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10 July 2014

Mrs L Fidock, Principal  
Tree Tops Academy  
Brishing Lane  
Park Wood  
Maidstone  
Kent  
ME15 9EZ

Dear Mrs Fidock

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Tree Tops Academy**

Following my visit with Barbara Saltmarsh, additional inspector, to your academy on 8 and 9 July 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

The academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs).

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Management Board, and the Academies Advisors Unit at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely  
Sheena MacDonald  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2013**

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching so it is consistently good and improve pupils' attitudes to learning by:
  - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can and should attain by challenging pupils to work harder in lessons
  - making sure teachers use information about pupils' progress to plan lessons which meet the individual needs of all pupils
  - enabling pupils to be less reliant on adult support
  - asking pupils more challenging and probing questions
  - ensuring teachers check the progress that pupils are making during lessons, spotting mistakes that pupils are making and adapting their teaching accordingly.
  
- Raise achievement in reading and mathematics by:
  - making sure that all teachers plan and teach phonics at the right level for pupils so that they can apply this knowledge with confidence
  - ensuring that the teaching of reading to older pupils places more emphasis on understanding the meaning of new words, whole sentences and the text as a whole.
  - providing pupils with more opportunities to develop and apply their reading skills across all subjects
  - making better use of resources to support pupils' mathematical skills, particularly for less-able pupils in Key Stage 2
  - improving teachers' planning so that pupils have more opportunities to use and apply their mathematical skills.
  
- Improve leadership and management by:
  - ensuring that teachers whose practice is not good enough receive high-quality support to help them improve rapidly
  - analysing information about pupils' attainment and progress more rigorously, taking action when appropriate to ensure pupils in every class are making at least good progress
  - developing the skills of all leaders so that they can fully contribute to improving the school
  - making sure that the interim management board holds school leaders robustly accountable for improvements in pupils' achievement.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 8 and 9 July 2014**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes jointly with senior leaders. This included short visits to observe the teaching of early reading. We looked at the work in pupils' books and scrutinised various documents including improvement plans, the management board minutes, safeguarding information, and the most up-to-date checks on pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. We met with the Principal, and senior and subject leaders. I also met two members of the management board, one of whom is a neighbouring academy Principal and the other is the Regional Director of Education for the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET).

### **Context**

One member of the teaching staff left the academy at Easter and a newly appointed member of staff joined the academy at the beginning of July.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

Pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills are improving and, in almost all classes, pupils have made reasonable progress, particularly in the latter part of the year. The Year 6 national test results have just been received by the academy and show a significant rise from the exceptionally low standards achieved last year. Similarly, there has been an improvement in the results of the phonic (sounds that letters make) screening check carried out with Year 1 pupils. Although these are pleasing, the pupils' skills are still not as good as they should be and remain lower than average. This is because the rate of progress has not been fast enough to help pupils make up the lost ground due to poor teaching in the past.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are much improved. In almost all sessions observed during this visit, they listened attentively and readily set about their activities. A successful focus on reading means that pupils are becoming enthusiastic readers. In the phonics sessions, pupils are keen to practise and learn new sounds, although there is less evidence that they are using their knowledge of letters and sounds in their writing. The strategies currently being used to improve reading are particularly focused on fiction and there are too few opportunities for pupils to use their reading skills in different subjects. The pace of learning is still slow in some classrooms and sometimes the pupils do not have enough time to get on with their work without interruption. This is particularly the case in writing and, as a result, they are making slower progress in writing than in reading and mathematics. This is evident in their books where there are few extended pieces of writing.

### **The quality of teaching**

The quality of teaching is improving and there is now very little that is inadequate. When teaching is less than successful, it tends to be when teachers and support

staff do not have a good understanding of the learning and purpose of the activities. Although, overall, most teaching still requires improvement, all observations during the visit had some good features. The sessions were well organised and teachers used a variety of resources, particularly in mathematics, to support the learning. Classrooms are inviting places with useful displays of vocabulary and reminders about what pupils can do to be successful. Teachers make links across different subjects to make sessions interesting and build on previous learning. For example, in Year 6, the teacher used a class novel to stimulate learning, across different subjects, including mathematics and literacy work.

