been checked appropriately. These checks have included checks against the prohibited list for full-time staff and for part-time and peripatetic staff. Where recently appointed staff began work before DBS checks were seen by the school, a separate barred list check was obtained, a risk assessment undertaken and supervision arranged and regularly updated, although individual staff were not made aware in every case of the supervision arrangements in writing. The responsible staff understand the latest guidance about checking EYFS staff for suitability 'by association' and are planning actively to implement this.

### **Regulatory action points**

The school does not meet all of the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2010 and therefore it must:

#### **Improve the wording and implementation of the safeguarding policy as follows [Part 3 Regulation 7 (a) and (b)]:**

1. The policy and its implementation require the following amendments.
  - Make clear that contact details for local agencies are provided for any staff, parent or other persons to use, and state that anyone, not just staff, can make a referral.
  - Ensure that definitions of abuse in the policy match the scope of those in KCSIE; clarify that the school is alert to identifying other forms of harm that may adversely affect children and will respond to obtain any additional advice and support in line with the needs of the school population and local community at any one time.
  - Ensure that definitions of safeguarding given in the policy are fully in line with those in KCSIE, and reflect the context of the school.
  - Include the dates of 'sign-off' of the policy by the chair of governors.

## **Other Recommendations**

1. Improve governors' oversight of safeguarding to include scrutiny of implementation of the school's recruitment policy and procedures, for example by sampling of staff files cross-referenced to the SCR.
2. Consider safer recruitment training for at least one governor.
3. Improve the staff code of conduct by including advice on how staff can protect themselves from potentially compromising situations.