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Mr John Atkins CBE
The Kemnal Academies Trust
The Atkins Centre
Kemnal Technology College
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Sir Robin Boshier
Regional Director, South East

Dear John

Inspections of academies within The Kemnal Academies Trust (TKAT), a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)

As you know, I asked inspectors to complete some work to assess the impact of The Kemnal Academies Trust and their work to improve academies. Ofsted conducted this work over a two-week period because of the wider concerns about the performance of the academies in the Trust.

In summary, the concerns were as follows.

- Three of your secondary academies were judged inadequate last year and two of these had been part of your trust for more than a year.
- Too many academies remain less than good and a number of academies have remained stuck at grade 3 when re-inspected.
- Less than half of your academies were good or better and there are no longer any outstanding academies in your chain.
- Whilst recent inspection outcomes for your sponsored academies have been more encouraging, it remains that 66% of those which have been inspected since being sponsored remain less than good. Four out of nine were in a category of concern.
- The proportion of pupils reaching the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 remains below average.

Outline of focused inspection activities

Ofsted inspected six primary academies, all of which had been open for at least four terms (see Annex 1). Inspectors held telephone conversations with the headteachers of a further 12 academies (see Annex 2). Three were secondary and nine were

primary academies. In addition, I have taken into account the most recent letters from Ofsted's monitoring visits to inadequate academies within your Trust.

Through these activities, inspectors gathered information on the quality and impact of the support provided by TKAT to headteachers and governors. Inspectors also asked questions about the quality of governance and the impact of your work to improve the quality of teaching and leadership.

Inspection outcomes

Of the six academies inspected as part of the focused inspection activity:

- one was judged to require 'special measures'
- three were judged to require improvement as they did not provide a 'good' education
- two were judged to be good.

This means that an overwhelming proportion of pupils attending one of the academies inspected are not receiving a good education. I am sure this will be disappointing to you and you will be anxious to support these schools in providing a good education for all children.

The inspections highlighted key weaknesses across many of the six academies inspected. These include:

- teaching that was not good enough to enable all groups of pupils to make enough progress
- insufficient challenge for more-able pupils and expectations that are not high enough
- weaknesses in pupils' writing and mathematical skills
- ineffective marking and feedback to pupils which does not help them to understand how to improve their work
- pupils' poor attitudes to learning
- a lack of urgency in taking effective action to close the gap between disadvantaged pupils and others
- weaknesses in middle leadership
- governance that has not secured effective leadership, displays a lack of urgency to bring about improvements and does not provide sufficient challenge in holding school leaders to account.

Although there is evidence that the quality of your support for academies is becoming more effective, in too many of these schools the improvements in support have come about too late to make a significant difference. For the academy judged to require 'special measures', the Trust failed to take effective action to improve performance.

Headteacher survey outcomes

The evidence collected through the telephone survey confirms that in the early development of the Trust, some school leaders found that systems and procedures were not effective in supporting academies to improve. The Trust made some weak appointments to senior positions within schools. However, the Trust now takes more appropriate action to improve the effectiveness of school leaders, to remove leaders who are not showing sufficient capacity to improve their academies and to appoint more effective school leaders.

This survey confirms that, since September 2013, you have restructured the leadership of the Trust and, as a result, your monitoring and support arrangements have improved.

Headteachers report that they are more rigorously held to account for the performance of students in their school. There is closer monitoring of the information the school gathers on the attainment and progress of pupils. Quality assurance visits provide useful information to the academy and the Trust in planning support and providing further challenge to school leaders. Headteachers are positive about the support provided by other schools in the Trust. In addition, they welcome the brokering of support from external providers, where particular areas for improvement have been identified.

The survey also confirms that the quality of governance in the academies is too variable and some leaders are unclear about the responsibilities of different boards and committees. There are some positive developments in some regions, where the Trust is exploring the use of clusters of Chairs of Governors to provide support within localities. Many school leaders report that governors have attended training provided by the Trust to improve their skills and develop their understanding of school performance information. However, some headteachers and indeed inspection reports confirm that governance is not strong enough in some schools.

Our focused work has identified the following strengths and weaknesses

Strengths

- The level of support is tailored effectively to meet the needs of each academy. Academies that 'require improvement' or are subject to 'special measures' are provided with greater support and this is helping these academies make reasonable progress.
- Most of the schools consider quality assurance visits as a helpful opportunity to validate their own judgements on the quality of teaching, leadership and achievement.
- The outcomes from quality assurance visits are used effectively to plan bespoke support for each academy.

