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Amy Batalli
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Dear Ms Batalli

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of The Ferns Primary Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 20 September 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 November 2022.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other leaders, staff, governors and the chief executive officer of the trust 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 and breaktimes, met with pupils and scrutinised school documents. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to be no longer judged as having serious weaknesses.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

The school has experienced a settled phase since the previous inspection, with very few staff changes. However, there have been some key changes in trust personnel, including the appointment of a new chief executive officer and a new director of education, both of

whom took up their posts at the start of September 2023. Three executive headteachers who oversee and support schools in the trust have been working closely with leaders and staff at The Ferns Primary Academy since the previous inspection.

You and your team have overhauled the curriculum since the previous inspection. The revised curriculum has been carefully considered to take account of the school's context and to reflect recent research about how pupils learn well. It provides teachers with a firm framework for teaching, with well-sequenced content in a wide range of subjects. You are now rightly focusing on making sure that it is securely established and taught consistently well. You know that careful attention needs to be given to making sure that the curriculum is adapted and delivered consistently well for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

You have given the teaching of reading a suitably high priority since the last inspection. A more consistent approach to the teaching of phonics means that pupils are now learning more reliable reading strategies. You have introduced more opportunities for pupils to read during the school day so that they can practise their reading skills more regularly. Some pupils told me that they are enjoying being able to read books that they have chosen, as well as those set by their teachers. Others, however, say that they dislike reading and find it difficult.

You have secured marked improvements in the quality of early years provision during the past year. You have used training well to improve staff subject knowledge and to strengthen the focus on learning. Classroom and outdoor areas have been reorganised so that children are clearer about expectations and activities available. Staff have established consistent routines and warm relationships with children at the start of the new school year so that children feel welcomed and secure. Children are happy, keen to learn and enjoying school. Parents who spoke with me during the inspection were very pleased with the way that their children are settling into school life.

You have updated the school's personal, social and health programme, taking great care to ensure that the content is meaningful and relevant for the pupils. Topics on subjects such as 'identity' include a strong focus on themes such as diversity and inclusion, which will be taught throughout the curriculum. You have suitable plans in place to monitor the effectiveness of this revised programme as it is implemented in the coming months.

You have made encouraging progress in improving pupils' behaviour. Clearer routines and expectations have ensured that the school's atmosphere is calm, orderly and welcoming, and pupils have noticed that classrooms are quieter than they used to be. Training has equipped staff with more secure strategies for supporting pupils' behaviour. There were examples of skilful staff support for individual pupils who were finding it hard to behave well during the inspection. However, you and trust leaders know that there are still some variations in behaviour and behaviour management which require further support. While the number of significant behaviour incidents has begun to decrease, a small but significant minority of pupils are struggling with increased expectations. This means that learning can still be disrupted in some lessons.

Positive relationships ensure that pupils feel valued. They are confident about what to do if they have any concerns about bullying and feel that adults will sort out any problems quickly. Pupils speak enthusiastically about the introduction of activities, such as football, softball and colouring, which have made breaktimes more enjoyable. However, they also acknowledge that there can still be some problems with behaviour in the playground.

You have developed an ethos of strong teamwork in the school. Staff share your ambitions for the school's future and are committed to playing their role in its journey of improvement. A raft of valuable training has helped to support progress since the previous inspection, and staff speak positively about the difference this is making to their practice. Recent developments include more opportunities for staff to learn from colleagues' practice and to share expertise across the trust.

You and the trust are clear about further improvements needed in the school's work. Plans for development are firmly focused on addressing the weaknesses identified at the time of the previous inspection, with robust arrangements in place for monitoring improvements. Governors have an accurate and realistic view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and of the importance of sustaining and building on the progress made so far.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of governors and the CEO of The Kite Academy Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Surrey. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Julie Sackett
His Majesty's Inspector