



Safeguarding Children
Training & Consultancy
LIMITED
Company No: 8500930

Safeguarding audit: Sheffield Inclusion Centre

Date of report: 21 February 2023

Author: Adele Gladman, Director

Contents

Introduction	3
Terms of Reference	3
Methodology	4
Summary of findings	4
Introductory Information	5
Site Security	6
Safeguarding practice	7
Policies and processes	7
Safeguarding knowledge and staff training	9
Safer Recruitment and Single Central Record	9
Culture and provision	11
Base provision	13
Partnership working	17
Student knowledge and progress	17
Key achievements	18
Management Committee	19
Student Voice	20
Parent Voice	20
Conclusion and Recommendations	21

Introduction

Sheffield Inclusion Centre was established in 2013. In 2020 it became a multisite school working with Primary and Secondary pupils who have been permanently excluded from school. There is a main centre and 8 smaller sites (bases) across the city. This enables pupils to have specialist provision close to their homes, and is directed at primary and secondary age pupil as well as those with additional needs such as SEND and children from hard to reach communities. The culture and ethos of the centre (SIC) can be summarised using the quote displayed on the Home page of it's website "*Welcome to being permanently included.*"

In 2018, SIC began offering an additional prevention provision working with those who are at high risk of permanent exclusion, and a reintegration programme for those ready to return to school.

A significant proportion of those attending SIC are SEND children. There is also a high number of Roma children who access the centre.

SIC was last inspected by Ofsted in 2019 when it was graded as 'Requires Improvement'. There has since been changes in senior leadership as well as the appointment of new subject leads in mathematics, science and vocational courses. Each of the new bases has a new leader. A new management committee was established, which includes elected members of Sheffield's city council.

Three Ofsted monitoring visits have taken place since the 2019 inspection, all of which have observed the continuing improvements at SIC. The last monitoring visit was in July 2022. This acknowledged that SIC's plan for improvement has been delayed as a result of the pandemic and restrictions but that "*Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action toward the school becoming a good school.*"

Although SIC believes that it has a culture of strong governance and a continuing programme of self-evaluation and improvement, this audit was commissioned to offer an independent perspective; to identify areas of good practice but also those requiring further attention and improvement. This is against the background of increased intake of children who have been permanently excluded across the city, accompanied by reducing funding and growing expectations.

Terms of reference

To undertake a full independent safeguarding audit to explore key areas of provision including:

- Safeguarding (including policies and processes; culture and staff knowledge; Safeguarding practice including partnership working)
- Staff training, knowledge and skills
- Safer Recruitment
- Student Voice
- Governance

In considering these areas:

1. To identify strong areas of practice, as well as those requiring improvement
2. To generally enable SIC to continue to develop its provision for vulnerable children in Sheffield.
3. To offer reassurance to local stakeholders and those in positions of governance.

Methodology

The audit was undertaken as follows:

Desktop reviews of all policies and procedures, website, previous self-evaluations and annual local authority audits, student voice, parent voice, staff and governor training record, recruitment files, records where a complaint or allegation was made against a staff member, documents relating to attendance, analysis of 4 year trends, GCSE comparison tool 2018-2021, PHSE programme and plans, weekly and termly analysis of students, School Improvement Plan.

Consideration of safeguarding records including CPOMS, referrals to agencies such as social care, needs assessments, reintegration plans, My Plans, minutes from attendance at multi agency meetings, communication with other services and agencies.

Documents relating to student and parent voice, including pen portraits created by staff and students.

Site visit to SIC, and 5 bases including Fir Vale, Woodthorpe, Parklands, St Bernard's and the Earl Marshall Centre.

Interviews with staff including Head, Assistant Head, Designated Safeguarding Lead, Business Manager, Teachers, Teaching Assistants, Base Leaders, Base Teaching Assistants.

Interviews with Chair of Governors and Nominated Safeguarding Governor, and Vice-Chair.

Student participation with children attending SIC and the bases visited.

Summary of findings

Safeguarding provision is excellent. The welfare and future wellbeing of pupils is at the centre of everything SIC does – from understanding the individual student; engagement and inspiring those attending SIC; addressing need in order to improve attendance and attainment; family support; and raising aspiration for the future. This is reflected in the staff training programme, and the practice that I saw during site visits. Staff at the centre and bases have a clear commitment to the children that they work with. Children were confident and secure; and have demonstrably good relationships with staff. De-escalation and restorative approaches help students to develop emotional intelligence and literacy and communicate need to staff. Attendance and attainment are areas that have proved challenging in the past. By making students feel understood and in cultivating culture of mutual respect, students want to attend the centre and its bases. Students were noted to be actively interested in and participating in lessons. The analysis of GCSE results provided to me during this audit shows the continuing improving attainment of those students attending SIC.

Staff were noted to be skilled and knowledgeable concerning safeguarding and wellbeing, and approach pupil learning and engagement in a trauma informed way. There is an equal focus on life skills as well as academic attainment, and a good variety of vocational subjects on offer.

There is a great deal of work that goes into engagement with families and communities. This starts with the Head meeting each new starter and their family. All pupils receive an induction so that they are clear concerning boundaries and expectations from the start. I spoke to a number of students during this audit, all were chosen at random. They had only positive things to say about SIC and its staff. The results of parent voice surveys also shows the positive view that parents have of SIC.

Leadership and governance are strong. The Chair of Governors is extremely skilled and experienced, bringing with him a wealth of knowledge from his involvement with other schools and MATs. Governors and senior leaders have an ongoing programme of scrutiny and improvement.

SIC has strong relationships with local partners. Often children coming to SIC have unidentified need or disabilities, and a particular strength of this provision is the identification of that need and how to best meet it. I do have concerns regarding how many pupils referred to SIC have SEND (mostly undiagnosed or not met before exclusion). The Head and Senior Leaders feel that often the value that they bring to these children and their futures is not fully appreciated by the local authority, and at times strategic support is lacking. This is concerning when the demand on and expectation of the provision is growing, but funding is not.