- The regular collection of pupil achievement data, information on the quality of teaching and financial information enables the Trust to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each academy.
- Training for governors has improved recently. In some academies, recently trained governors are better able to challenge school leaders because they have a greater understanding of the information available to them about the effectiveness of the school. These governors have a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities.
- Centralised statutory policies have been developed to support academies to ensure essential systems and procedures, particularly with regard to the management of staff, are in place.
- Training for school leaders has been beneficial in developing strategic leadership and further developing leadership skills.
- Schools are very positive about the Trusts strategy to arrange school to school support. Good teachers work alongside weaker teachers in other TKAT schools to strengthen the quality of teaching and improve pupils' progress.

Areas for development

- There remain weaknesses in governance in many schools. There is more to be done to ensure all governors have the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding to hold school leaders effectively to account. In some schools, leaders are confused by the structure of governance
- Training for senior leaders has been valued by academies, but the development of middle leaders and subject leaders has been less successful. Developing this layer of leadership is now a priority, to ensure their skills are effectively used to support less effective and experienced teachers.
- The recent inspections, including those carried out in the spring term this year expose some common areas for improvement. These include:
 - The need to raise pupils' achievement, particularly in writing and mathematics, by improving the quality of teaching
 - raising expectations in relation to the performance of different groups of pupils such as vulnerable learners and the more-able
 - the quality of marking and feedback to pupils
 - the need to improve pupils' attitude to learning in some academies.
- The school improvement planning requires improvement in some academies.

The outcomes of the inspections and discussions with headteachers indicate that you have not been wholly successful in substantially improving the effectiveness of your academies. There have been recent improvements as a result of your reorganisation

but these have come too late for some academies. I am pleased to report that you appear to be in a stronger position to support academies now than in the past. This view of improved capacity is supported by the progress inadequate academies are making. I would urge caution as you expand further, making sure that sufficient capacity exists to support and nurture vulnerable schools as soon as they join you.

I hope this letter is useful to you in further developing your strategies for improvement. Ofsted will continue to work with you in providing support and challenge to academies which fail to provide a good education.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin Boshier". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Sir Robin Boshier
Regional Director, South East

Annex 1

TKAT academies inspected between 12 and 20 June 2014

Academy Name	Region	Local Authority	Opening date as an academy	Previous inspection grade and date of previous inspection	Inspection grade in June 2014
Northdown Primary School	South East	Kent	01/09/2012	3* 24 March 2011	2
Salmestone Primary School	South East	Kent	01/09/2012	3* 18 January 2012	3
Drapers Mill Primary School	South East	Kent	01/12/2012	3* 14 March 2011	4
Portfield Primary School Academy	South East	West Sussex	01/09/2012	3* 16 November 2011	3
Hilltop Primary School	South East	West Sussex	01/09/2012	3 5 July 2012	2
Heybridge Primary School	East	Essex	01/12/2012	3* 10 July 2012	3

*denotes grade awarded to predecessor school

Annex 2

TKAT academies which were included in the telephone survey of headteachers

Academy Name	Local Authority	Phase	Opening date as an academy	Date of most recent inspection	Inspection grade
East Wickham Primary Academy	Bexley	Primary	01/04/2011	14/03/2014	3
Pluckley Church of England Primary School	Kent	Primary	01/04/2012	22/06/2010	2*
Broadfield East Infant and Nursery School	West Sussex	Primary	01/09/2012	04/07/2012	3*
Kemnal Technology College	Bromley	Secondary	01/09/2010	07/06/2013	2
Orchards Academy	Kent	Secondary	01/11/2010	09/02/2012	2
Thomas Bennett Community college	West Sussex	Secondary	01/09/2012	09/12/2010	2*
Tangmere Primary Academy	West Sussex	Primary	01/04/2012	06/02/2014	3
Seal Primary Academy	West Sussex	Primary	01/04/2012	14/02/2014	2
Dame Janet Primary Academy	Kent	Primary	01/012/2012	26/02/2014	3

Gray's Farm Primary Academy	Bromley	Primary	01/09/2013	27/06/2012	4*
The Mill Primary academy	West Sussex	Primary	01/09/2013	16/01/2013	3*
Pebsham Primary Academy	East Sussex	Primary	01/01/2014	17/10/2012	4*

*denotes grade awarded to predecessor school