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21 May 2018

Mr Alan Jenner  
Interim Headteacher  
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Cuckoo Hall Lane  
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London  
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Dear Mr Jenner

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Cuckoo Hall Academy**

Following my visit with Ann Pratt, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 9–10 May 2018, 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 that have been taken since the academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in July 2017.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the Cuckoo Hall Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Enfield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jude Wilson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in July 2017.**

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - leaders at all levels make accurate judgments about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
  - the assessment system supports teachers in planning to meet pupils' needs and in helping them to make strong, sustained progress
  - the curriculum is reviewed to make sure that it helps pupils to make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics
  - skilled governors are recruited and retained to improve the impact of the local governing board
  - governors rigorously monitor the impact of the pupil premium spending on the progress that disadvantaged pupils make
  - teaching assistants are helped to improve their skills and subject knowledge, in order to maximise their impact on pupils' progress
  - provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities supports them to make good progress from accurately assessed starting points
  - the learning environment and the quality of teaching in the early years are improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

An external review of governance is recommended in order to ascertain how well this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 9 May 2018 to 10 May 2018**

### **Evidence**

This first monitoring inspection focused on the effectiveness of leadership and management, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the early years provision. During the inspection, meetings were held with the interim headteacher, the school's improvement consultant, senior leaders, middle leaders, groups of teaching staff, the safeguarding team and teaching assistants. The inspection team also had discussions with the chair of the rapid improvement board and the chief executive officer of the trust. Inspectors visited lessons across all year groups, accompanied by school leaders. Inspectors spoke to pupils formally in groups and informally during playtimes. The inspection team evaluated the quality of learning in a sample of pupils' books from across the school and scrutinised documents provided by the school. Inspectors checked the single central record of staff suitability checks and safeguarding procedures.

### **Context**

The acting headteacher at the time of the section 5 inspection returned to her post as one of the deputy headteachers. The trust appointed an interim headteacher, who joined the school in September 2017, but resigned after half a term. The current interim headteacher took up the post full time in November 2017 and works closely with the school's improvement consultant, who is at the school two days a week. Leadership roles and responsibilities have been restructured. Two assistant headteachers joined the school in September 2017. The school appointed a special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) in January 2018 but had to reappoint a new SENCo in April 2018 due to resignation. In early years, the Nursery leader left and the trust appointed a new Nursery leader, and one of the deputy headteachers oversees the Reception provision. Twelve members of teaching staff have left since the previous inspection. The governing body was disbanded following the section 5 inspection. A rapid improvement board comprising trustees, the interim headteacher and the school's improvement consultant was set up in its place.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The school experienced a false start to this academic year when the interim headteacher left after half a term. This prolonged the disruption the school had already experienced and hampered the school's improvement plans. The current interim headteacher works closely with the school's improvement consultant. Together, they have provided much-needed stability to the school.

Since November, the senior leaders have worked swiftly to begin to address the areas for improvement. Many strategies that have been put in place are in the early stages of development, but there are some signs of improvement in the overall effectiveness of the school.

Leaders agreed with the judgements made at the previous inspection. They have identified strengths and weaknesses in the skills and knowledge of their staff, including at leadership level. Many staff are inexperienced and have benefited from having experienced senior leadership since November. New leaders and managers have received effective guidance and a training programme is in place to help leaders and managers be more effective in their roles. Staff are resilient. Through the period of upheaval, they fully support the senior leaders in their drive to improve the standard of education and pupils' outcomes.

School leaders have rightly focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning. To do this, they recognised the need for leaders to be secure in their understanding of what good-quality teaching and learning looks like. The school has used the services of external education consultants to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning and validate their own judgements. Leaders undertake more regular lesson observations and book scrutinies than previously, in order to assess pupils' progress over time. Senior leaders now have a clear overview of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning across the school.

Middle leaders have received training from senior leaders and consultants, completing joint observations and observing feedback to teachers. This has helped them to identify more accurately and confidently the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning. However, their judgements are not always secure and there is a tendency to focus on teaching styles rather than what the children are actually learning.

Senior leaders use their monitoring information to personalise targets for teaching staff. These targets are linked to the school action plan and performance management. As a result, teachers are now more accountable for the progress of pupils in their classes. Weekly staff training sessions are aligned with whole-school areas for improvement, but support is also targeted to those who need it most. In addition, the school has reduced the number of unqualified teachers on its teaching staff.

Leaders reviewed the assessment system and recognised that assessment of pupils' progress across the school was not accurate. They conducted research and visited other schools to find the system that would work best in the school. With the changes in leadership, the new assessment system was not put in place until November. Baseline assessments were completed using a consistent system across the school and leaders now track pupils' progress from these. Teacher assessment is ongoing and feeds into half-termly assessment reviews and termly pupil progress meetings. Leaders and teaching staff discuss each class in detail, identifying pupils at risk of underachieving and agreeing intervention. As a result, leaders are now more confident than before in the accuracy of assessment and they track pupils' progress more systematically.

School leaders reviewed the curriculum as a matter of urgency. The 'stage not age'

curriculum is no longer in place. Teachers now deliver the curriculum through whole-class teaching, with the exception of phonics. This means that teachers are now with their class for the majority of the school day and can get to know their pupils well. They have a clearer overview of their pupils' progress, but teachers find planning for the wide range of abilities challenging.

The leaders' main focus of the curriculum is English and mathematics. Pupils study other subjects, such as history and geography, through topics, but their knowledge is limited in the wider curriculum. French is taught sporadically and science learning is done in bite-sized chunks. This is due to the intense focus on reading, writing and mathematics as leaders have prioritised the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils told inspectors that they miss learning other subjects. Leaders are aware that the curriculum should be broader and more balanced.

