

## Merton Court School

38 Knoll Road, Sidcup, Kent, DA14 4QU

**Date of visit** 23 February 2016

### Purpose of visit

This was an unannounced visit carried out at the request of the DfE to check that the school has fully implemented the action plan submitted following the unannounced emergency visit in June 2015. The focus of the visit was on welfare, health and safety, the recruitment of staff, supply staff and proprietors and the manner in which complaints are handled.

### Characteristics of the School

Merton Court School is a co-educational day school for pupils aged from 3 to 11 years of age. It is owned and governed by members of the Price family, who purchased it in 1979 and who also comprise the senior management team. The school is situated within a 17-acre site near the centre of Sidcup. At the time of the visit there were 310 pupils on roll, of whom 34 children were in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The school has 7 pupils who receive support for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupil has a statement of special educational needs or an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan. One pupil has English as an additional language (EAL). The school's previous full ISI inspection was in November 2014 and ISI carried out an unannounced visit in June 2015.

### Inspection findings

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

The school does not meet all of the Regulations.

The school has carried out all the requirements of the previous visit. Since the previous visit its safeguarding policy has been rewritten and agreed with the proprietors. It has been shared with all staff and is published on the website. The new policy includes all the required amendments and is compliant with the most recent regulations and government guidance, including those to minimise risks from extremism and radicalisation. In response to findings that the previous version was over long and repetitive, the policy has been shortened and is supported by a raft of policies that give useful additional guidance to staff. Minutes of proprietors' meetings and the newly constituted advisory board indicate that safeguarding is discussed at each meeting and that the safeguarding policy and arrangements have been formally reviewed following the completion of the LSCB's annual audit.

The school ensures that new staff receive appropriate induction training in safeguarding as demonstrated in training given to staff appointed this academic year. All staff updated their

safeguarding training recently and the school implements efficient arrangements to provide training for any absentees. Records of all training are well kept and the training of the designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) is comprehensive and up to date. A sample of staff interviewed demonstrated they have a clear awareness of correct referral pathways should they have any safeguarding concerns. Both the proprietor head and the DSL are aware of the need to contact LADO immediately for further advice should a concern or allegation about staff behaviour arise. The school does not yet have a whistleblowing policy though staff interviewed articulate a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities for whistleblowing, gained from their staff conduct policy. Safeguarding records are well maintained and indicate that referral procedures have been followed correctly in relation to any safeguarding concerns.

The staff recruitment policy that is referred to in the safeguarding policy is generally in line with required procedures though does not reference the most recent (2015) guidance and there is one omission. Whilst it includes information on the checks required for most groups of workers such as staff on the payroll, supply staff, contractors and volunteers, it does not specifically include as a category visiting staff such as peripatetic music teachers and sports coaches. Consequently, there have been omissions in checks for this group of staff.

### **The suitability of staff and proprietors [Part 4, paragraph 18 (2)(d); EYFS requirements 3.9]**

The school does not meet all of the Regulations.

The school's recruitment procedures correctly include provision for all the required checks, including prohibition from teaching, prohibition from management and disqualification by association. In response to the requirement of the previous visit, the school ensures that a DBS check is carried out on all new staff and has demonstrated its commitment to safe recruitment by updating the DBS status for long serving staff. Should anyone start work prior to receipt of the DBS check, records indicate that all the other checks are in place, including checks against the barred list, a risk assessment is undertaken and work is carried out under supervision. Correct implementation of this procedure has been demonstrated in the appointment record of one member of staff, who also confirmed to inspectors that supervision had taken place. The headmaster reviews and signs the single central register on a weekly basis.

The single central register does not indicate that all the required checks on visiting staff have been carried out and appointment procedures for this category of staff are not mentioned in the recruitment policy. Visiting staff have been DBS checked though there is no evidence of checks on their employment history, medical fitness, prohibition status or that references have been taken. Whilst the school had assured itself of these staff's right to work, this is not entered into the register.

### **The manner in which complaints are handled [ISSR Part 7, paragraph 33; EYFS requirements 3.74]**

The school meets all of the Regulations.

The complaints policy has been amended so that it now follows the required three-stage process. Timescales for resolution at each stage of the procedure are appropriate. It also correctly includes the 28-day timescale required for resolution of complaints in relation to the fulfilment of EYFS regulations. The policy has been reviewed and approved by the proprietors. Records indicate that there have been no complaints raised under the formal procedure since the previous visit.

## **Regulatory action points**

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

### ISSR Part 3 Welfare, health and safety, paragraph 7; EYFS requirement 3.4- 3.7

- Ensure that references and employment history are obtained in respect of all staff, including visiting teachers and coaches. [paragraph 7(a) and (b)];

### ISSR Part 4, Suitability of Staff, paragraph 18; EYFS requirements 3.9-3.13

- Ensure that visiting staff are subject to the same checks on appointment as staff on the payroll, to include checks against the list of prohibition from teaching and for medical fitness, and that these checks are entered into the single central register. [paragraph 18.2(b); (c)(ii); paragraph 21.3(iii); (vii); (b)]