

Tribal  
Kings Orchard  
One Queen Street  
Bristol  
BS2 0HQ

T 0300 123 1231  
Text Phone: 0161 6188524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

**Direct T** 0117 311 5359  
**Email:** christina.bannerman@tribalgroup.com

2 December 2014

Mrs Cathy Farthing  
Headteacher  
Staplehurst School  
Gybbon Rise  
Staplehurst  
Tonbridge  
Kent  
TN12 0LZ

Dear Mrs Farthing

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Staplehurst School**

Following my visit to your school on 2 December 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school 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 school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

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

Catherine Anwar  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is good or better by:
  - ensuring that marking and helpful comments about pupils' work are used consistently across the school to help pupils to improve, especially in mathematics and writing
  - developing teachers' subject knowledge so that they have the skills to plan the teaching of mathematics and writing in a structured way that reinforces learning at the right pace for every pupil
  - improving the teaching of phonics (linking of letters and the sounds they make) so that pupils learn to read well and can apply their skills to developing spelling and interesting writing
  - closing the gaps in achievement for pupils supported through the pupil premium and for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
  - checking frequently and rigorously that all pupils are making at least good progress in all subjects and responding quickly when information shows that this is not happening
  - developing the skills of middle leaders so that they can manage improvements to their curriculum areas and ensure all teachers have access to resources to help them to improve their teaching of that subject
  - ensuring that governors have the expertise to hold the school rigorously to account.
- Improve the curriculum so that pupils have more opportunities to practise and develop their skills by:
  - checking that there is a good range of well-planned and relevant opportunities for reading, writing and mathematics to be used in topics and physical education (PE) and sport
  - improving the range of resources to teach information and communication technology (ICT) and making sure that there are activities planned for all year groups so that pupils can develop their ICT skills well in addition to using ICT to support their learning in other subjects.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 2 December 2014**

### **Evidence**

The inspector met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, representatives from the governing body and a representative from the local authority. The inspector observed parts of four lessons with the deputy headteacher, reviewed the single central record of teacher vetting checks and scrutinised a wide range of pupils' literacy and mathematics books. The inspector also looked through pupil progress data and visited a music assembly.

### **Context**

Since the last inspection, five teachers have left the school and four have joined.

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

Senior leaders have maintained the momentum of improvement in the school through their relentless pursuit of high expectations. A prudent review of the role of support staff has, wisely, led to a honed-down team. Support for pupils has been sensibly reshaped to ensure a sharper focus on high-quality teaching. A well-targeted programme of training is helping teachers to better match work to the abilities of all pupils, but this is still work in progress.

Subject and phase leaders are beginning to take on more responsibility for their areas and have recently completed useful improvement plans to support their work. Encouragingly, these colleagues are also to benefit from external leadership training courses next term.

The headteacher's drive and determination are reflected in much better test results in 2014 and in a continuing rise in the rates of pupils' progress. She has astutely identified remaining areas for improvement and has quickly put appropriate actions into place. For example, frequent short lesson observations currently focus on the rates of progress made by those pupils in receipt of the pupil premium funding.

Governors are keenly aware of key areas for improvement in the school and offer a strong level of challenge to leaders. They have a good understanding of the progress made by different groups of pupils, visit the school regularly and have helped with the strategic identification of leadership priorities. The governing body is now replete with expertise in relevant areas and is using this to good effect.

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

- Improvements in teaching mean that pupils are now making better progress. Outcomes at the end of the summer term were very pleasing, pupils' in-year progress is promising and books show evidence of sustained improvements in

the standard of work. Phonics teaching is better and Year 1 pupils reached a good standard in this area by the end of the summer term.

- Strong leadership has embedded effective systems to check pupils' progress and successful intervention is in place for pupils who are making slower progress.
- The work of middle leaders in the school is beginning to show promise, however it is too early to see any substantial impact.
- Governance is now much stronger; governors knowledgeably hold leaders to account and demonstrate a sharp strategic focus.
- Pupils are benefiting from increased ICT provision. Opportunities for extended writing are increasingly apparent in pupils' books and displays of their work. Pupils demonstrate a very positive approach to their writing; they are keen and eager to show how their work is getting better.

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

- Despite overall improvements, consistency in the quality of teaching remains an issue. Teachers have undertaken training by the local authority on improving their subject expertise in mathematics, but this has yet to show a significant impact. Marking and the comments made by teachers in pupils' books are not always targeted precisely enough on how pupils can develop their learning. The progress of disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and those eligible for pupil premium funding is not yet good enough. This is particularly the case in Key Stage 1, where the gap between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and their peers is growing.
- Middle leaders now need to swiftly develop their skills. They must hold their teams to account with increased rigour to improve standards and consistency of teaching more quickly.
- Leaders have not yet been able to secure consistency in marking or more rapid rates of progress for all groups of pupils. The school has appropriate plans in place to tackle these issues.

### **External support**

The local authority continues to provide positive and intensive support for the school. Fortnightly meetings are supplemented by formal six-weekly reviews of the school's progress. Useful training has been provided for middle leaders and staff. The local authority's input is valued by school leaders and by governors.

I recommend that the next inspection of Staplehurst School should be a section 5 inspection.