Leaders carried out a review of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. From this, they have put in place a number of measures to improve the provision. The school now has a SEN register and leaders have identified pupils' needs accurately. However, changes in leadership of the SEN provision have led to limited improvements in this area. As a result, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are still not making sufficient progress.

Leaders recognise that teaching assistants did not all have secure subject knowledge to carry out their roles effectively. Leaders have plans to offer training so that all teaching assistants are well qualified to deliver effective support. Teaching assistants are invited to attend the weekly staff training. However, due to their shift patterns, they often miss this training and are sometimes unavailable to support teachers' planning. Leaders deliver additional catch-up sessions for those who miss the training, but it is too early to see significant improvements in this area of the school's work.

After the previous inspection, there was no recommendation not to appoint newly qualified teachers. The school currently has six newly qualified teachers, some of whom trained in other schools within the trust. Initially, these teachers did not receive appropriate training and support from the school. This has improved considerably since November, when a deputy headteacher, supported by the interim headteacher and school's improvement consultant, took on responsibility for the training and support of newly qualified teachers. They value the guidance and mentoring that they receive from school leaders and have received strong support to develop their skills.

A review of pupil premium funding, recommended at the previous inspection, has taken place. From this, leaders have amended the pupil premium strategy to support the improvement of outcomes for eligible pupils across the school. Current outcomes indicate that disadvantaged pupils are making improved progress in reading. However, there are significant weaknesses in writing for this group of

pupils, but this applies across the school and to all pupils.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements continue to be effective. Pre-recruitment checks are carried out in line with statutory requirements. The safeguarding team works well, sharing expertise to get a clear picture of each child's individual circumstances. Referrals to external agencies, such as children's services, are followed up rigorously, including when staff have concerns about children missing in education. Staff follow safeguarding procedures and their training is up to date. Pupils feel safe and know they can speak to members of staff if they have any worries.

There have been significant changes to the governance of the school since the previous inspection. The trust has taken on full responsibility for governing the school and has put in place the rapid improvement board. The trust carried out the recommended review of governance earlier this year and has started to act on the areas identified. It meets every month to review the school's progress against the action plan. There is a high degree of scrutiny, challenge and support from the rapid improvement board.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

The school has clear systems to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The interim headteacher introduced 'non-negotiables' for each classroom, and classroom routines are generally well established across the school. Pupils are well behaved and want to learn. They show very positive attitudes to learning.

There is still wide variation in the quality of teaching and learning, which leads to inconsistent outcomes across the school. Frequent changes in teaching staff have had a noticeable impact on the pupils' progress in certain classes. Where progress is strong, classes have usually had the continuity of the same teacher. Pupils' progress is particularly weak in classes where the teacher has changed since September. This is especially noticeable in mathematics.

Due to the revised assessment system, teachers have a better understanding of their pupils' progress and know which pupils need additional support. They are not so clear, however, on how to use the assessment information effectively in their lessons to tailor tasks that are suitable for their pupils' needs. Often the work in lessons is not pitched at the right level and teachers do not have consistently high expectations.

In January, leaders launched a new programme of mathematics across the school. They recognised that pupils lacked understanding of basic mathematical concepts and had significant gaps in their knowledge. Staff have received internal and external training on how to deliver the new mathematics programme. Leaders have also supported them with their training and resources. The new approach to

mathematics is not yet embedded across the school. Pupils' progress, particularly in Year 6, is not strong. More time is needed for improvements in outcomes to be realised.

Leaders and teachers are continuing to develop guided reading. More focus has been put on developing pupils' comprehension skills, such as inference and making links between texts. There is evidence that pupils are starting to improve these skills. Spelling is assessed regularly, but mistakes are not picked up by teachers in pupils' written work. Grammar is taught directly, but misconceptions are not always addressed by staff. Pupils have opportunities to write in a range of genres. However, the quality of this is varied and often constrained by writing frames. As a consequence, pupils are not making strong progress in writing across the school.

Leaders have identified phonics as an additional area for improvement. Teachers have recently received training to improve their subject knowledge. They also work with each other to practise their developing skills. Although this is at an early stage and there are still some inconsistencies in the delivery, phonics teaching is generally effective.

### **Early years**

The early years provision has been through a turbulent time since the previous inspection, with frequent changes to staffing and leadership. This has caused setbacks in improvement plans. Since January, there has been greater stability in staffing and leadership. The leaders in early years are fully aware of the changes needed to improve the early years provision. They have devised a detailed action plan and have started to take steps to address areas for improvement.

Leaders and staff in early years work closely together to evaluate and refine their priorities. The outdoor provision has been revamped and children have a variety of stimulating activities which capture their interests. Staff measure children's progress accurately against the baseline assessments completed in the autumn term. Current assessment information suggests that children are making progress in all areas of learning, although progress in writing is considerably weaker than in other areas. Staff have put in place more writing activities to target particular pupils, particularly boys. It is too early to see the full impact of leaders' actions, but there is evidence of some improvement.

### **External support**

The trust has given extensive support to the school since the inspection in July 2017. The trust appointed the interim headteacher and the school improvement consultant to strengthen and stabilise leadership and management. They have provided a means of holding leaders rigorously to account through the rapid improvement board. The trust has appointed a substantive headteacher for September 2018 and are working with senior leaders to ensure a smooth transition.



Leaders from other schools within the trust provide effective support. Additional support has been provided from a range of external consultants, delivering training to staff to help improve the quality of teaching and learning. Links with schools outside of the trust have been established in order to share good practice and broaden the knowledge of leaders and staff.