The recommendations made at the conclusion of this audit report reflect the strength of this provision, with most recommendations being 'fine tuning' of existing polices and processes; and evidencing what they do in a more comprehensive way.

Introductory information

At the time of the audit, SIC had 180 students on roll. Of those, a small number were subject to a child protection plan (3), and a similarly small number of children who were in the care of the local authority. 40 students had an EHCP, with others working towards a plan. 67% students were BAME, 23% Roma/Slovak origin.

As part of this audit, I saw analysis of attendance an analysis of a 4-year trend. This shows that:

- In the academic year 22/23, there are 50% more pupils attending SIC and its Bases
- 59.4% students are BAME
- The numbers of students with EHCP have sharply increased

SIC works in three ways:

- **Assessing need** – many children have undiagnosed additional needs when they are referred to the centre. The specialist knowledge of staff, combined with smaller class sizes helps to identify this along with the culture of SIC which seeks to understand the reasons for the permanent exclusion, as well as the child's perspective. Children and their parents

are supported in accessing specialist services and in going through assessments. Every child attending SIC has an individual plan, including EHCPs.

- **Supporting need** – there is a strong pastoral team including 4 youth workers, a youth offending worker, a transitions coach, a SEND family worker, an outreach team, a therapist plus a team of teachers, and learning mentors. All classes are supported by teaching assistants. Again, the knowledge and experience of staff assists in identifying how best to meet need. Some of the need is complex, requiring outside partnerships and provision. Some children have needs which are easier to respond to (in one young person's case, providing an office chair on wheels which facilitated movement secured the student's attendance and engagement in lessons, and resulted in a decrease in disruptive behaviour).
- **Planning a pathway** -although the aim is to return children to mainstream school, in some cases this is not appropriate. Some children transition to a special school. Others stay with SIC to complete their qualifications. When at SIC, Key Stage 4 students study for GCSEs and BTECs at a high level. Vocational training is also on offer. Whatever the pathway, there is a focus on both educational and personal development, and a drive to raise child's aspirations for their future.

Site security (Sheffield Inclusion Centre Main site, Parklands, St Bernard's, Fir Vale, Woodthorpe, Earl Marshall Centre)

All sites visited during the audit appeared secure. Most have locked gates, CCTV, and robust perimeter fencing. In all cases, I was accompanied by the DSL and greeted by the Base Leader. I was escorted at all times. Staff were noted to be vigilant regarding student safety. Where buildings had shared spaces (such as Parklands and Fir Vale) pupils were escorted by staff when leaving the main classroom.

There was a signing in process for each site and I was issued with a visitor lanyard. Only the main site has a computerised system however, with other sites relying on a somewhat outdated signing in book. I was surprised to learn that this is something advised by the local authority as most areas moved to more sophisticated systems as a result of GDPR (as visitors can see details of other visitors) and infection control during covid restrictions. This is something that I would recommend is revisited, for reasons of confidentiality but also to enable SIC as a whole to have easier access to attendance and visitors' data (see Recommendations).

Bases vary in their onsite condition and provision. SIC is a new purpose built building with excellent external areas including football and baseball areas, a climbing wall, play equipment and internal provision such as a gym, sensory room, music room and multiple nurture spaces. Some bases are shared buildings, and in one case (Parklands) the base car park is also open to the public. Some bases are in better condition than others. This is beyond SIC's control (as these are buildings provided by the local authority), however in all bases the space had been used to the best possible advantage, and often there were plans to further develop or improve in progress.

Safeguarding practice

“Leaders put the well-being of pupils at the heart of all that they do. Safeguarding runs like a rod of iron through the school.” (Ofsted, 2019).

Policies and processes

SIC has a superb and experienced Designated Safeguarding Lead with a social work background. She is well supported in her safeguarding role by the Senior Leadership Team, a Deputy DSL, SENDCO, and Base Leaders.

The DSL has overview of CPOMS on a daily basis, supervising and supporting staff, and taking action to support students as well as attending multi agency meetings. The DSL (supported by other designated staff) ensures that she sees all CPOMS entries daily. There is analysis of the quality and quantity of staff recording. If some staff do not appear to be using CPOMS, the reason for this is questioned. There has been a focus on improving recording, and evidence-based practice. This has been particularly important for staff from previous roles where they would not have had access to CPOMS (such as youth work). The records that I saw on CPOMS were of good quality. CPOMS is used well to assess staff knowledge and application as well as the individual need and risk of students.

The DSL participates in the collation and analysis of information relating to safeguarding, attendance, behaviour, attainment. She further oversees the staff training programme and is central to the day on day development of staff – giving advice and recommendations, giving feedback (for example when recording on CPOMS needs improvement) and undertaking support and supervision when needed. She is clearly well regarded and respected by both students and staff – this was particularly noticeable when visiting the bases.

The DSL and SLT undertake an annual self-audit with the local authority. This is done in liaison with the Chair/Nominated Safeguarding Governor and scrutinised by the Management Committee. I have had sight of the most recent audit was seen. The rag rating for sections was mostly green. Those amber areas for improvement were noted to be part of the current SIP (for example the DSL was booked on sessions relating to Online Safety and plans implemented to cascade knowledge to staff and students).

Each week starts with a planning meeting with key staff to identify and pre-empt issues which may occur and the strategies needed to address them. Each morning starts with a briefing between the bases and DSL. Each day ends with a debrief at each base. There is an end of week analysis of all pupils and their needs, as well as significant incidents and changes.

SIC has a number of policies which were examined as part of this audit:

Child Protection Policy -this was last reviewed in October 2022. It was noted to be comprehensive and of good quality.

