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Mr Pete Wood  
Headteacher  
Millfield LEAD Academy  
Hat Road  
Leicester  
LE3 2WF

Dear Mr Wood

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Millfield LEAD Academy**

Following my visit with David Carter, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 2 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the academy's predecessor school was judged to be a school causing concern.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other staff and groups of pupils. They spoke to parents and carers, and met with the Chair of the Governing Body and the executive headteacher of the academy Trust.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is making reasonable progress in raising standards for all pupils.

### **Context**

The academy opened on 1 January 2013 and is part of the LEAD Academy Trust. The 369 pupils are organised into two classes for each year group from Reception to Year 6. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. One third come from a wide range of different minority ethnic groups, the largest being of Indian

heritage. The proportion of pupils who are known to speak English as an additional language is above average.

The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and support through the pupil premium (additional government funding) is below average. The proportions who have minor learning difficulties (school action), more complex learning needs (school action plus) or a statement of special educational needs are average. Their needs include speech, language and communication difficulties, and moderate learning difficulties.

Since the school became an academy, one teacher has resigned, one has commenced maternity leave and one is on long-term sick leave. The leader for mathematics has returned from maternity leave. A business manager has been appointed. At the time of the monitoring inspection, there were two temporary teachers covering the Year 2 classes. Three new class teachers have been appointed and will take up their posts in September 2013. Two of these are newly qualified teachers. The two Reception classes have been relocated into a newly built Early Years Foundation Stage unit, which is shared with a local authority nursery.

### **Achievement of pupils at the academy**

Pupils begin at the Millfield LEAD Academy with attainment which is currently just below that normally expected for their age. They get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and most at least achieve the levels expected of them by the time they enter Year 1. The evidence collected by leaders since the academy opened and that seen in lessons and pupils' work books during this monitoring inspection indicate that attainment is rising and progress has quickened for most pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion of pupils making good progress has grown so that they are now in the majority. More pupils are making outstanding progress. However, progress continues to require improvement for a minority of pupils, and for a very few it remains inadequate.

The proportion of pupils making good progress has grown because more teaching is now good or outstanding. The key factors are raised expectations of what all pupils can achieve and the higher level of challenge more consistently offered to pupils. Because of this, the proportion of more-able pupils who exceed the expected levels of attainment for their age has increased. Pupils' progress remains inconsistent because the quality of teaching has not uniformly improved to be good or better. Where teaching requires improvement or is inadequate, pupils' progress is slower and the gaps in learning are not being closed as quickly as they should be for the minority who still have them.

Pupils' attainment is improving. In most, but not all year groups, pupils are on track to at least reach the levels expected for their age once again. For a good proportion of pupils in Year 1, where weak teaching has been eradicated, attainment is above average. This year, almost twice as many Year 1 pupils met or exceeded the

expected levels in the phonics screening check than in 2012. Nearly all pupils who did not reach the expected level in 2012 have now caught up in Year 2.

In Year 2, progress had been accelerating earlier in the year. However, more recent turbulence in teaching has slowed pupils' progress once again. Consequently, the levels they attained in teacher assessments this year are not quite as high as those achieved in 2012.

There is some variation in attainment and progress in Key Stage 2. Pupils now make consistently good progress in Year 3 and outstanding progress in Year 6. In both of these year groups, pupils are making up previously lost ground and are on track to achieve broadly average standards once again. The school's own data confirm wide variations in progress in Year 4, including some that is inadequate. Consequently, these pupils still have a lot of catching up to do. Year 5 got off to a slow start but their progress has accelerated more recently. Overall it still requires improvement and these pupils will still have some catching up to do in Year 6.

Because leaders now keep a careful check on how well pupils are doing, they are well aware of the places where gaps may not be closing quite as quickly as they should. Extra support has been put in place to make sure that no-one falls further behind, and astute arrangements have been made for the organisation of classes in September 2013 so that everyone gets off to the best start possible.

