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12 September 2023

Sandra Pennington  
Headteacher  
Birchen Coppice Academy  
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Dear Mrs Pennington

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Birchen Coppice Academy**

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 12 July 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 May 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, other senior leaders and the CEO of the multi-academy trust, governors and trustees 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 met with other curriculum leaders, looked at curriculum planning, visited lessons, spoke to pupils and listened to pupils read. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

**Birchen Coppice 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**

Since the previous inspection, there have been several changes made to leadership and staffing. You started supporting the school as seconded headteacher in September. Since then, you have been appointed substantive headteacher. You have appointed a new special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator (SENDCo) and have brought in support from other trust schools to increase leadership capacity. For this inspection, I

focused primarily on pupils' behaviour and attitudes, as this was the aspect of the school which was judged to be inadequate in May 2022. However, I also gathered evidence about the quality of education, including reading, the wider curriculum and leadership and management.

Following the previous inspection, you took swift action to prioritise the areas that needed improvement. You identified that pupils' behaviour had to be addressed as a priority as you recognised that pupils had to be able to behave well in order to learn successfully. You simplified the school rules to: 'be ready, be respectful, be safe'. All staff and pupils know and understand these rules. Pupils talk positively about how their behaviour has significantly improved. One child said, 'It used to be chaos. No one ever got a consequence, but now we have reminders, we know what is expected and we follow the school rules. Behaviour is so much better.' This view is echoed by staff.

After you arrived, you quickly identified that many pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were not getting the support they needed to be successful learners. In fact, some pupils with SEND did not have their needs correctly identified. You addressed this with urgency. You appointed a new SENDCo and, together with other leaders, you worked with teachers to ensure that all pupils' needs were correctly identified so support could be put in place. This led to the number of significant behaviour incidents declining, because support ensured that pupils' unmet needs were being addressed. That said, you recognise that there is still work to do with teachers to ensure they are fully skilled in providing the right support for pupils with SEND.

While significant behaviour incidents have declined, there is still work to do to ensure that all pupils have positive attitudes to learning in the classroom. Pupils now generally remain in lessons. However, at times, they are not fully engaged in their learning and do not always show positive learning behaviours. You have also identified that pupils' attendance, while improving quickly, is still a significant barrier to improving their behaviour and learning. There are still too many pupils who regularly miss school. You are addressing this with a steely determination, but there is still work needed to ensure that parents recognise the importance of bringing their children to school regularly.

You have also rightly prioritised improvements to early reading. As you and your staff explained, 'We need to get reading right so pupils can access the rest of the curriculum.' The phonics programme is now fully embedded. You have ensured that all staff are skilled in delivering your chosen approach. The books the pupils read match the sounds they are learning in class. Pupils who struggle to read are now getting the support and help they need to catch up with their peers. However, some older pupils do not read with confidence and fluency. You are aware of this and are beginning to put in place systematic catch-up support.

The wider curriculum is being developed. In many subjects, you have ensured that the precise knowledge, skills and important vocabulary have been identified. However, although you have put the plans in place, these are not yet being implemented. In

addition, further support is needed to ensure that all subject leaders have the skills to implement and monitor the impact of these plans.

Improvement planning is detailed and precise. You have not tried to fix everything at once. Instead, you have carefully prioritised the areas that you deemed the most important and worked on those. This is paying dividends. There have been noticeable improvements and staff appreciate how you have balanced school improvement with their workload and well-being. Staff report that they are proud of the school and can see the work they are doing is having a positive impact on pupils.

Governors and trust leaders have made significant investment into the school, both with time and finances. There is a commitment from all leaders and a moral purpose to ensure that the pupils in the local community have access to a good school. Leaders are determined to bring this about. However, they do not shy away from the fact that there is still a significant amount of work needed to further develop the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Eve Morris  
**His Majesty's Inspector**