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21 November 2014

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

Dear Mrs Brooker

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Molehill Copse Primary School**

Following my visit to your academy on 20 November 2014 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. 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 was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in December 2013. 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 removal of the special measures designation.

The sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Kent.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Gard  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

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

- Improve the achievement of pupils and increase the proportion of teaching that is consistently good and outstanding by:
  - giving all pupils regular opportunities to correct and improve their work after it has been marked
  - promoting pupils' resilience so that they have high aspirations, and are able to play a full part in lessons and can judge their own progress accurately
  - use assessment information more effectively to plan work that is consistently matched to the needs and capabilities of the different groups of pupils and check regularly that pupils are making the progress that they should make
  - ensuring that all lessons are delivered at a brisk pace, motivating pupils to do well and encouraging them to have positive attitudes to learning.
- Build on improvements to attendance to ensure all pupils attend as regularly as they can.
- Strengthen further the capacity of leadership and management at all levels to sustain improvement by:
  - rapidly implementing the new management board's plans for asking challenging questions and holding academy staff to account for improvements in teaching and pupils' achievement
  - creating an effective and sustainable long-term structure for leadership, management and governance so that the academy is led and managed well at all levels.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 20 November 2014**

### **Evidence**

The inspector met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, a group of pupils, subject leaders for English and mathematics and the special educational needs team. The inspector also spoke to a representative of the academy trust and the chair of governors. The inspector visited seven teaching sessions with the headteacher and looked at pupils' work with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. The inspector reviewed a range of documentation including the academy's statement of action, pupil progress data, the school's checks on the suitability of adults working with children, information about exclusions and attendance and governing body minutes. The inspector concentrated on evaluating how well leaders at all levels are raising standards.

### **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection in May 2014 the deputy headteacher has returned to school full time. There is a new teacher in charge of the specialist unit for pupils with a hearing impairment. Three teachers left in July 2014 and have been replaced by two experienced teachers and one newly-qualified teacher. The two teachers responsible for leading English have left on maternity leave and their roles have been taken over by two teachers from within the school. A new regional director of education for the academy trust started in September 2014.

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

When the new headteacher started in April 2014 she was determined to raise standards across the school through developing better-quality teaching. Staff appreciate her hands-on approach which shows them exactly what she expects. Teaching has improved but it is too early to measure the effect on pupils' achievement.

Leaders know further work is needed to ensure all pupils do as well as they should. They have shown teachers how to use information about pupils' standards effectively to help them do better. Daily target-getting sessions focus on specific areas of English or mathematics to help pupils catch up with where they should be. Older pupils explain that this work 'helps you reach the standard you should be at.' An additional teacher has been appointed to help improve progress in Year 6. Pupils work in smaller groups which helps them to concentrate well on their work.

Very few pupils met the expected standard in the national check on letters and sounds (phonics) in 2014. Leaders looked at what went wrong and rightly made helpful changes to the way phonics is taught. Useful training raised adults' expectations about the standards pupils should reach. Pupils are taught by their own

class teacher instead of in different groups. This helps make sure activities are at the right level of challenge so pupils learn more quickly than before.

The family liaison officer spends a great deal of time working with a small number of families whose circumstances put them at risk. This helps these families feel well supported but their children still do not come to school frequently enough. More recently there has been a tougher approach to raise awareness of the importance of coming to school. Parents whose children miss too much school are sent letters to remind them about attendance rates and some have been sent penalty notices. Targeted pupils are starting to attend more regularly but leaders are aware that overall absence remains too high.

The behaviour policy has been revised. The new traffic light system helps pupils see just when their behaviour is on track. Importantly, all adults had the same training so there is a consistent approach and pupils know exactly how they are expected to behave. Pupils say conduct in class is better. They are very motivated to attend the exciting Golden Time sessions which reward pupils who behave consistently well.

Subject leaders for English and mathematics have identified key areas to tackle in order to raise standards further. For example the mathematics leader recognises teaching assistants need training to give them greater confidence to support mathematics sessions. The recently-appointed English leaders already have a good grasp of what they need to do. Their new initiative to encourage regular reading is inspiring pupils.

The chair of governors visits the academy regularly. He has a good understanding of what is being done to raise standards. However there are no formal records of visits to show whether all governors check exactly how well the academy is doing. Governor meeting minutes do not indicate clearly enough how effectively governors challenge school leaders.

### **Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Most pupils try hard in lessons and concentrate on their work. This helps them to make progress.
- Where marking is effective teachers show pupils exactly what to improve and set extra challenges to make them think hard.
- New approaches to writing are helping pupils develop better resilience to write longer pieces.

### **Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- The useful marking seen in some books is not consistent across the school.
- Action plans for some subjects and special educational needs require improvement to be effective tools to raise standards.

- Pupils are not always given enough time to practise skills in lessons, and this holds learning back.

### **External support**

The academy trust provides valuable support. For example consultants work alongside new subject leaders to develop their skills. There are useful opportunities to work with local schools in the same trust, for example to help teachers agree the standards pupils achieve in their work. The regional director of education visits regularly to check how well the academy is performing.

The academy trust has reviewed its statement of action. It is now a useful tool to help improve the academy because it is clear just what the academy is aiming for and exactly how this will be achieved. Targets have been set for the higher levels, showing that leaders are ambitious for pupils to do as well as they can.