The majority of groups of pupils are making similar progress within their year groups. Some are often making better progress, including pupils learning to speak English and the majority of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. This is particularly true where teaching is good or better, or where pupils benefit from carefully chosen additional support. However, this is not always the case, particularly for a very few pupils at school action. Teaching is occasionally not adapted well enough to meet their needs precisely, or the class teacher leaves these pupils and some others of lower ability too long before checking that they are progressing well enough.

Careful checks are made to ensure that pupils eligible for the pupil premium receive the support they need to swiftly close any gaps in their learning. The funding has been used to provide additional teachers and resources to meet their specific needs.

Better teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) is helping to close gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding, and underpins the accelerated progress some pupils are making in reading and writing. Some pupils in Key Stage 2 who have not benefited from this improved teaching still make too many basic spelling errors. Acceptable standards of handwriting and presentation have not yet been assured across the school.

In mathematics, the use of practical resources to reinforce learning and more opportunities to solve problems using mathematical skills are paying dividends in some classes. Pupils are developing greater confidence to apply their skills when

working on their own, and in a wider range of subjects. Leaders acknowledge that in some classes this is not happening often enough, or the work they do in other subjects is not of the same standard as in English and mathematics.

### **The quality of teaching**

Teaching meets the needs of most pupils and ensures that most, whatever their background, circumstances or ability, make at least expected progress. For many it has ensured that progress has accelerated and gaps in learning have closed. In a few cases pupils still have not yet made up the ground lost due to previously inadequate teaching, but the number of such cases has reduced significantly.

Teaching is now mostly good, and some outstanding teaching was seen during the inspection. However, some still requires improvement or is occasionally inadequate. Improvements have taken place because training and support are now closely tailored to the specific needs of each member of staff, and the arrangements for holding staff to account for their performance have been strengthened. Some, though not all, of the less effective practice was seen in lessons where there are temporary arrangements to cover for staff absence or pending appointments.

In the best lessons seen, teachers' plans were based on accurate assessments of the needs of pupils of all abilities. Teachers built on these plans throughout lessons with probing questions to challenge pupils to think and work hard, and to keep a close track of who was finding the work too hard or too easy. They immediately addressed any misconceptions and changed their plans on the spot where necessary. In these classes teachers give pupils helpful spoken and written feedback about what to do to improve their work, and the opportunity to respond to the comments made. These effective features were too often missing from the weaker lessons seen.

Pupils were seen learning particularly well in lessons where teaching assistants were well prepared, knew pupils' learning targets well and were actively involved in helping pupils to achieve their targets. In other cases, they concentrated on simply getting pupils to complete tasks or affirming pupils' first and sometimes simplistic answers.

The ability of pupils to evaluate their own success is well established in some classes but in its early stages in others. It was seen to depend on teachers' ability to develop the skills pupils need to do this successfully. Pupils know their targets well for reading, writing, and mathematics. They say this is helping them to improve their work, as is the agreed marking code where it is consistently applied.

Teachers plan a range of additional activities, including first-hand experiences, to engage pupils' interest and enjoyment. Pupils are proud to discuss the displays that illustrate their own 'learning journeys' and the 'working walls' which they say support their learning. These are not of the same high quality in each class.

Good opportunities are provided to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils particularly enjoy the opportunities for creative expression, and to learn about the local community and its history. Pupils mostly collaborate well and show respect for each other in lessons. Everyone was seen to be included in all the activities on offer. Pupils have opportunities to learn about people from other cultures and faiths, although this could be extended further.

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

Pupils demonstrate good attitudes to learning in lessons and show an increasing amount of pride in their work and achievements. This is due to the positive ethos generated by teachers and adults, a clearer system of rewards and sanctions, a renewed emphasis on promoting positive behaviour and a stronger focus on pupils' learning. Recent changes to staffing arrangements, playground 'zones' and additional play resources have been successful in improving behaviour at lunchtimes. Pupils say that they feel safer and parents confirm their children's positive view. Behaviour around the school, between lessons and as observed at sports day was similarly good.

