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2 May 2014

Mrs Angela Gartland  
The Executive Headteacher  
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 with Sian Thornton, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 30 April and 1 May 2014, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures. The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Raeside  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2013**

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching so it is consistently good by:
  - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can and should attain
  - making sure that teachers use information about pupils' progress to plan lessons which meet the individual needs of all pupils so that they can all make good progress
  - providing more opportunities for pupils to work independently and be more actively involved in lessons because activities interest and engage them
  - making it clear to pupils what they are learning in lessons and involving them in checking how successful they are in their work
  - ensuring marking provides clear guidance for pupils about what they need to do next to improve their work.
- Raise achievement in reading, writing and mathematics by:
  - providing pupils with more opportunities to independently apply their reading and writing skills, through activities which closely match their different abilities
  - ensuring pupils in all year groups have access to high-quality and varied reading materials
  - using practical resources and visual prompts to support pupils' writing and mathematical skills, particularly for less able pupils
  - challenging more able pupils by giving them more demanding, open-ended work which encourages them to think for themselves in mathematics
  - providing regular opportunities for all pupils to use and apply their mathematics skills in a real-life context.
- Improve the behaviour and safety of pupils by:
  - providing more opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for managing their own behaviour around the school
  - rigorously implementing guidance and support programmes from outside professionals for pupils at risk of exclusion.
- Improve the leadership and management, including the governance, of the school by:
  - taking immediate action to ensure the school meets statutory requirements for safeguarding
  - providing training for leaders at all levels so they are more accurate in judging the quality of teaching so they can inform teachers of what they need to do improve
  - rigorously checking the progress of individuals and groups in reading, writing and mathematics and swiftly identify any pupils who are underachieving
  - ensuring improvement plans are clear, have specific outcomes and include interim measures against which progress can be regularly evaluated
  - improving the skills and knowledge of the governing body so they are more able to hold school leaders to account for improvements in teaching and pupils' progress.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 30 April and 1 May 2014**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and another member, and a representative from the local authority.

### **Context**

The executive headteacher and senior principal leader are temporary consultants, employed by educational consultancy, Lilac Sky Schools Ltd. The Department for Education (DfE) has given approval for the school to become an academy, sponsored by the ARK academy chain, from September 2014. At this point a new headteacher, who has already been appointed, will take up post and Lilac Sky will withdraw. Three supply teachers are currently covering for teachers who are absent from school, two of them long term.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

Standards are rising in reading, writing and mathematics, although improvement is stronger in some year groups than in others. Senior leaders now carefully monitor information about pupils' progress, which is more accurate than in the past. Pupils in Year 2, Year 4 and Year 6 are already achieving at higher levels than was achieved at the end of the school year, last year, and this is a clear benchmark of success. Rates of progress are improving more slowly in Year 5 and Year 1 and senior leaders are focusing keenly on remedying this situation. The progress of all groups of pupils is accelerating, including for pupils entitled to free school meals, those with special educational needs, and the most able.

Pupils give an enthusiastic account of how the school is helping them become better readers. Classrooms and shared areas have more inviting displays of books. Regular visits from the mobile library and the purchase of new books have enthused the pupils, who describe a 'really big choice' of new books coming in to school every day, 'on a lorry'. They talk animatedly about their reading. Teachers are much more successfully promoting a wide range of reading habits, in and out of school; for pleasure and for specific learning purposes; and to improve spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Mathematics time is organised daily in ability groups, enabling teachers and teaching assistants to tailor learning more closely to the needs of smaller groups of pupils. In one lesson all groups of children were learning well because adults were consistent in how they used questioning to challenge thinking. Pupils explained and articulated their learning, developing their mathematical understanding as a result. Teachers

help pupils to see the relevance of their learning, by linking mathematics to real-life situations wherever possible. In a Year 6 lesson, pupils explained that ratio and proportion would be important to a decorator mixing paint or a hairdresser mixing dye. One pupil described how his teacher always ensures that mathematics problems have 'a visual perspective' to help the class see and understand how to work them out.