Details of DSL are at the front of the policy. Roles and responsibilities for all staff are defined. The policy also covers record keeping, the role of governors, partnership working with parents, raising

awareness with and supporting children, safer recruitment, handling allegations, training and safeguarding in specific circumstances.

As the policy is so comprehensive, it would benefit from an index or contents list. It would also benefit from an overview summarising what action staff should take when they have a concern (including concerns about staff), and a section on whistleblowing. It would be advisable to cross reference the section on concerns about staff, and whistleblowing to the relevant policies. (See Recommendations).

Some SIC policies are Sheffield City Council policies. This includes:

- Allegations against staff;
- Behaviour Guidance and Positions of Trust;
- Child on child abuse;
- CSE;
- Domestic Abuse;
- Children Missing from Education;
- Online Safety;
- Reasonable Force,
- Searching and Screening;
- Sexualized Behaviour.

These were all noted to be of good quality, although the current allegations policy does not appear to have been updated by Sheffield City Council following Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2022. For example, it does not give guidance on low level concerns and record keeping. My advice is that record keeping regarding safeguarding and associated matters such as allegations should be consistent and follow the NSPCC guidance ([Child protection records retention and storage guidance | NSPCC Learning](#)). This should be reflected in SIC's Record Retention policy (see Recommendations). I would suggest that SIC contact Sheffield City Council to see if the Allegations policy has been updated following KCSIE 2022. If so, that should be adopted. If not, the current policy is marked 'under review' pending such an update (see Recommendations).

Other SIC policies (such as Sexual Violence, Behaviour and Relationships, Data Protection, Record Retention, SRE) were noted to be of good quality and showed evidence of regular updating. The Behaviour and Relationship policy was noted to be of a very high standard, as is the comprehensive Code of Conduct.

Some policies are currently under review but this was not obvious from the website. As this will perhaps be the main way that parents, stakeholders and the public will access SIC policy, my recommendation is that these should be marked accordingly, both on the policy and on the website. As this had been actioned by the time of this report, I have not included this in the Recommendation section of this report.

I also considered the different risk assessments that SIC uses. Evolve is the platform used for visits and activities. SIC also uses individual risk assessment which include planning and

resources needed to address risks. These were noted to be of good quality and comprehensively completed. There was evidence of review of assessments, and update where appropriate.

Staff knowledge and training

Staff training is comprehensive and ongoing, with regular briefings and CPD sessions. All new staff receive online safeguarding training in the first instance.

Each academic year there is a safeguarding training session for all staff. This is supplemented by regular CPD sessions (the past two academic years has included sessions on topics such as Prevent, Child on Child abuse, Children Missing from Education, KCSiE, and Online Safety).

Designated safeguarding staff have also attended appropriate and regular training (including Mental Health First Aid training).

The DSL frequently deliver safeguarding updates to staff. Her analysis of CPOMS assists her in assessing where staff development needs may lie. The analysis of school data further assists her and SLT in identifying emerging trends that may warrant focussed staff training. The annual self-audit additionally helps identify areas for improvement, which may include staff training needs.

Staff spoken to during the audit were noted to be knowledgeable about safeguarding issues and SIC process. All could identify designated safeguarding staff and processes for sharing concerns (including whistleblowing or raising concerns about another member of staff).

I have two recommendations regarding staff training:

The current Safeguarding Training Pathway does not reflect the extent of the school's training and development programme, or the frequency of delivery and this should be amended accordingly.

General staff training is recorded on an Excel spreadsheet and maintained by the Business Manager. Safeguarding training should be included on that. This will provide a comprehensive record of all staff training, as well as assisting SIC in identifying any staff who have missed key sessions (for example because of maternity leave or sickness). (See Recommendations).

Safer Recruitment and the Single Central Record

The Single Central Record (SCR) is based on the Sheffield City Council template and is colour coded so that action points and outstanding issues are easy to spot. It is maintained by the Business Manager, who was noted to be both knowledgeable and efficient. The SCR is therefore unsurprisingly of a high standard, with appropriate categories and all fields completed appropriately.

The Chair of the Management Committee undertook an audit of the SCR audit in October 2022. I am recommending that this becomes a regular check with the Chair and Head undertaking this every term, accompanied by a randomly selected number of recruitment files. This will assist with the recommendations I have made regarding these files (see below) but will also ensure that the

SCR matches and is evidenced by those records and that all relevant information is being retained. (See Recommendations).

Contractors are asked to come on site in holidays or when students have gone home. If there is an emergency that means an immediate response is needed, contractors are supervised at all times (even though they all have a DBS check undertaken). This is good practice, given the vulnerability of students attending SIC.

Occasionally agency staff are used. Only trusted recruitment agencies are used, and the Business Manager obtains details of vetting checks undertaken, ensuring that these reflect SIC's expectations and safer recruitment requirements. Details of agency staff are kept on the Single Central Record for 12 months. There is some debate nationally as to whether agency staff should be removed from the SCR the day their temporary work ends. With SIC, the same agency staff tend to return during the academic year, so there is some logic to retaining their details in the appropriate section of the SCR. This however needs to be referred to in Record Retention policy (see Recommendations).

Taxis are used to transport students. These are approved by the local authority. This is recorded on the SCR. In recent years, SIC has purchased mini buses which are driven by staff to ensure consistency of care and high levels of safety in transporting students.

Some recruitment files were sampled and noted to be of a high standard, with 'Warner style' questions asked at interviews and all appropriate checks undertaken. Recruitment processes appear robust, and ensure that no-one starts work until a DBS and Barred List check has been received; all vetting checks have been carried out and qualifications verified; two references obtained; right to work checks undertaken; and (if needed) overseas police checks undertaken. Online checks are now being undertaken in line with KCSIE 2022.

I also considered the induction process for new members of staff, which is comprehensive and appropriate. I had sight of the induction pack as part of this consideration.

