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Mrs P Willetts  
Executive Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Willetts

### **Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Edgar Stammers Primary Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 12 January 2016, 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 that have been taken since the academy's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses in May 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, other senior leaders, the Chair and other members of the Local Advisory Board (the body responsible for governance of the academy) and a representative of the trust. The trust's statement of action and the academy's improvement plan were evaluated.

### **Context**

At the time of the section 5 inspection, the previous headteacher had indicated her intention to resign from her post. She left the academy in July 2015. The trust had, by then, secured your services as executive headteacher of this academy, alongside your existing role as headteacher of Woodhouse Primary Academy, to take effect from 1 September 2015.

During the summer term, you worked with the trust to make staffing appointments to ensure that each class would have its own class teacher for this academic year. Since September, two teachers and three teaching assistants have left the school. You have deployed staff to minimise the disruption to pupils' learning caused by this. You are in the process of recruiting permanent replacements for the teaching assistants.

You have introduced two 'phase leader' roles on a temporary basis in order to boost leadership capacity until a long-term staffing structure is implemented. An additional deputy headteacher joined the school on a secondment basis at the beginning of this term. She has a teaching commitment in Year 6 and an additional brief to lead the strategy for tackling rates of pupils' absence. You have also increased the level of administration support.

The trust has appointed a new challenge adviser, whose role is to track the academy's progress through half-termly visits. The trust has also instigated executive scrutiny board meetings each half term. Since November, the trust's primary adviser has been working with you to provide training and support for subject leaders and phase leaders in carrying out their roles more effectively.

The academy was visited by an adviser from the Department of Education in November 2015, who recommended that an external review of governance should be carried out. This has been commissioned for later this term. Governance is carried out by a local advisory board. Three new members have recently been appointed to the board.

Works to improve the building have been carried out, including the removal of unsafe conservatories, substantial changes to the early years classrooms and the establishment of new library facilities.

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

Following your appointment, you quickly diagnosed the reasons for the academy's weaknesses and devised a suitably rigorous action plan to tackle issues systematically. For example, you made clear your high expectations of how teachers and pupils will conduct themselves. Similarly, you set clear guidelines for how classrooms should look. Since taking up your post, you have implemented this plan with relentless drive and determination. This has injected a strong sense of accountability for most staff. Your high-profile presence around the academy conveys the message that your expectations must be met. In your own words, 'It's not going away'. As a result, there is now much greater consistency in adherence to agreed policies and practices. For example, most staff follow the academy's dress code. Classroom environments and most teachers' responses to pupils' learning are improving in line with your policies. Nevertheless, this is not completely so. A minority of teachers still follow your rules inconsistently. You are taking appropriate steps to iron out this variability.

You have brokered effective support from consultants to help teachers improve. This is beginning to make a difference. Some teachers make good use of opportunities to reflect on their practice, try out new approaches and reshape tasks to increase learning in lessons. Their teaching is improving as a result. However, while the quality of teaching is improving overall, it remains highly variable and some inadequate teaching persists. Consequently, some pupils are making better progress in some subjects and in some classes, but this is not the case for all.

You and other leaders have ensured that assessment of pupils' attainment is now accurate. This means that teachers now have a clearer picture of what pupils can do and what they need to learn next. For example, assessments of children's skills at the beginning of the Reception year are being used more forensically to plan appropriate learning experiences. Children are beginning to make better progress as a result. Teachers in Year 6 are responding to the many gaps in pupils' knowledge by systematically revisiting the basic skills that should have been taught in previous years. This is why these pupils are making rapid progress from very low starting points. In some classes in Years 1 to 5, teachers are using the improved information about attainment to plan interesting lessons that build pupils' skills in a meaningful way. In these classes, pupils are making better progress. However, this is not happening widely enough to ensure that all pupils make adequate progress.

Pupils' behaviour has improved since the section 5 inspection because you have ensured that teachers consistently implement the academy's behaviour management policy. Changes to the organisation of lunchtimes have resulted in a calmer playground and fewer issues spilling over into afternoon lessons. Pupils know what constitutes unacceptable behaviour and what sanctions will be applied if they break rules. As a result, lessons are now rarely disrupted by pupils' behaviour. Because staff now manage behaviour more effectively, the minority of pupils who find it difficult to settle into school life are better supported. You have made appropriate plans to train staff to promote pupils' mental health and well-being.

You are acutely aware that rates of pupils' attendance remain unacceptably low. Leaders have continued to seek ways of working more effectively with parents to reduce the high levels of absence. For example, an attendance board has been established, through which leaders attempt to support parents in overcoming barriers to getting their children to school regularly and on time. Nevertheless, you have identified that more needs to be done. A senior leader has recently taken responsibility for revising the academy's strategy to improve attendance. A member of the local advisory board now has oversight of attendance rates for different groups of pupils. You have instigated an external evaluation of the potential contribution to attendance rates within the family support worker role.

Following the section 5 inspection, the trust submitted a plan to Ofsted, showing how the identified weaknesses were to be addressed. It was judged to be fit for purpose. During the summer term, the trust revised its reporting structures to increase leaders' accountability for the rate of improvement. The support plan was

further refined in August 2015 and now indicates robust accountability between leaders at the academy and the trust, based on clear measures to evaluate whether improvement is happening quickly enough. This strategic plan is effectively supplemented by your operational plan, which details week-by-week actions to be taken by leaders and teachers.

Immediately after the section 5 inspection, the trust considered removing the local advisory board (LAB). This has not been pursued. Instead, the make-up of the LAB has been revised. Some members resigned and three new members were appointed. The revised board understands the strategic role of governance. Members are now more confident to challenge information provided by leaders, adopting a 'How do I know that is true?' approach. Board members are keen to improve their effectiveness and welcome the opportunity presented by the forthcoming review of governance. The board has oversight of improvement planning and reports progress to the trust's executive scrutiny board each half-term.

The trust has provided effective advice to subject leaders and other middle leaders. This is beginning to help them be more effective in their roles. For example, the early years leader is having a notable impact on improving the effectiveness of provision in the Nursery and Reception classes. Subject leaders have a better understanding of what needs to be done to improve pupils' outcomes and have established appropriate action plans to support effective teaching of their subject. Similarly, the teaching of phonics has improved in the early years and Key Stage 1 due to the effective work of the phase leader. As a result, the majority of current Year 3 pupils had gained the expected knowledge about letter sounds by the end of Year 2. The proportion is likely to increase further this year.

The deputy headteacher, supported by advice from the trust, has implemented a strategic approach to planning and teaching for Year 6 to address the significant previous underachievement of this cohort of pupils. They have made rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics since September as a result. Nevertheless, these pupils have a very long way to go to catch up from the legacy of the inadequate teaching they have received during their time at the academy. You acknowledge that, as a result, many are unlikely to reach the standard of work expected for their age by the time they leave the academy in July this year. Your tracking of pupils' outcomes indicates that the proportion who will reach this standard is on track to be double that for last year's cohort, but that the academy is not likely to reach the government's floor standard until July 2017.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Local Advisory Board, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes

**Her Majesty's Inspector**