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Mrs Carol Brooker
Headteacher
Molehill Copse Primary School
Hereford Road
Maidstone
ME15 7ND

Dear Mrs Brooker

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Molehill Copse Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 1 May 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in December 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with: the headteacher; subject leaders for English; the attendance leader and family liaison officer; the special educational needs coordinator and deputy special educational needs coordinator; the Chair of the Management Board and the Regional Director of Education for the Academies Enterprise Trust. Brief visits were made to all classes. The academy's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated. The checks made on staff about their suitability to work with children were reviewed.

Context

Following a period of interim leadership from January to April a new substantive headteacher started at the school at the end of April 2014. The deputy headteacher

is on long-term sick leave. A new governor has been appointed to the management board. A new special educational needs coordinator was appointed in January 2014.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The newly appointed headteacher is ambitious for the school. Her vision to raise aspirations among pupils and parents and carers is shared by the staff and governors; they are excited and buoyant about the proposed ways forward.

The school's action plan identifies the key areas to work on and makes it clear who is responsible, what they need to do and the timeframe for action. The plan has got off to a good start with the reorganisation of some classes to improve pupils' learning.

The Academy Enterprise Trust's statement of action includes all the areas for improvement from the school's inspection. However, the organisation of the plan is muddled. It does not set out well enough who will lead the actions, what is hoped to be achieved, how progress towards goals will be checked and how this will be done. This means it is not a useful tool for governors and senior leaders to check how well the school is doing. The targets for pupils' attainment and progress are not ambitious enough to set the high expectations needed for all pupils to do as well as they should.

The newly created special educational needs team knows exactly what it needs to do to raise aspirations and standards. For example, the team intends to involve teaching assistants in planning with teachers so they can support learning more effectively. The detail of how their aims will be achieved has yet to be decided but they are certainly on the right track.

Subject leaders for English understand the need to tackle underachievement. The additional help for pupils to learn letters and sounds (phonics) is a useful way forward; leaders should think carefully in advance about the exact goals for such work to be able to check its success. The recent session for parents and carers to help their children with phonics was well attended and leaders sensibly plan to repeat this to develop support for children at home.

The attendance leader and family liaison officer are rightly highlighting to families the important links between attendance and learning. They have made a good start in developing new strategies to tackle persistent absence, such as questionnaires for parents, carers and pupils, but it is too early to see the impact of this work.

Members of the management board understand the issues faced by the school and are fully committed to improvements. Governors' valuable skills are not fully utilised to challenge and support the school because of weaknesses in the statement of action.

The Academies Enterprise Trust has provided helpful support from consultants, for example to help Year 6 pupils prepare for the national tests in May. Successful schools within the chain are providing models of good practice. The impact of this support has not yet been assessed.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The academy's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Management Board, the Director of Children's Services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Gard

Her Majesty's Inspector