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10 December 2013

Mrs Angela Gartland
The Executive Principal
Little Ridge Community Primary School
Little Ridge Avenue
St Leonards-on-Sea
TN37 7LR

Dear Mrs Gartland

Special measures monitoring inspection of Little Ridge Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on Friday 6 December, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, members of the senior leadership team, members of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority. You and I visited all classrooms and briefly observed teaching in all years. I evaluated the local authority's statement of action and the school improvement plans.

Context

Following the inspection, the headteacher left the school and the local authority commissioned a school improvement consultancy, Lilac Sky Schools, to oversee the running of the school until September 2014. You joined the school, as executive principal, employed by Lilac Sky, to lead the school until then. A temporary 'principal leader' has also been appointed by Lilac Sky, until Easter 2014, as an additional support to the senior leadership team. The staff have otherwise remained unchanged, other than the addition of one newly qualified teacher. Prior to the inspection, the governing body had begun to investigate conversion to academy

status. The governing body is now formally seeking approval for sponsorship from the ARK academy chain, with conversion to academy status anticipated in September 2014.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The executive principal has made a strong start. Her '100 day plan' shows clearly how she has begun to establish effective systems to ensure that teaching and pupils' achievement improve quickly. Her analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses is accurate and incisive. She has rightly prioritised site security and the provision of a high-quality reading environment for immediate action. Plans and costs drawn up for electronic gates to secure the site and for a temporary structure to house a library are an appropriately urgent response to significant issues raised by the inspection. The next inspection visit will test the implementation and impact of these plans. This means that funding will have to be agreed quickly. Senior leaders, governors and local authority representatives agree that there should be no delay in making the site safer or in developing a library space that promotes a love of books and rapidly develops pupils' reading.

The governing body has been re-organised, with a small, core group taking responsibility for urgent improvement. Governors argued persuasively against the imposition by the local authority of an interim executive board following the inspection. They have agreed instead to undergo a 'root and branch' review of their effectiveness and to undertake training to ensure that they are well equipped to improve the school quickly. The local authority has acceded to this, but retains the right to re-consider. Governors assert strongly that they are under no false illusions about the seriousness of the school's position or the size of the task in restoring its grading of 'good'. This inspection visit confirmed that they have a realistic grasp of the school's position and the necessary commitment to lead its improvement. They understand that they will have to show considerable impact in doing so at the next inspection visit to remain credible.

In response to comments in the inspection report about the school's safeguarding arrangements, the local authority audited safeguarding and child protection policies and practice. As a result, the school's record keeping is much improved and better maintained. The school's single central record of staff safety checks is complete and meets statutory requirements. However, this inspection visit revealed that not all agency staff checks were clearly evidenced, even though they had been appropriately carried out by the relevant employer. This had not been picked up by the local authority audit, nor by the safeguarding governor.

Taken together, the local authority statement of action and the rapidly developing school improvement plans provide a clear pathway for improvement. Actions are appropriate and well paced to drive change quickly. Targets for achievement have been raised to reflect higher expectations and ambition. They are fit for purpose, but

there is room for improvement. It is not always possible to identify clearly what success will look like in terms of what pupils will know, understand, or be able to do, in order to attain higher target levels. This inhibits governors' ability to monitor the success of actions taken and the understanding of teachers of exactly what they are aiming for to improve their practice. The executive principal understands and accepts that evolving plans need to spell out more clearly and precisely how success will be measured. In addition, the short delay in establishing how governance would be constituted means that the role of governors has yet to be fully incorporated into improvement plans. Their contribution to improvement, both in developing their own skills as a governing body, and in holding teachers and senior leaders to account, is not clear enough.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority statement of action and the school improvement plans are fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for East Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Raeside
Her Majesty's Inspector