

MERTON COURT SCHOOL

38 Knoll Road, Sidcup, Kent , DA14 4QU

15 SEPTEMBER 2016

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Merton Court School is a co-educational day school for pupils between the ages of three and eleven. It is situated near the centre of Sidcup in Kent. The proprietor, who is also the head, has overall responsibility for the governance of the school. At the time of the visit, there were 303 pupils on roll. Of these, 65 were in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The school has identified four pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and one receives specialist support for their learning. There are no pupils with statements of special educational needs or education or health and care (EHC) plans. One pupil speaks English as an additional language.

PURPOSE OF THE VISIT

This was an unannounced progress monitoring visit at the request of the Department for Education to check that the school has fully implemented the action plan submitted following the progress monitoring visit on 23 February 2016. The focus of the visit was on safeguarding, the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, the recording of checks on the single central register of appointments and the provision of information.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 7(a) and (b), EYFS 3.4 – 3.8]

The school does not meet the Regulations.

The school has an appropriate policy for safeguarding which provides suitable arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are not correctly implemented because procedures do not have full regard for current statutory guidance. The school has not undertaken prohibition from teaching checks on some newly appointed staff, including peripatetic staff without qualified teacher status (QTS), prior to their appointment. The school promptly contacted Bexley LSCB and all checks were retrospectively undertaken during and by the close of the visit.

Procedures for reporting concerns about children are well understood by staff. Staff ensure that they listen to pupils and support their concerns and well-being. Pupils comment that staff are very approachable and caring and that they are always attentive to their needs. The school liaises appropriately with external agencies to support pupils' needs and report concerns. Staff articulate a clear understanding of their responsibilities towards safeguarding children and recognising signs of abuse; they understand that a direct referral to the local safeguarding children's board (LSCB) should it be necessary. Both staff and pupils are aware of the risks through the misuse of technology. Pupils comment that they receive regular guidance on electronic safety, which includes the use of social media.

The proprietor head demonstrates a clear understanding of managing allegations against staff, although there has been no cause to make a referral to agencies since the previous inspection visit. Staff receive clear guidance on whistleblowing procedures and are confident about the action to take should they have any concerns.

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is supported by three deputy safeguarding leads (DDSLs), of whom two have designated responsibility for the EYFS and one is the proprietorial head. All have appropriate levels of advanced training for their designated roles. Safeguarding leads have a clear knowledge of LSCB procedures. Training, including that for all other staff, is in line with LSCB requirements and appropriate records are maintained. Staff demonstrate a clear understanding of recent changes to regulatory guidance and what impact this has on their safeguarding practice. The DSL ensures that staff are updated regularly on safeguarding arrangements, which are always a focus on the agenda for the weekly staff meetings. Induction training for new staff is thorough and covers all the required elements.

Regular team meetings ensure a consistent approach to the management of safeguarding on a day-to-day basis. The proprietorial head regularly reviews policies and procedures. Scrutiny of records demonstrates that discussions on policy review have sufficient depth and breadth.

The suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors [ISSRs Part 4, paragraphs 18 to 21]

The school meets the Regulations.

Although some staff checks for the prohibition from teaching order have not always been undertaken as required, this has been accurately recorded in the single central register of appointments. In all other respects, procedures for checking staff before they take up their appointments are correctly recorded and appropriate documentation retained in staff files. The recruitment policy correctly outlines procedures for staff appointments and checks on staff, including peripatetic staff. Discrepancies identified at the previous inspection, relating to reference, medical fitness and employment history checks are now correctly undertaken.

Provision of information to parents [ISSR Part 6, paragraph 32 (1) (c)]

The school meets the Regulation.

The school meets the requirements for providing information relating to safeguarding to parents. Particulars of the arrangements for safeguarding are published on the school's website.

Quality of leadership and management [Part 8, paragraph 34]

The school does not meet the Regulation.

Senior leaders and managers have appropriate levels of experience but do not demonstrate good skills and knowledge or fulfil their responsibilities effectively to ensure that the independent standards are met consistently. This relates to lapses in recruitment checks on new staff prior to appointment and lapses in fully addressing the action points from previous inspection, which also related to safeguarding and recruitment procedures.

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.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 7(a) and (b), EYFS 3.4 – 3.8]

- Ensure that all staff, including those visiting the school for teaching purposes, are checked against the list of those who are prohibited from teaching and that the date on which these checks have been carried out are entered into the single central register. [paragraph 7 (a) and (b)]

Quality of Leadership and Management [ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34]

- Ensure that leaders and managers have the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfil their responsibilities so that the independent school standards are consistently met. [paragraph 34 (a) and (b)]