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Dear Miss Luck

Urgent inspection of Forest Oak School

Following my visit with Tim Hill, His Majesty's Inspector to the school on 25 and 26 March 2025, 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 at the school 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 met with the executive headteacher, governors, designated safeguarding lead, senior leaders, groups of pupils, groups of staff, two representatives from the local authority's school improvement team and with the local authority designated officer. We also visited the key stage 4 Oakwood site and the key stage 5 Woodlands Campus.

Inspectors talked to pupils and staff informally and formally at various times of the school day. We spoke to parents, transport drivers and passenger assistants. We examined school policies and information on the school's website. In addition, we scrutinised governor minutes, findings from local authority safeguarding audits, attendance records, behaviour management records, records of concerns about pupils and arrangements for managing allegations against staff. We also carefully considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

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

Arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Main findings

In recent months, leaders and governors have taken action to strengthen further various aspects of safeguarding, including in response to external reviews of this aspect of the school's work. Specifically, the school has improved the way staff raise and report concerns, in line with their managing allegations against staff procedures. This includes how concerns are recorded and followed up. In addition, staff have received enhanced training for identifying, reporting and recording concerns about pupils. This has led to an increased focus on checking pupils' safety and well-being when they are not attending school.

The school has effective systems in place for identifying, managing and acting on any concerns raised about pupils' safety and well-being. Leaders take prompt and decisive action to reduce the risk of any pupils experiencing further harm. The school's record-keeping is thorough and summarises any actions taken and the reason for these decisions. Staff demonstrate secure knowledge of pupils' needs and their vulnerabilities. In addition, the school extends its support to families. When necessary, leaders make timely referrals to other agencies to ensure that pupils are protected without delay.

The school's personal, social, health and economic curriculum is well designed. The curriculum teaches pupils about healthy and unhealthy relationships. Pupils can talk about consent at an age-appropriate level. They can name adults on their 'network hand', who are five people they can share their concerns with. Pupils can also name emergency services that help them, including Childline and the police. All pupils have early morning check-ins with staff. This is where staff talk to pupils about how they are feeling and if there is anything they want to discuss. For the youngest pupils in the school, who do not use verbal language to communicate, staff use visual aids and signing to support them. Older pupils receive independent travel training. This enables some pupils to travel independently and safely to school using public transport. Pupils are taught about online safety. They know how to raise concerns about online activity.

The school supports pupils to behave well. Staff understand the vulnerability and needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities here. For example, staff know that changes in a pupil's behaviour may be a sign of an underlying issue. Staff report and

record these changes. Pupils are taught about safe and unsafe behaviours and how to identify when they may be at risk of harm. Pupils learn how to name and identify their own feelings. This helps pupils understand when these feelings may be because they are feeling unsafe. The school's 'SMILE' approach supports the mental health and well-being of pupils. This helps pupils to manage and regulate their own behaviours. Staff are well skilled in using a wide range of strategies to support pupils' social, emotional and sensory needs at the earliest opportunity. This significantly reduces the likelihood of staff needing to physically intervene to ensure pupils' safety. Leaders are aware that, for some older pupils, the physical environment at breaktimes would benefit from further attention to support some pupils with sensory needs. The school are beginning to address this.

The recruitment of staff follows appropriate safer recruitment practice. Several leaders and governors have completed safer recruitment training. At least one of these leaders is always present on interview panels. Leaders ensure the correct pre-employment checks are made before staff take up post. They maintain an accurate record of these checks.

The school pays serious attention to the importance of attendance. Where there are any concerns about pupils' absence, the school has robust processes in place to check on pupils' safety and well-being. Although there are a number of pupils who do not attend regularly enough, the school is doing everything it reasonably can to help pupils attend school.

Forest Oak currently shares the premises with another adjoining special school located in the same building. The two schools are part of the same federation, and staff from both provisions can access the two schools throughout the day. However, the agreements and protocols about this arrangement are not clear enough. This means the school does not always have an accurate picture of which staff members are at each provision at various times of the day. Some protocols are in place, such as staff and pupils from both schools accessing the main hall at lunchtime. However, agreements about accessing each provision during other times of the day are less clear.

The school now securely understands its staff's working arrangements with pupils and families outside of school. Staff know the importance of sharing and declaring these arrangements. The school has established clearer expectations with staff about the importance of openly sharing this information in the best interests of pupils.

Many staff welcome and comment positively about the recent changes. However, some staff are not confident that their views about the school are listened to and acted on sufficiently well enough by leaders. This means the morale of some staff remains low because they feel that their views are not well considered.

Additional support

School leaders have benefited from the range of support they have received from the local authority. This work has included a review of the school's safeguarding practice, including reviews of internal policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding.

Priorities for further improvement

- Some staff are not confident that their views about the school are listened to and acted on sufficiently well enough. As a result, the morale of some staff is low because they feel their views are not considered. The school should take further action to gather a comprehensive understanding of staff views about working at the school and systematically address these issues.
- Staff from Forest Oak School and from the adjoining special school can access both provisions throughout the day. Although the two schools are part of the same federation, staff do not have clear protocols and agreements to follow about access between both provisions. The school should implement clearly defined agreements about the arrangements and the reasons for when staff access each provision throughout the school day.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of governors, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Solihull. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Anna Vrahimi
His Majesty's Inspector