Each employee file has a checklist on the front of the file so that the Business Manager knows what checks have been undertaken and what is outstanding for new employees. I am recommending that the files are divided into sections (e.g. application stage; pre-employment checks; contract and post-employment issues). This will assist the Business Manager or any appropriate person in her absence being able to find information quickly in any file (see Recommendations).

Interview notes are retained. The interview template however provided for a grading of the quality of answer – this was not completed on the files seen. This scoring should either be completed or removed from the template (see Recommendations).

Paper records are kept in a locked filing cabinet in the Business Manager's office. Only a small number of staff have access. The keys to the cabinet are locked in another cabinet; the keys to those and the room are only available to designated staff.

As SIC moves towards some records being kept electronically, there should be a cross reference with this in the paper files so it is clear where certain documents have been retained. There should be consistency regarding which documents are retained in paper form, and which are stored electronically. Having a regular audit of the Single Central Record and recruitment files will ensure this (see above and Recommendations).

Interview notes for unsuccessful candidates are currently retained for 12 months rather than the usual 6 months. It is therefore recommended that the Record Retention Policy and any associated policies are amended accordingly to reflect this (see Recommendations).

DBS checks are renewed every 3 years and a spreadsheet shows which are coming up for renewal. This is reviewed regularly and updated by the Business Manager.

As part of the audit, I considered three cases where allegations had been made against staff. In one case the allegations were substantiated, the staff member dismissed and referred to the DBS. In the two other cases, concerns were unsubstantiated and unfounded. In all three cases, there was evidence of good practice, of statutory guidance being followed, and of a professional working relationship with the local authority designated officer (LADO) including consultation and referral where appropriate.

The issue of references where an allegation is made against a staff member was discussed. The position regarding substantiated allegations is clear, that they must be referred to in all references. I would further recommend that external HR advice is sought where a reference request is requested in other circumstances, particularly if the allegation is defined as a 'low level' concern. (See Recommendations).

Culture and provision

SIC's website sets the tone for provision at the Spring Lane centre and the bases. It is child and parent facing, welcoming and reassuring, with many useful resources. There are links to SIC's social media feeds which include video posts of students on speaking of the difference that SIC has made to their lives. That is what SIC staff were the proudest of when I interviewed them – taking the often hardest to reach children, identifying their needs, and supporting them in working towards achieving their potential.

The atmosphere that I observed in all the settings is one of calm and consistency. Incidents are responded to swiftly and effectively. One example is that on arrival at one of the bases, a young person wanted to leave and was visibly angry and distressed. Within 5 minutes a member of staff had de-escalated the situation and brought the young person back inside. Within 10 minutes they were engaging with staff and students and a short time thereafter, with myself. It was a genuine pleasure to have this young person then have the confidence to demonstrate his impressive music skills to me, including playing classical music as well as songs from his culture; while talking about his post-GCSE plans and intention to study music at college. At the bases I saw more than one example of challenging behaviour quickly being brought under control.

Staff are demonstrably passionate about the children that they work with. This is equally true of senior leaders such as the Head, Deputy Head and SLT. They interact positively with pupils and speak about them with genuine fondness.

The culture throughout SIC is one of nurture and support. The importance of staff self-care and managing the emotional dimension of working with children who have often experienced (and continue to experience) significant trauma is practiced by all members of staff, encouraged and supported by senior leaders. Two examples of this include the Assistant Head openly speaking of his distress in having to respond to a challenging situation, and of the DSL actively seeking out a member of staff after a difficult incident involving a child.

This culture is created and reinforced in the following ways:

Senior Leaders model the professional behaviour they expect to see. They are very visible and active in the day to day management of the centre and its bases.

There is strong leadership, including an extremely skilled and committed Head.

The staff are well trained (see below).

There is constant communication between SLT, centre staff and the bases. Each morning starts with a briefing with the centre and the Bases. Staff are consulted and informed in planning and reviewing needs/strategies. Each morning begins with overview of all pupils to identify any issues and any missing pupils.

Staff adopt trauma informed approaches, reflective practice, and restorative practice.

There is a sense of inclusion. For example, all children and staff eat together.

Engagement comes from listening to children and helping them to be ready to learn. Individual interests are included throughout the day. Timetables are varied and engaging. Children are encouraged to learn life skills such as cooking.

Staff are well supported and feel valued as members of staff (this was particularly evident during interviews conducted as part of this audit). There are daily debriefs, with reflective practice sessions for staff. All senior leaders also have supervision.

Change and achievement is constantly recognised and celebrated, both the pupils and their families; and with staff.

Staff are highly skilled in identifying and pre-empting issues; responding to them in a trauma informed way.

The focus of every day is on educational achievement but also making personal progress: increasing communication and engagement with staff. I noted some excellent relationships between staff and students. The staff I interviewed understood the trauma and adversity that some young people had experienced, and the continuing challenges that they often faced. Behaviour was understood to be a communication of that.

Children are encouraged to take responsibility for their behaviour and developing techniques when they are angry or distressed, Every site and bases had resources on display on self-regulation and de-escalation techniques such as mindfulness. One thing that students repeatedly told me was how they felt safe and understood at SIC; how they were encouraged to reflect on taking responsibility for learning and understanding the impact behaviour had on others: *“The staff are easy going but challenging. It is so different to mainstream. That is so difficult for me, I had no support”; “It’s so calm and non-judgemental here.”*

There is also a focus on addressing barriers and challenges that some children face in education. For example in the base where young people are preparing to re-integrate back into school, the Base Lead helps the student compose a Pen Portrait which shows the context of their exclusion, allows the child to give their perspective on that but shows their journey since. This document allows the child to communicate what their needs are, what they perceive their strengths and weaknesses to be, and what they need to engage in education.

There is a focus on identifying and meeting individual need. By the time they leave SIC, all students have comprehensive plans and strategies including My Plans and a Re-integration plan. All children are asked for their views on how they think they will manage back in mainstream school, what the challenges are, and what they might need to help them re-integrate. This is shared with the school they are going to attend, and SIC help students manage the transition, including follow up visits once they have returned to mainstream school.

