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Dear Miss Conroy

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Maldon Primary School**

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 13 March 2023, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in February 2022.

During the inspection, I held discussions with you, the senior director of education (primary) from the multi-academy trust (MAT) and the chair of the local governing body. Our discussions focused on the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. I also held meetings and discussions with other leaders, staff and pupils regarding attendance, behaviour, curriculum development, provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and safeguarding. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

**Maldon Primary School remains inadequate and has serious weaknesses. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.**

### **The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation**

Since the first monitoring inspection in July 2022, there have been some staff changes. The substantive executive headteacher took up post in September 2022, along with two teachers and three learning support assistants. In January 2023, an existing staff member

took on the responsibility for managing pupils' attendance. Their predecessor had left the school to begin a new role within the MAT.

Leaders are in the process of developing the curriculum. They are taking a measured approach. Leaders are choosing to revise the curriculum for a few subjects at a time to ensure that changes work well. Leaders arrange appropriate training and support that galvanises curriculum leaders to drive improvements. This includes opportunities to meet with curriculum leaders from other schools within the MAT. Curriculum leaders appreciate how these meetings enable them to share best practice. This helps curriculum leaders to shape the school's curriculum and determine the most effective teaching approaches to deliver it. For example, leaders have recently chosen to introduce the 'three slides' strategy. First, teachers make links to what pupils should have learned, aiming to prepare pupils for what comes next. Then, teachers explicitly teach the meaning of subject-specific words that pupils need to know and understand. After, teachers introduce new knowledge, having made sure that pupils are suitably prepared to understand what they will be taught.

Some teachers are still developing their teaching skills. They follow leaders' guidance, but do not check carefully enough that pupils have understood what they have been taught. This means that some pupils make mistakes in their work which go unnoticed, or struggle to explain what they should know and understand. Leaders recognise that some teachers need more support. So, leaders have put an ongoing programme of staff coaching and support in place. This happens within lessons and during staff meetings. For instance, the start of staff meetings is now set aside for sharing practical tips about effective teaching approaches. Leaders then follow this up with further lesson visits to check that teaching is getting better and to praise teachers when they see improvements to their practice.

To support curriculum development, leaders choose to adopt high-quality schemes of work. Mostly, these set out what pupils learn from Year 1 onwards. This is problematic for curriculum leaders who lack confidence in developing the early years curriculum. Some of what is set out for children to learn is too much for the time set aside to teach it. Similarly, children's starting points are not well considered, particularly where they are learning concepts usually set aside for much older pupils to learn. Leaders have more to do to set out what words, ideas and skills children need to learn and in what order, so that they are sufficiently prepared for Year 1.

Most pupils behave well. Pupils remember what they learn in assemblies, such as how to demonstrate the three school values: honesty, respect and hard work. Leaders' 'ticks and crosses' system motivates pupils. Most pupils work hard to achieve weekly certificates, stickers and a coveted spot at the headteacher's dining table. Additionally, pupils appreciate how leaders and staff listen to their ideas and make them a reality. For instance, the school council recently used pupils' suggestions to refurbish the playground with new equipment. However, there are some pupils who continue to unsettle others and disrupt teaching and learning during lessons. Leaders are making changes to the learning environment and supporting staff to follow clear plans with the aim to resolve this.

Pupils' attendance is not where it should be. There are too many pupils who regularly miss school. Leaders have a systematic approach in place, particularly how and when they offer support to families. However, too much time can pass before leaders take direct action to challenge parents about their children's attendance. Leaders must rectify this. Time away from school leads to gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding across all curriculum subjects. Too much absence also makes it difficult for some pupils to understand and follow the school's routines.

Local governors are dedicated to their role. They check that leaders' priorities and actions to improve the school are making a difference. Local governors provide an appropriate balance of challenge and support to school leaders. In turn, school leaders foster open, positive relationships with their staff. This ensures a happy workforce. Furthermore, leaders are rightly proud of how they engage with parents. There is now a suite of events, including coffee mornings and open afternoons. These events, along with the better communication that is now in place, help parents to feel reassured that leaders and staff are improving the school.

Since the first monitoring inspection, leaders have continued to oversee safeguarding with dogged determination. Their meticulous record-keeping demonstrates that they and their staff go above and beyond to protect pupils at risk of actual or possible harm. This includes leaders challenging themselves as well as external organisations in an effort to swiftly secure suitable support for vulnerable families.

Trust leaders recently commissioned the local authority to audit the school's provision for pupils with SEND. School leaders have welcomed this external, specialist support. Leaders have used the findings to confirm the school's strengths. They have taken the suggested next steps on board. These provide a helpful steer to further strengthen the school's provision for pupils with SEND.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of The Kennal Academies Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Short  
**His Majesty's Inspector**