### **The quality of teaching**

Pupils are making better progress because teachers expect more of them. They talk knowledgeably about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work. This change in the culture of the school is strongly supported by improvements in marking and assessment. Teachers mark work more precisely, giving specific advice for improvement rather than just encouragement. Pupils show an increased appetite for learning and enjoy tracking how well they are doing against their targets.

New learning is recorded on the 'learning wall' in each classroom; teachers refer to this and it helps pupils follow the development of a topic or concept. Books show writing improving from 'cold' tasks, which pupils tackle unaided, to 'hot' writing tasks, for which they have prepared and practised key skills. Teaching assistants are making a stronger contribution to good learning. In the best examples, they support and promote independent thinking. In one case, a group of the most able pupils developed a piece of sophisticated writing, thanks to the high expectations and carefully targeted questioning of a skilled teaching assistant.

Although there is a general improvement in teaching and learning, it is not entirely consistent across all classes. Some teachers have embraced changes in expectations more readily than others. There is still evidence of pupils losing interest in a task, because its purpose has not been made clear, or because it is too undemanding. Sometimes teachers prepare prompts for learning that are not sophisticated enough to stretch the most able pupils. Occasionally, pupils do not produce enough work, are given too long to complete a task, so that their interest drifts, or finish quickly because the work is too easy.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Pupils' behaviour around the school is strikingly safe and courteous. Pupils proudly and sensibly undertake responsibilities such as register monitor, and they readily told inspectors about the system of 'peer mediators' and how this helps with playground or friendship issues. Pupils show a clear understanding about different forms of bullying and say that they do not see this as a problem. Pupils feel happy and safe in school.

There is now much better involvement of a wide range of agencies in the care of children whose challenging behaviour may put them at risk of exclusion from school. Clear support packages have been put in place to help these children and their

families, including coherent planning to involve a wide range of additional services where appropriate.

Senior leaders keep detailed records of poor behaviour and of actions taken as a consequence. What is less clear is how these records are used to anticipate and prevent further risk, especially where a pupil's behaviour appears to be escalating. Similarly, senior leaders record attendance information systematically and consider the needs of individual pupils whose absence is too frequent. They do not, however, do enough to analyse and interpret attendance statistics by groups in order to guide their actions more precisely.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

The executive headteacher has made a significant impact on the school in a short space of time. Along with the principal leader, she has implemented strong and effective systems to improve teaching and raise standards of achievement. The school is in a significantly better position, moving towards becoming an academy, than it was at the time of the last inspection. Strong leadership has reversed the decline in achievement and significantly improved teaching so that pupils are now making much better progress.

Senior leaders are accurate in their evaluation of where teaching still needs to improve and where there are strengths. They consider a wide range of evidence to inform their judgements about achievement. They hold teachers firmly to account for the progress of pupils in their classes and have a keen understanding of which pupils are not yet doing as well as they could.

Following an external review of governance, the governing body challenges the school's performance more effectively. Governors ask more searching questions of the headteacher, based on a keener understanding of pupil progress. Improvement plans help governors to check the school's progress because they have clear expectations and timescales for improvement.

Governors ensure that the necessary recruitment checks are carried out to safeguard pupils. They monitor and check the school's record of these checks, which are now thorough. However, concerns arose during the inspection about the secure maintenance of this information. Although these concerns were resolved by the headteacher, they raised more general questions about how alert senior leaders are to the possibility of risk. Despite the headteacher's best efforts when first in post, the school gates have not been replaced with a secure entry system and the site's open access continues to constitute a risk. Although governors have recently discussed and agreed this to be the case, the situation has not yet been adequately resolved or rectified.

## **External support**

The local authority has worked closely with the school to manage its smooth transition to academy status, as well as commissioning leadership to ensure its improvement in the interim year. The local authority link officer works closely with senior leaders to check the impact of planned improvements in achievement and the quality of teaching. Her reports concur with the inspection findings and have been used well to support focused training for individual teachers. The local authority supported the review of governance and a senior officer with expertise in governance has been recruited to the governing body.

## **Priority for further improvement**

- Strengthen and review the assessment of risk to children, including, with immediate effect, from access to the site throughout the school day; take action to ensure that the site is as safe as is reasonably possible.