There are a number of specialisms within SIC and its bases. This includes a special needs team; an extremely experienced and knowledge SEND Lead; a Pastoral team; 4 youth workers; a YOT worker; transition coach; a SEND family worker; outreach team; and a therapist.

The Senior Leadership Team consists of the Head, Deputy Head, DSL, Business Manager, and SENDCO. ALT feeds into this and consists of Key Stage Leads. Each base has a leader. All classes are supported by experienced teaching assistants.

Base provision

All Bases visited during this audit were noted to be secure and nurturing places. They all had a sense of calm and are stimulating learning environments. Classes are small with various displays on online safety, safeguarding, regulating behaviour (in different age-appropriate ways), and student work. There are displays on aspirational people from diverse background such as those with SEND or from Roma communities. It would of additional benefit to those attending to see some success stories featuring former students or staff (see Recommendations).

The Bases visited had different focusses. The Earl Marshall Centre and St Bernard’s are both preventative provisions. Both are welcoming environments, and able to show me how they work well with schools and other partners to prevent children becoming permanently excluded. This includes working with students at schools, and attending meetings to support families and enable the child’s perspective to be heard and understood. Educational targets are rewarded with leisure activities, often ones that embed language and maths skills, as well as enabling students to regulate behaviour and social interaction. This includes games such as Monopoly. These bases

also help pupils develop strategies that can be applied in school and prevent further difficulties arising. Each programme is bespoke to the individual child: *“At my old school the teacher had it in for me from the start. I wasn’t sure about coming here but I learn so much and the staff are kind. They are teaching me how to manage my anxiety. They help me to understand why I feel how I do sometimes and that makes goes to school easier to manage.”*

Parklands is attended by young people on a programme for reintegration. There is a focus on regulation, and restorative practice. The experienced Base Leader ensures that comprehensive multi-agency plans identify and meet needs as well as ensuring that the individual young person has the best chance at re-entering mainstream provision by having some insight into their own behaviour and how to address that. Students are supported when they start back at mainstream school to give re-integration the best chance of success. Pupil voice is exceptionally strong at this base, although it is a key feature throughout SIC. This is considered later in this report.

Woodthorpe was one of the first bases to be established and is located in the grounds of a local school. Some of the children attending have experienced acute trauma. SLT recognises that there is a need for mental health specialist workers in all bases but have had difficulty in recruiting. Currently SIC are delivering a programme to upskill key staff to enable them to better meet student need and support families overall.

Fir Vale is a provision located in the heart of the Slovak/Roma community. There are particular issues associated with poverty, sexually harmful behaviour and overall a lack of trust from the community regarding mainstream school and its expectations. It was therefore surprising to see those attending engaging so well with staff. Engagement in and contributions to lessons was good. Although cautious at first, these young students were also keen to talk to me about the base and what they gained from it: *“School’s just not good, it’s a bad place. Here is different. Staff understand us and what we need. Here we are safe.”*

There are daily reports to parents from all Base Leaders, always focussing on the individual and daily achievements of the child (however small). It would be easy for the bases to feel isolated from the main centre. Through daily meetings and regular contact this is avoided. Senior staff also regularly visit bases and students from Bases come to the main site for vocational training. There is communication with SIC and the DSL throughout the day and a daily debrief at the close including a report to SLT. My observations from site visits and interviews with staff and students was that safeguarding and wellbeing are at the core of every day at each of the bases and a sense of close partnership with SLT.

Base staff are evidently passionate and committed about the work that they do. They are always striving to do better for the children that are placed with their individual base. During my visits I saw evidence of good support from senior leaders, including a reflective practice meeting following a difficult incident with a student; and of appropriate professional challenge.

Class sizes are small, and each class is supported by at least one teaching assistant. This means that if a student is upset or distracted, they can be supported without the learning for the rest of the class being disturbed. Pupils that I spoke to felt that this was a particular strength of the

provision: *“I like that classes are small, and teachers explain things really well. I’ve always found it hard to ask for help but here they notice and offer it.”; “Staff support me all of the time”.*

There is also additional support beyond the classroom. This may take the form of:

- 1-1 tuition
- mentoring
- reading interventions
- bespoke curriculum pathways, e.g., equine therapy.

Key Stage 4 pupils are taught about the importance of skills and behaviours when considering their future, There is guidance on writing effective CVs, applying for jobs and becoming aware of experiences of the workplace. Pupils are also supported to attend college open days and workshops such as Girls in Engineering run by Sheffield Hallam University.

SIC has a schools careers programme which is assessed using the ‘Compass’ analysis tool every term to evaluate against the 8 Gatsby Benchmarks.

In each of the bases there is time for personal development – such as adding to kindness trees, cooking, working on regulating behaviour and communicating emotions. The delivery of learning in short sessions interspaced with physical activities such as music, dance, boxing, keep children engaged and prevent pupils from feeling anxious or overwhelmed. Giving them a set timetable and structure gets children ready to learn and in routines. Students are often engaged in activities that reinforce learning core language and mathematics skills, and incentives are given through targets and reward. They are encouraged to identify what isn’t working for them and to take responsibility in taking steps to address it.

PHSE is delivered in all the Bases in an age appropriate way. Sometimes this has needed some introductory work and re-embedding (for example at Fir Vale where pupils may not have an existing understand of issues around consent and acceptable behaviour in English society). There is a focus on healthy relationships including avoiding and resolving conflict.

Resources used throughout SIC were noted to be practical and appropriate particularly for students who may be neurodivergent or not have English as a first language. This included helping pupils in using facial expressions to ascertain feelings; encouraging students to develop strategies to ascertain or resolve feelings; looking after mental and emotional wellbeing; understanding British values; and zones of regulation. Scenario based work is a key strength and students have a chance to engage in debates and group discussions. Other topics covered are dealing with change and resilience to peer influences (particularly negative ones). A new PHSE Lead has adopted a three-tier approach to the PHSE programme. This includes reactive bespoke work based on identified trends and incidents. There is also a focused mentoring programme, where staff are matched to individual children/issues based on their skill set and experiences.

