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19 May 2023

Mrs Carly Welch  
Principal  
Hollington Primary Academy  
Hollington Old Lane  
St Leonards-on-Sea  
East Sussex  
TN38 9DS

Dear Mrs Welch

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Hollington Primary Academy**

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 25 April 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in July 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, senior leaders, staff, the deputy chief executive officer and a trustee, the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also visited lessons, met with pupils, observed playtimes and lunchtimes and scrutinised school documents, including behaviour and safeguarding records. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

**Hollington Primary Academy 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**

Following the previous inspection, there have been many leadership and staffing changes. The trust's director for school improvement led the school during the autumn term of this school year, pending the appointment of a new principal. You took up your substantive role as principal in January 2023. You are also the principal at one of the other primary schools in the academy trust. You split your time each week between the two schools. In

September 2022, a new assistant principal with responsibility for behaviour and pastoral care joined the senior leadership team. Five new teachers started at the school in September 2022. The trust is in the process of restructuring the local governing body and revising the trust's scheme of delegation. For this inspection, I focused primarily on behaviour and attitudes and leadership and management, including safeguarding. These are the aspects of the school that were judged to be inadequate in July 2022. However, I also gathered evidence about the quality of education, including reading.

Your work to improve pupils' behaviour and attitudes is proving successful. The school is now a much more settled community and classrooms are calm and orderly. Clearer routines and changes to lunchtime arrangements have contributed to improved behaviour. New appointments and adjustments to existing roles have increased leadership capacity. This has helped leaders to deal with any issues quickly so that any disruption is minimised. Pupils who need help to regulate and 're-set' their behaviour are supported well. Your high expectations and the new behaviour policy have drawn a clear 'line in the sand'. Training and guidance have improved staff expertise. Staff also value senior leaders' visible and approachable leadership. Staff and pupils know what is expected and speak warmly about the changes that you have brought about. They say that the school is now a much happier place.

However, there is still some low-level disruption and not all staff manage pupils' behaviour consistently well. While serious incidents and suspensions have reduced markedly, pupils say that there are still some occasions when their learning is disturbed by other pupils' behaviour. Although pupils feel safe in school, not all of them feel entirely at ease during lunchtimes. This is because there are still some incidents of poor behaviour and occasional fights. There is therefore more work to do to embed improvements to behaviour and ensure that the momentum of your successful work is sustained.

You are continuing to work with families to communicate the importance of good attendance and help them to understand the impact of any missed time in school. This has included re-setting expectations, following the disruption to education during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. You have implemented attendance plans and targets for individual pupils. The new education welfare officer meets regularly with parents to review attendance and provide appropriate support and guidance to families. This work is beginning to bear fruit and overall attendance is improving. However, rates of persistent absence remain very high. Approximately a third of pupils do not attend school regularly enough.

Safeguarding is now effective. Staff know that leaders are always on hand, should they need any support. You and other leaders quickly step in to support staff and deal with any behaviour issues that could escalate and pose a potential safety risk. There has been a positive shift in culture and the experiences of pupils and staff in the school. Pupils now feel safe in school. New processes for managing any concerns about adults are in place. Staff are confident in using the 'staff safe' system, when there are issues to report. Leaders ensure that any concerns about adults are logged and followed up swiftly. When needed, leaders refer concerns to the local authority designated officer. Leaders have

maintained the aspects of effective practice that were identified at the previous inspection. Staff are trained to identify and report any concerns about pupils. Record-keeping is tight and recruitment processes are thorough. Leaders are very aware of pupils' vulnerabilities and keep in regular contact with many outside agencies. Concerns are noted and followed up appropriately and without delay.

Improvements to reading are well underway. Teaching staff value the training they have received and feel confident in implementing the new phonics programme. Pupils' individual reading books are aligned to this programme. However, during some reading lessons, books are not always matched well enough to pupils' reading knowledge. This means that sometimes pupils are tempted to guess at words. Not all support staff who deliver intervention programmes have had training in the new phonics programme. You have identified this issue and are addressing this. You have given reading a higher profile and introduced new and creative ways to encourage pupils to read at home and to promote a love of reading among pupils.

Previous very poor behaviour led to staff not being able to implement the curriculum successfully. This impacted significantly on pupils' achievement, which has been compounded by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, there is a legacy of low achievement, reflected in the outcomes for pupils in 2022. Many pupils still have much ground to make up. You and other leaders have high ambitions for all pupils. The leadership team and staff now have the capacity to focus on improving the quality of education. You are strengthening subject leaders' expertise and skills to enable them to contribute fully to improving the quality of education. You recognise that there are still some inconsistencies in teaching, and leaders are providing support and training where this is needed.

Effective systems enable the executive team and trustees to have a clear view of the school and to hold leaders to account. The trust has stepped up its support and scrutiny, including through regular focused visits to the school. In the autumn term, trust leaders commissioned the local authority to conduct a detailed audit of safeguarding. This has helped leaders and trustees to have an accurate understanding of safeguarding arrangements at the school. Leaders have identified and focused on the right priorities. The executive team and trustees regularly review the progress made towards achieving the objectives in the improvement plan. However, the targets are not as precise as they need to be to enable trustees to evaluate fully the impact of leaders' actions. Some aspects of the plan would benefit from further refinement, to draw clearer distinctions between leaders' actions and the intended impact.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Cox  
**His Majesty's Inspector**