There are still occasions when adults, particularly learning support assistants, do not give pupils opportunities to work on their own without constant direction. This limits how much pupils can achieve and it also shows that the adults' expectations of what pupils can achieve are still too low. Sometimes, teachers' good ideas do not work out well in practice because the pupils are not used to thinking things out for themselves or staying on task without continual prompting. Where teachers have persevered with different approaches to help pupils become less dependent on the adults, this is beginning to work. Pupils are beginning to show that they can achieve without constant adult support. This was seen in a Year 2 writing session where pupils focused on their writing with just a little, appropriate support and encouragement from the adults.

The regular collection and improved use of information about how well pupils are achieving mean that teachers now have a better understanding of the pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills. They are also more aware of what they need to do next to help pupils improve. Most teachers plan activities that are set at the right level. Previous inadequate teaching means that there are unexpected gaps in pupils' understanding and also times when pupils have a better understanding than the teachers expected. This requires teachers to be ready to adapt activities quickly and most teachers are not yet quite able to do that as effectively as is needed. Almost all teachers are using the agreed system for marking pupils' work and there are good examples in most classes of pupils improving their work or doing extra challenges in response to the teachers' feedback.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Pupils of all ages usually get along well together, listen carefully to adults and to each other and are keen to do well. They usually feel safe and happy in school because they are well looked after. Their behaviour in classrooms has improved along with their attitudes to learning. This means that there is much less of the inattentive and off-task behaviour which was noted in the section 5 inspection. There are still occasions when some of this behaviour creeps in and it is usually in the classes where teaching has been inadequate until recently. Although the academy uses a variety of strategies to improve attendance, there are still too many pupils who do not attend every day and on time so that attendance remains below average.

## **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

The Principal and Vice-Principal are determined to bring about the required improvements. They have set about the task of improving the academy with clear purpose and have been supported in this by consultants provided by AET. Other subject and senior leaders are also enthusiastic about carrying out their responsibilities and are beginning to be increasingly influential. The leaders have perhaps been a little ambitious about what can realistically be achieved in a relatively short period and the time it takes to embed improvements in everybody's practice. Nonetheless, the improvements in pupils' achievements and in the quality of teaching show that their approaches are beginning to work.

Senior leaders carry out regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning. They carefully analyse the, now accurate, information about how well the pupils, and groups of pupils, are achieving. They also look at the work in books, scrutinise teachers' planning, and observe teaching and learning. Helpful guidance is provided to reinforce expectations about the quality of teaching, and this is followed up quickly to celebrate success or to provide additional individual support where necessary. As a result of this, there is good evidence of teachers making significant improvements to their practice. Almost all staff now follow agreed guidelines for planning, teaching, classroom displays and marking pupils' work. Up until now, leaders' monitoring has tended to focus on making sure that everyone is following the guidelines. Now that they are, it is time to shift the balance on to how well pupils, and groups of pupils, are learning. It is particularly important to make sure that pupils have more opportunities to work at length and to check that there is enough challenge, particularly for more-able pupils.

All staff have received a range of valuable training opportunities including, in some cases, observing successful practice in other schools. Regular meetings are held with class teachers to discuss pupils' progress and teachers are beginning to be held to account for the progress, or lack of progress, of pupils in their classes. The involvement of teachers in taking responsibility for ensuring the progress of all of their pupils, and implementing their own strategies to speed up the process, is still relatively underdeveloped.

The management board is influential and knowledgeable. Members carry out visits with particular areas of focus, and the records show that they know the academy well and are holding senior leaders to account as well as providing support. The chair is the Regional Director of AET and regularly spends time in the academy supporting the senior leaders, but also monitoring and evaluating the rate of improvement. The academy's improvement plan and the statement of action have been carefully followed, but now managers, senior leaders and academy staff rightly intend to streamline the plans and make sure that targets are challenging but also realistic. Although the academy has made some significant improvements, many of the milestones in the statement of action have not been achieved. Senior staff and

managers are well aware that, although there are encouraging signs of real improvement, there is a great deal still to do.

### **External support**

AET are providing a high level of consultancy support and training, and this is being followed up well by senior leaders so that advice is being used to bring about improvements. Consultants have enhanced leadership by providing training for teachers and support staff. The Principal has also developed links with two special academies and a local authority school to provide specialist training and opportunities for staff to observe good practice.