One student told me how he had benefited from relationships with staff at all levels, including SLT and from extra- curricular activities which increased his confidence. Of particular importance to

him was how he had been given flexibility to regulate and reflect in a supportive environment *“It’s important for me to be able to take myself out and come back in.”*

Support for parents can often be practical – resources to understand and manage behaviour, supporting them in attending appointments and helping them to access services. During the bases visits I could see evidence of the good relationships between parents and the staff and how there was partnership working, with agreed goals for the child.

All staff interviewed as part of the audit were knowledgeable and highly experienced in safeguarding. They spoke positively of their CPD programme, which they felt equipped them well to deliver their work, along with the support and mentoring from designated staff. All staff were able to say with certainty that any concerns they raised would be responded to effectively, including any of a whistleblowing nature.

I saw evidence of good relationships between staff and students. I spoke to children who were confident in talking to me about their experiences, and also saw them asking staff to help them with things such as having access to the gym. Some staff’s personal professional experience helps in making children feel understood. This assisting them in reflecting on what they can and need to do in order to move forward and achieve: *“The staff are great; you can talk to them about anything.” “The staff, they have your back., Anything you are worried or anxious about, they support you.”*

The NGAGE team offers additional provision with programmes and activities around music production, cooking, boxing and so on.

There is provision for counselling in school. In the past term there has been a focus on mental health. The DSL has undertaken mental health first aid training and as mentioned earlier, existing staff are being trained to enable them to have more expertise and confidence in identifying and responding to issues around emotional wellbeing.

One thing that I felt was missing from visiting SIC and its bases was written evidence of what it does and the difference that it makes. There is a varied range of skill and experience among staff, and it would be beneficial to SIC when submitting reports to stakeholders or being inspected (for example by Ofsted) to have to hand the details of Spring Lane and each base provision – an overview of the staff working there, and details of the work delivered outside of the core curriculum. SIC does so much and does it so well but it lacks the documentary evidence to show this (see Recommendations). Included in this should be the written evidence of what staff do to improve outcomes for the young people that they work with. SIC overall could do so much more in evidencing the improvements in individual attendance, attainment and behaviour. In creating individual progress charts and data, SIC could also capture the excellent work that they do with multi agency partners and families. This would help those external to SIC (particularly those funding its work) to understand the added value and benefit that this unique provision brings. (See Recommendations).

Partnership working

This is a particularly important part of this audit, as the children attending SIC have complex needs and backgrounds. A significant percentage of the students are SEND (often this is identified during their time at SIC). Most have experiences of trauma. All the students I spoke to told me of their poor secondary school experiences. With its specialist knowledge, staff skill-set and small class size; SIC offers a unique opportunity to understand the difficulties that have led to issues in mainstream school and how to address them. In doing so, previous safeguarding issues and undiagnosed conditions such as ADHD are often identified.

School works well with its partner agencies. From CPOMS I could see that SIC is escalating constantly to partners, especially social care. Where there are concerns about child protection, there was evidence of good partnership working and challenge. There is partnership working with all relevant agencies and specialist provision, including CAMHS, speech and language, health etc.

Of a particular focus is the identification of individual need and risk. Several senior staff voiced concern that the numbers coming to SIC is rapidly increasing, with seemingly inconsistent reasons for exclusion. A common feature would seem to be that children come with My Plans that are not followed or have never been reviewed. It is fair to say that SLT are concerned about the rising numbers of referrals, and expectations against a backdrop of reducing funding. Although SIC works well with its partners, resources are often scarce. This would seem to be the case for SEND and trauma affected children in particular. There is concern that permanent exclusions are sometimes a tool for managing rather than understanding and responding to challenging behaviour. The Management Committee is aware of and monitoring this.

Another concern is the lack of information sharing by the police, which often means that vital knowledge concerning risks in the community is missing, This is something that I am recommending that the Management Committee reviews to see if it can aid in improving (see Recommendations).

During the audit, I saw evidence of regular reports to children's social care, and that CPOMS is used well.

I also considered two high risk case studies. The records showed appropriate practice, with SIC sharing information with the local authority, escalating processes, challenging decisions and also adding in participation from the child.

Student knowledge and progress

All bases work hard to try to improve attendance. When considering attendance, I was mindful of how disengaged some students are from education and how much of a challenge regular attendance must be. I could see a clear process for children missing from education. There is an immediate home visit as soon as a student does not attend, with further enquiries made from peers and the community if the young person cannot be found. Local partners are engaged where appropriate. I was able to see evidence of this during my visit to one of the Bases.

SIC's approach in addressing unmet needs and safety issues means that students previously disengaged from education are ready to learn. Teachers were observed to be dynamic, holding interesting and high energy sessions which students readily engaged in. Learning goes beyond the academic. Staff are inspirational, often with personal experience of living in challenging communities and their engagement with the students was observed to be excellent. Community engagement was also felt by staff to be essential along with this life experience. One teaching assistant from Fir Vale gave this example: *"They will say 'My dad works but he has no qualifications'. I try to help them to see that with qualifications they can get better paid work that is of real interest to them."*

The learning that I saw engaged students and any potentially difficult behaviour was quickly addressed and de-escalated. It was clear in all bases that students felt welcomed and safe, and that it was a place they wanted to be: *"I love it here. I want to come even if I don't like some of the lessons"*

In each base when I saw pupils together, there was no trace of bullying or discriminatory behaviour. Pupils were respectful towards and supportive of one another.