Pupils say that the school responds immediately to any allegations or incidents of bullying. Leaders acknowledge that the current system for recording incidents does not help them to monitor possible trends. The views of staff and parents are not sought regularly enough to inform leaders' decisions about how to improve behaviour even further.

A small number of pupils have been provided with personal plans to help them meet the high expectations for their behaviour. There is clear evidence of improvements made due to effective partnership working with external agencies and their parents and carers.

Pupils say that they are taught to keep safe and respond to any risk. For example, they are taught about road safety and have welcomed the introduction of the opportunity to cycle to school. They know how to keep safe when using the internet and are aware of the potential risks posed by social networking sites.

Attendance is above average overall, and the vast majority of pupils arrive to school and lessons on time. However, the attendance of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below that of similar pupils nationally. The attendance of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs has improved recently, but it is not yet in line with that of most other groups.

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

Leadership of the academy has been strengthened. The strong steer given by the headteacher has been reinforced by the vision and ethos of the LEAD Academy Trust and raised staff expectations still further. The leadership structure has been astutely reorganised so that skilled practitioners can take a more direct lead in driving

improvements in teaching and learning. These established and highly effective teachers are new to senior leadership roles and their skills have yet to be fully developed.

The introduction of the LEAD Academy Trust systems and personnel for managing finances, health and safety, human resources and safeguarding has freed leaders to focus all of their time on improvement. The appointment of a bursar is also paying dividends. All senior leaders, including the executive headteacher, who is the main link with the Trust and its other academies, are involved in directly checking the effectiveness of the academy's work. The new systems have brought even more rigour to the checks on performance at all levels, particularly teaching, and the ways in which everyone is held accountable for pupils' success.

The academy's improvement plans identify the right actions. However, they do not always have clear targets or milestones to measure success along the way for getting the school to be good with even more urgency. The leader responsible for special educational needs has been too slow to identify and tackle the reasons why some pupils at school action, for example, do not always make enough progress.

Teachers say that they feel well supported by the leadership team to improve their practice. There have been visits to other LEAD Academy Trust schools to see examples of excellent practice, and visits from outstanding teachers to demonstrate effective methods. Tailored support has been provided for individual teachers. There is clear evidence that where teachers have applied the training they have received, it is having a positive effect. However, there is some variability in the quality of teacher and leadership so pupils' progress is not yet consistently good or better.

Relationships with parents are strengthening. They say they particularly value the more open approach of the headteacher and staff, and the helpful information they are given. Many said they had noticed improvements, for example in pupils' behaviour and their engagement with learning. They particularly value the '16 day book' which they say gives them a clear picture of the rate at which their children are making progress.

Safeguarding arrangements meet national requirements and the academy promotes equality of opportunity. This is reflected in the generally better achievement of pupils whose progress is most at risk of stalling.

The governing body has been restructured and strengthened. There is now a local governing body that is accountable to the LEAD Academy Trust. The new Chair of the Governing Body brings a wealth of experience in school improvement. Governors have a realistic insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are getting to know the school quickly because a structured programme of monitoring provides clear information which they can use to hold school leaders to account.

### **External support**

The executive headteacher has provided appropriate support, including coaching for leaders in conducting lessons observation, giving feedback and improving documentation. The LEAD Academy Trust has helped to restructure the leadership, strengthened the systems used for managing information about the academy's performance and facilitated partnership work with other academies in the Trust.

**Priorities for further improvement**

- Swiftly develop the skills needed so that all leaders play a full part in securing good or better achievement for all pupils.
- Make sure that all improvement plans include starting points, clear measurable targets, deadlines and points to check on their success.
- Ensure that all the features of the most effective teaching are applied in all lessons, so that teaching is at least good and all pupils make good or better progress.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Harvey  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**