Key achievements

In my view, the identification of and meeting of unmet needs is without a doubt the biggest difference that SIC makes to its pupils. In recognising their life journey and the reasons for their difficulties at school as well as understanding their needs, staff help to break down barriers to learning; and raise aspirations for the future. Small realistic targets are set and celebrated when reached. This helps pupils to believe in their ability to achieve.

There are weekly reviews for each child involving safeguarding staff, the SENCO, SLT, and Key Stage Leaders. Issues and strategies are reviewed and revisited. In this way plans and resources adapt along with the changing needs of the child.

The 4-year trend analysis provided to me by SIC shows that:

- Attendance is improving (but will always be a challenge for a provision like SIC with disengaged and hard to reach pupils).
- The GCSE comparator tool that I saw shows significant improvement in results. 28 GCSEs in 2018/29 compared to 47 20/21 Less students 84 2018/9 to 61 20/21.

This shows that the benefit to those attending SIC is not just personal; there is a benefit in terms of engagement and attainment also. I do not believe that the same would be true were these children attending a provision other than SIC.

Management Committee

A new Management Committee was established following the Ofsted inspection in 2019. There is an extremely experienced and skilled Chair of Governors who also acts as the Nominated Safeguarding Governor. He contributed to this audit, as did the Vice Chair. The Management Committee also includes members with extensive practice experience of a local authority special needs team, a teacher with experience of working with the Roma community; a local councillor

with a teaching and legal background; and member who have senior positions in the local authority.

I was particularly impressed to see that each governor's meeting concludes with a self-evaluation to ensure that the correct level of scrutiny has been brought to relevant issues and that statutory requirements are being satisfied. This ensures that the effectiveness of the Management Committee and how they are meeting their core purpose and goals is kept under constant review.

I also saw evidence of a SWOT analysis, identifying that post pandemic the Management Committee had lost some key Head Teacher members which were felt to be an asset in addressing some of the concerns raised by Ofsted. This is currently being addressed.

I had sight of minutes of a number of Management Committee meetings. I could see evidence of an active engagement with SIC. This includes scrutinising information received from the Head and DSL, of the School Improvement Plan, and analysis of information around attainment, attendance and behaviour. I saw further evidence of involvement in safeguarding audits and reference to ongoing work such as the Single Central Record audits.

The Head Teacher's report to governors is comprehensive but could perhaps be more detailed and follow a standardised template. As I have already discussed this with the Head, I have made no further recommendations in this report.

Through consideration of the minutes, and in interviews with the Chair and Vice Chair I could ascertain that there is solid support for SIC and its senior leaders. There would appear to be a good relationship between the Head and the Chair. The Head has been the subject of more than one concern raised by the local authority, and I saw evidence that the Chair had given appropriate support and also reassurance to the Management Committee.

The Management Committee has a good understanding of the expectations and challenges of SIC and how they meet these. The Chair is proud of SIC, its unique provision, and of its achievements: *"There is a whole network of adults focussed on the children from the minute they arrive and being aware of how they are and what they might need during the day"*.

All members of the Management Committee have been recruited following safer recruitment guidance and have an enhanced DBS certificate (including a Barred list check). I consider this to be best practice, given the enhanced vulnerability of the children attending SIC.

Some members of the Management Committee have received training, including safeguarding, and the Chair and Vice Chair have attended safer recruitment training. I am recommending that the Business Manager creates an Excel spreadsheet to record Governor's training. This should be reviewed by the Management Committee each term to assess what training may be needed or in need or updating for which governors. The Chair should liaise with the Business Manager concerning this. In this way both SIC and its Management Committee will be fully informed about governor training and requirements (see Recommendations).

I discussed the issue of training with both the Chair and Vice Chair. Some understanding of the role of the Designated Lead, online safety, and mental health would be of benefit to the governors

in helping them understand the statutory expectations of SIC. It will reinforce the role the Management Committee should play in supporting the attainment of this.

I appreciate that it can be a challenge for members to attend training, and that sometimes training is too generic to feel of relevance to their role as governors. One of the ideas I proposed to the Chair and Vice Chair was a programme whereby the Management Committee identifies topics that it needs further understanding of. An individual member can take responsibility for researching a topic or attending relevant training and cascading this to other governors at each meeting. This will assist members in accessing training relevant to their role as well as keeping updated so that they can be effective as possible can. If the suggestion is taken forward, the sessions should be reflected in the excel spreadsheet showing the Management Committee training and maintained by the Business Manager (see above).

The Vice Chair also suggested that she had been thinking of an induction process for governors, reflecting on what was difficult for her as new governor and what helped (practical steps such as site visits, being part of the appointment of new Base Leaders and hearing their thoughts on the development of the Baes etc). This is an excellent suggestion and one which I fully support.

Student Voice

As noted previously, students are encouraged to have a voice at SIC. The website has a strong student voice, Social media such as the school Twitter feed also reflects student voice, with videos featuring young people talking about their experiences at (and benefit from attending) SIC.

The Deputy Head takes the lead for student voice, with an online questionnaire completed by pupils every half term. I have seen the results of this along with action planning to address points requiring improvement.

The provision does not currently have a Student Council. I understand the difficulties that comes with small classes and provision at different bases. I would recommend that SIC consider different ways in which this could be facilitated. For example, one way forward may be the use of dedicated form time where a staff leader for each group feeds into a student council by proxy (and feeds back). (See Recommendations).

Parent Voice

Although there is ongoing and daily contact with parents, obtaining feedback from parents is challenging for SIC. Unsurprisingly this is as a result of issues such as prior disenfranchisement and disengagement from services; literacy and language skills; and lack of access to technology.

The last Ofsted survey was conducted in 20/21. There were 28 responses. 92% of parents responding felt that their child was happy at SIC. 95% said their child felt safe. 91% of parents would recommend SIC to others.

The responses that were less favourable were around bullying and dealing with parents concerns but even so the results were good, with 74% parents feeling that bullying was dealt with well and that 74% feeling that their concerns (when raised) were responded to well by the school.

Consideration was given to parent participation during this audit but for a number of reasons was not possible. I would however suggest that some participation work takes place in the near future. This may be as simple as recording views shared by parents to members of staff in one place. It may be something developed and delivered by Base Leaders. I also wonder if SIC have an exit evaluation that they assist parents/carers in completing when their child leaves SIC. Extracting data from sources such as these is likely to be more effective than sending out questionnaires or surveys. Extracting and analysing data in this way will allow SIC to address any issues arising, post positive comments on social media and the website, and collate evidence of parent voice ahead of any Ofsted inspection (see Recommendations).

Conclusion

The provision at SIC is robust and effective. There is a culture of wanting to improve and achieve the best for those attending. This is evidenced by things such as SLT analysis of data; DSL analysis of CPOMS; reflective practice; engagement and partnership working with other agencies; and engaging in audits (including this one).

The areas needing improvement are important but not areas for concern. They are changes and improvements to policies, recording, and evidencing what SIC does. The recommendations below reflect that.

Recommendations

1. That within the next 3 months the DSL amends the current safeguarding policy so that it:
 - a. Has an index or contents list at the start of the policy
 - b. Contains clear guidance on what action staff should take if they have a concern about a child
 - c. Contains guidance on what action staff should take if they have a concern about another member of staff or other person who works with children.
 - d. Cross references with the allegations and record retention policy
 - e. Contains a section on whistleblowing.
2. That within the next 3 months the Business Manager and DSL amend the Record Retention policy to reflect the NSPCC guidance on safeguarding record keeping including where allegations are made against staff ([Child protection records, retention and storage guidelines \(nspcc.org.uk\)](https://www.nspcc.org.uk)) It is further recommended that there is one system for keeping records where concerns are raised regarding staff, whether these be low level concerns or if they reach the LADO threshold and that this is reflected in this policy.
3. That within the next 3 months the DSL contacts Sheffield City Council to see if the Allegations policy has been updated following KCSIE 2022. If so, SIC's policy needs to be updated accordingly. If not, the current policy should be marked 'under review' pending such an update.
4. That within the next 3 months the DSL amends the Safeguarding Training Pathway so that it reflects the extent and frequency of the school's training and development programme. This should reflect the fact that safeguarding training is delivered to all staff

annually, and that there is a continuing CPD programme in place. Any references to staff having safeguarding training refreshed every 3 years should be removed.

5. That within the next 3 months the Business Manager and DSL create a record of all staff training including safeguarding training.
6. That within the next 3 months the Business Manager and DSL ensure that the Record Retention Policy makes reference to the retention of agency and supply staff on the SCR for a 12-month period.
7. That within the next 3 months the Business Manager and Senior Leadership Team should ensure that the interview template is amended to remove the panel assessment scoring the candidate quality of answer – or alternatively ensure that this is fully completed in all cases in the future.
8. That within the next 3 months the Business Manager should ensure that the Record Retention Policy makes reference to the retention of unsuccessful candidate's paperwork for 12-month period following application.
9. That within the next 6 months the Chair of the Management Committee and the Business Manager create a timetable to ensure that the SCR is audited termly by the Chair and Head. This should include auditing a randomly selected number of recruitment files. This will ensure that the SCR matches and is evidenced by those records and that all relevant information is being retained.
10. That within the next 6 months the Business Manager organises recruitment files so that there is a content list and dividers between sections (e.g., application documents and interview notes; pre employment checks; post-employment documents).
11. That within the next 6 months the Business Manager should ensure that there is cross referencing between paper files and electronic records so that it is clear where certain documents have been retained.
12. In cases where references are requested, I would recommend that the Business Manager seeks external HR advice where an allegation has not been substantiated or defined as a 'low level' concern.
13. That within the next 6 months, the Business Manager creates an Excel spreadsheet to record training attended by members of the Management Committee. This should be reviewed by the Management Committee each term to assess what training may need arranging for which member. There should be liaison between the Chair and Business Manager regarding this.
14. That within the next 6 months the Chair and Vice Chair should propose to the Management Committee that a programme is created whereby the Management Committee identifies topics that it needs further understanding of. An individual member can take responsibility for researching a topic or attending relevant training and cascading this to other governors at each meeting. This should be recorded in the excel spreadsheet showing the Management Committee training and maintained by the Business Manager.
15. That within the next 6 months the Chair of the Management Committee should met with SLT and report back to the Management Committee regarding the lack of information sharing by the police. The Management Committee should set aside time to review how and if it can aid in improving this.

16. That within the next 6 months the DSL and Base Leaders should create a profile of each pupil which contains a record of work delivered and improvements in areas such as attainment, attendance, and behaviour. There should be a quarterly report from each base to SLT giving details of progress in those three fields. Those quarterly reports should be analysed and contained in a quarterly report by the Head to the Management Committee. Hard copies of all quarterly reports should be retained to evidence to Ofsted how key targets are met; and to stakeholders how progress is made and monitored.
17. That within 6–12 months SLT and Base Leaders prepare a document which gives an overview of the staff working at Spring Lane and the bases. This should include an overview of the children and their progress, and details of the work delivered outside of the core curriculum. This should be regularly updated by Base Leaders with oversight from SLT.
18. That within the next 6-12 months SLT revisit the signing in process for bases.
19. That within the next 12 months the DSL and Base Leaders consider creating displays showing success stories featuring former students or staff.
20. That within the next 6-12 months the Deputy Head consider how pupil participation can be obtained and feed into a school council. This may be best facilitated in form time, with a dedicated pupil voice session where the leader for the group feeds into a student council by proxy (and feeds back) to the class. There should be involvement from the Management Committee with this,
21. That within the next 6-12 months SLT considers how best to obtain and record parents and carers views. This should be shared with the Management Committee on at least a bi-annual basis.